



House of Representatives

File No. 754

General Assembly

February Session, 2026

(Reprint of File No. 103)

Substitute House Bill No. 5004
As Amended by House Amendment
Schedules "A" and "C"

Approved by the Legislative Commissioner
May 1, 2026

AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 17a-114 of the 2026 supplement to the general
2 statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof
3 (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

4 (a) As used in this section, (1) "approval" or "approved" means that a
5 person has been approved to adopt or provide foster care by a child-
6 placing agency licensed pursuant to section 17a-149, (2) "licensed"
7 means a person holds a license to provide foster care issued by the
8 Department of Children and Families, (3) "fictive kin caregiver" means
9 a person who is twenty-one years of age or older and who is unrelated
10 to a child by birth, adoption or marriage but who has an emotionally
11 significant relationship with such child or such child's family amounting
12 to a familial relationship, and (4) "emergency placement" means the
13 placement of a child by the Department of Children and Families in the

14 home of a relative or fictive kin caregiver as a result of the sudden
15 unavailability of such child's primary caretaker.

16 (b) (1) No child in the custody of the Commissioner of Children and
17 Families shall be placed in foster care with any person, unless (A) (i)
18 such person is licensed for such purpose by the department or the
19 Department of Developmental Services pursuant to the provisions of
20 section 17a-227, (ii) such person's home is approved by a child-placing
21 agency licensed by the commissioner pursuant to section 17a-149, or (iii)
22 such person has received approval as provided in this section, and (B)
23 on and after January 1, 2017, for a child twelve years of age or older,
24 such child has received a foster family profile in accordance with the
25 provisions of section 17a-114e. For the purposes of this section, any
26 prospective adoptive parent shall be licensed by the department. Upon
27 the denial of an initial license, the department shall disclose to the
28 applicant, in writing, the reason for such denial. Any applicant denied
29 an initial license by the department may appeal such denial to the
30 commissioner, in a form and manner prescribed by the commissioner,
31 not later than thirty days after such denial. Not later than sixty days after
32 the making of such appeal, the commissioner shall grant such license or
33 affirm such denial in writing. The commissioner shall adopt regulations,
34 in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54, to establish the licensing
35 procedures and standards.

36 (2) (A) Except as provided in subparagraph (B) of this subdivision,
37 the commissioner shall require each applicant for licensure or approval
38 pursuant to this section and any person eighteen years of age or older
39 living in the household of such applicant to submit to state and national
40 criminal history records checks prior to issuing a license or approval to
41 such applicant to accept placement of a child for purposes of foster care
42 or adoption. Such criminal history records checks shall be conducted in
43 accordance with section 29-17a. The commissioner shall check the (i)
44 state child abuse and neglect registry established pursuant to section
45 17a-101k for the name of such applicant and for the name of any person
46 eighteen years of age or older living in the household of such applicant,
47 and (ii) child abuse and neglect registry in any state in which such

48 applicant or person resided in the preceding five years for the name of
49 such applicant or person.

50 (B) If an applicant for licensure or approval or any person eighteen
51 years of age or older living in the household of such applicant has
52 submitted to the state and national criminal history records checks
53 described in subsection (c) of this section within the previous twelve-
54 month period, the commissioner shall not require such applicant or
55 person to submit to the state and national criminal history records
56 checks described in subparagraph (A) of this subdivision in connection
57 with the issuance of a license or approval.

58 (3) The commissioner shall require each individual licensed or
59 approved pursuant to this section and any person eighteen years of age
60 or older living in the household of such individual to submit to state and
61 national criminal history records checks prior to renewing a license or
62 approval for any individual providing foster care or adopting. Such
63 criminal history records checks shall be conducted in accordance with
64 section 29-17a. Prior to such renewal, the commissioner shall check the
65 (A) state child abuse and neglect registry established pursuant to section
66 17a-101k for the name of such applicant and for the name of any person
67 eighteen years of age or older living in the household of such applicant,
68 and (B) child abuse and neglect registry in any state in which such
69 applicant or person resided in the preceding five years for the name of
70 such applicant or person.

71 (4) The commissioner shall comply with any request to check the
72 child abuse and neglect registry established pursuant to section 17a-
73 101k made by the child welfare agency of another state.

74 (c) (1) Notwithstanding the requirements of subsection (b) of this
75 section, the commissioner [may] shall make an emergency placement of
76 a child with a relative or fictive kin caregiver who has not been issued a
77 license or approval, [when] if such emergency placement is in the best
78 interests of the child, provided a satisfactory home visit is conducted
79 and a basic assessment of the family is completed. When the

80 commissioner makes such an emergency placement, the commissioner
81 shall (A) request a criminal justice agency to perform a federal name-
82 based criminal history search of such relative or fictive kin caregiver and
83 each person eighteen years of age or older residing in the home, and (B)
84 check the state child abuse and neglect registry established pursuant to
85 section 17a-101k for the name of such relative or fictive kin caregiver
86 and each person eighteen years of age or older residing in the home. The
87 results of such name-based search shall be provided to the
88 commissioner.

89 (2) Not later than ten calendar days after a name-based search is
90 performed pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection, the
91 commissioner shall request the State Police Bureau of Identification to
92 perform a state and national criminal history records checks of such
93 relative or fictive kin caregiver and each person eighteen years of age or
94 older residing in the home, in accordance with section 29-17a. Such
95 criminal history records checks shall be deemed as required by this
96 section for the purposes of section 29-17a and the commissioner may
97 request that such criminal history records checks be performed in
98 accordance with subsection (c) of said section. The results of such
99 criminal history records checks shall be provided to the commissioner.
100 If any person refuses to provide fingerprints or other positive
101 identifying information for the purposes of such criminal history
102 records checks when requested, the commissioner shall immediately
103 remove the child from the home.

104 (3) If the commissioner denies an emergency placement with a
105 relative or fictive kin caregiver or removes a child from such home based
106 on the results of a federal name-based criminal history search performed
107 pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection, the person whose name-
108 based search was the basis for such denial or removal may contest such
109 denial or removal by requesting that state and national criminal history
110 records checks be performed pursuant to subdivision (2) of this
111 subsection. Upon the denial of an emergency placement with a relative
112 or fictive kin caregiver or removal of a child from such relative or fictive
113 kin caregiver's home, the commissioner shall document, in writing, the

114 reason for such denial or removal. If a child is placed in the home of a
115 person who is not a relative or fictive kin caregiver, the commissioner
116 shall confirm, in writing, that such placement, rather than placement
117 with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, serves the best interests of such
118 child.

119 (4) Any such relative or fictive kin caregiver who accepts placement
120 of a child shall be subject to licensure by the commissioner, pursuant to
121 regulations adopted by the commissioner in accordance with the
122 provisions of chapter 54, to implement the provisions of this section or
123 approval by a child-placing agency licensed pursuant to section 17a-149.
124 The commissioner may grant a waiver from such regulations, including
125 any standard regarding separate bedrooms or room-sharing
126 arrangements, for a child placed with a relative or fictive kin caregiver,
127 on a case-by-case basis, if such placement is otherwise in the best
128 interests of such child, provided no procedure or standard that is safety-
129 related may be so waived. The commissioner shall document, in writing,
130 the reason for granting any waiver from such regulations.

131 (d) Any individual who has been licensed or approved to adopt or
132 provide foster care and any relative or fictive kin caregiver with whom
133 a child has been placed pursuant to subsection (c) of this section shall
134 apply a reasonable and prudent parent standard, as defined in
135 subsection (a) of section 17a-114d, on behalf of the child.

136 Sec. 2. Subsection (b) of section 46b-129 of the 2026 supplement to the
137 general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu
138 thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

139 (b) If it appears from the specific allegations of the petition and other
140 verified affirmations of fact accompanying the petition and application,
141 or subsequent thereto, that there is reasonable cause to believe that (1)
142 the child or youth is suffering from serious physical illness or serious
143 physical injury or is in immediate physical danger from the child's or
144 youth's surroundings, and (2) as a result of said conditions, the child's
145 or youth's safety is endangered and immediate removal from such

146 surroundings is necessary to ensure the child's or youth's safety, the
147 court shall either (A) issue an order to the parents or other person
148 having responsibility for the care of the child or youth to appear at such
149 time as the court may designate to determine whether the court should
150 vest the child's or youth's temporary care and custody in a person
151 related to the child or youth by blood or marriage, a fictive kin caregiver,
152 as defined in section 17a-114, as amended by this act, or [in] some other
153 person or suitable agency pending disposition of the petition, or (B)
154 issue an order ex parte vesting the child's or youth's temporary care and
155 custody in a person related to the child or youth by blood or marriage,
156 a fictive kin caregiver or [in] some other person or suitable agency. A
157 preliminary hearing on any ex parte custody order or order to appear
158 issued by the court shall be held not later than ten days after the issuance
159 of such order. The service of such orders may be made by any officer
160 authorized by law to serve process, or by any probation officer
161 appointed in accordance with section 46b-123, investigator from the
162 Department of Administrative Services, state or local police officer or
163 indifferent person. Such orders shall include a conspicuous notice to the
164 respondent written in clear and simple language containing at least the
165 following information: (i) That the order contains allegations that
166 conditions in the home have endangered the safety and welfare of the
167 child or youth; (ii) that a hearing will be held on the date on the form;
168 (iii) that the hearing is the opportunity to present the parents' position
169 concerning the alleged facts; (iv) that an attorney will be appointed for
170 parents who cannot afford an attorney; (v) that such parents may apply
171 for a court-appointed attorney by going in person to the court address
172 on the form and are advised to go as soon as possible in order for the
173 attorney to prepare for the hearing; (vi) that such parents, or a person
174 having responsibility for the care and custody of the child or youth, may
175 request the Commissioner of Children and Families to investigate
176 placing the child or youth with a person related to the child or youth by
177 blood or marriage or a fictive kin caregiver who might serve as a
178 licensed foster parent or temporary custodian for such child or youth.
179 The commissioner shall investigate any relative or [relatives] fictive kin
180 caregiver proposed to serve as a licensed foster parent or temporary

181 custodian for such child or youth prior to the preliminary hearing and
182 provide a preliminary report to the court at such hearing as to such
183 relative's or [relatives'] caregiver's suitability and any potential barriers
184 to licensing such relative or [relatives] caregiver as a foster parent or
185 parents or granting temporary custody of such child or youth to such
186 [relative or relatives] caregiver; and (vii) that if such parents have any
187 questions concerning the case or appointment of counsel, any such
188 parent is advised to go to the court or call the clerk's office at the court
189 as soon as possible. Upon application for appointed counsel, the court
190 shall promptly determine eligibility and, if the respondent is eligible,
191 promptly appoint counsel. The expense for any temporary care and
192 custody shall be paid by the town in which such child or youth is at the
193 time residing, and such town shall be reimbursed for such expense by
194 the town found liable for the child's or youth's support, except that
195 where a state agency has filed a petition pursuant to the provisions of
196 subsection (a) of this section, the agency shall pay such expense. The
197 agency shall give primary consideration to placing the child or youth
198 with a relative or fictive kin caregiver. If such placement with a relative
199 or fictive kin caregiver is denied, the agency shall give secondary
200 consideration to placing the child or youth in the town where such child
201 or youth resides. The agency shall file in writing with the clerk of the
202 court the reasons for placing the child or youth in a particular placement
203 with a person other than a relative or fictive kin caregiver or outside the
204 town where the child or youth resides, as applicable. If such child or
205 youth is placed with a person other than a relative or fictive kin
206 caregiver, such writing shall include confirmation that the placement
207 selected for such child or youth, rather than placement with a relative
208 or fictive kin caregiver, serves the best interests of such child or youth.
209 Upon issuance of an ex parte order, the court shall provide to the
210 commissioner and the parent or guardian specific steps necessary for
211 each to take to address the ex parte order for the parent or guardian to
212 retain or regain custody of the child or youth. Upon the issuance of such
213 order, or not later than sixty days after the issuance of such order, the
214 court shall make a determination whether the Department of Children
215 and Families made reasonable efforts to keep the child or youth with his

216 or her parents or guardian prior to the issuance of such order and, if
217 such efforts were not made, whether such reasonable efforts were not
218 possible, taking into consideration the child's or youth's best interests,
219 including the child's or youth's health and safety. Any person or agency
220 in which the temporary care and custody of a child or youth is vested
221 under this section shall have the following rights and duties regarding
222 the child or youth: (I) The obligation of care and control; (II) the
223 authority to make decisions regarding emergency medical,
224 psychological, psychiatric or surgical treatment; and (III) such other
225 rights and duties that the court having jurisdiction may order.

226 Sec. 3. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
227 "caregiver" means a relative or fictive kin caregiver, as defined in section
228 17a-114 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, who has accepted
229 emergency placement of a child pursuant to subsection (c) of section
230 17a-114 of the general statutes, as amended by this act.

231 (b) There is established a grant program to provide grant payments
232 to caregivers for clothing, food, safety-related purchases and other
233 necessities for children upon the placement of such children with such
234 caregivers by the Commissioner of Children and Families.

235 (c) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Children and
236 Families shall develop a formula for the distribution of such grant
237 payments, which formula shall include a maximum grant payment of
238 six hundred twenty-five dollars to any caregiver, and guidelines for the
239 appropriate expenditure of grant payments.

240 (d) Each caregiver who receives a grant payment under this section
241 shall file an expenditure report with the Commissioner of Children and
242 Families at such time and in such manner as the commissioner
243 prescribes. Each such caregiver shall refund to the department any
244 amounts not expended in accordance with the guidelines developed by
245 the commissioner pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

246 (e) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the
247 Commissioner of Children and Families shall submit a report to the

248 Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee, established pursuant to
249 section 18 of this act, and, in accordance with the provisions of section
250 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the
251 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.
252 Such report shall include, for the preceding year, (1) the number of grant
253 payments provided, (2) the amount of each such grant payment, and (3)
254 the length of each such placement that has concluded.

255 Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section, (1)
256 "after school program" means a program that takes place after regular
257 school hours and provides educational, enrichment and recreational
258 activities for children in grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, (2)
259 "caregiver" means a relative or fictive kin caregiver, as defined in section
260 17a-114 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, who has accepted
261 emergency placement of a child pursuant to subsection (c) of section
262 17a-114 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, or a caregiver as
263 defined in section 17a-126 of the general statutes, and (3) "child care
264 service" has the same meaning as provided in section 19a-131k of the
265 general statutes.

266 (b) There is established a grant program to provide grant payments
267 to caregivers for all or a portion of costs associated with after school
268 programs and child care services for children placed in the care of such
269 caregivers by the Commissioner of Children and Families.

270 (c) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Children and
271 Families shall develop (1) an application process, (2) eligibility criteria
272 for caregivers, (3) guidelines for the appropriate expenditure of grant
273 payments by caregivers, and (4) a formula for the distribution of such
274 grant payments, which formula shall include the maximum grant
275 payment available to any caregiver, provided not more than fifty per
276 cent of the total funds available in any fiscal year for such grant program
277 shall be provided for costs associated with after school programs and
278 not more than fifty per cent of such funds shall be provided for costs
279 associated with child care services. Priority for such grant payments
280 shall be given to caregivers who are eligible for foster care maintenance

281 payments or a guardianship subsidy but have not yet received an initial
282 payment or subsidy.

283 (d) Each caregiver who receives a grant payment under this section
284 shall file an expenditure report with the Commissioner of Children and
285 Families at such time and in such manner as the commissioner
286 prescribes. Each such caregiver shall refund to the department any
287 amounts not expended in accordance with the guidelines developed by
288 the commissioner pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

289 (e) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the
290 Commissioner of Children and Families shall submit a report to the
291 Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee, established pursuant to
292 section 18 of this act, and, in accordance with the provisions of section
293 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the
294 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.
295 Such report shall include, for the preceding year, the (1) number of
296 applications received by the department for grant payments for costs
297 associated with (A) after school programs, and (B) child care services,
298 and (2) total number of grant payments and the amount of each such
299 grant payment provided for (A) after school programs, and (B) child
300 care services.

301 Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
302 "relevant field" means social work, applied sociology, child
303 development, child welfare, clinical psychology, counseling, human
304 development and family studies, human services, marriage and family
305 therapy, nursing, social services, education and criminal justice.

306 (b) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department of Children and
307 Families, in consultation with institutions of higher education in the
308 state, shall establish a prospective social worker internship program that
309 includes opportunities for internship experiences, job shadowing,
310 support and coaching, and offers participants insight into the
311 professional challenges and rewards associated with social work over
312 the course of not less than one academic semester. The department shall

313 (1) establish (A) an application process and criteria for acceptance in
314 such program, which criteria shall include, but need not be limited to, a
315 requirement that participants are enrolled in a bachelor's or master's
316 degree program in a relevant field, and (B) criteria for the selection of
317 mentors who are employed by the department as social workers, and (2)
318 recruit such employees to participate as mentors in the program.

319 (c) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department of Children and
320 Families shall establish a first-year social worker mentorship program
321 for newly hired social workers employed by the department. Such
322 program shall include opportunities for job shadowing, support and
323 coaching during each participant's first year of employment as a social
324 worker by the department. The department shall establish (1) an
325 application process and criteria for acceptance in such program, and (2)
326 criteria for the selection of experienced social workers employed by the
327 department to serve as mentors, and recruit such employees to
328 participate as mentors in the program.

329 (d) The Department of Children and Families (1) shall pay a stipend
330 to each intern and mentor who successfully completes the internship or
331 mentorship program described in subsections (b) and (c) of this section,
332 and (2) may pay a stipend to each newly hired social worker who
333 successfully completes the mentorship program described in subsection
334 (c) of this section.

335 (e) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the
336 Commissioner of Children and Families shall submit a report to the
337 Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee, established pursuant to
338 section 18 of this act, and, in accordance with the provisions of section
339 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the
340 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.
341 Such report shall include, for the preceding year, the (1) number of
342 participants in the internship and mentorship programs described in
343 subsections (b) and (c) of this section, (2) the cost of each such program,
344 (3) whether or not adequate resources have been allocated to each such
345 program, and (4) recruitment and retention statistics amongst

346 participants.

347 Sec. 6. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2028,
348 the Commissioner of Children and Families, in consultation with the
349 Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services, shall develop
350 and provide a mandatory educational training program for employees
351 of the Department of Children and Families concerning (1) perinatal
352 mood and anxiety disorders, and (2) trauma-informed, nonstigmatizing
353 practices for interacting with individuals suffering from such disorders.
354 Such training program shall (A) include guidance to such employees
355 concerning such disorders and practices, and (B) be offered not less than
356 once every six months thereafter. Each person employed by the
357 department shall complete such training program at least once.
358 Employees hired prior to January 1, 2028, shall complete such training
359 program not later than December 31, 2028. Employees hired on or after
360 January 1, 2028, shall complete such training not later than one year after
361 beginning such employment.

362 Sec. 7. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2028,
363 the Commissioner of Children and Families shall, in consultation with
364 the Commissioner of Emergency Services and Public Protection and the
365 executive director of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors,
366 Equity and Opportunity, established pursuant to section 2-127 of the
367 general statutes, develop and provide a mandatory educational training
368 program for employees of the Department of Children and Families
369 concerning human trafficking and trauma-informed, nonstigmatizing
370 practices for interacting with child and adult victims of human
371 trafficking. Such training program shall (1) include guidance to such
372 employees concerning such practices, and (2) be offered not less than
373 once every six months thereafter. Each person employed by the
374 department shall complete such training program at least once.
375 Employees hired prior to January 1, 2028, shall complete such training
376 program not later than December 31, 2028. Employees hired on or after
377 January 1, 2028, shall complete such training not later than one year after
378 beginning such employment.

379 Sec. 8. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2028,
380 the Commissioner of Children and Families shall develop and provide
381 a mandatory educational training program for employees of the
382 Department of Children and Families concerning cultural sensitivity in
383 the delivery of the department's services and implicit bias, as defined in
384 section 19a-490u of the general statutes. Such training shall (1) include
385 guidance to such employees concerning such issues, and (2) be offered
386 not less than once every six months thereafter. Each person employed
387 by the department shall complete such training program not less than
388 once every two years. Employees hired prior to January 1, 2028, shall
389 initially complete such training program not later than December 31,
390 2028. Employees hired on or after January 1, 2028, shall initially
391 complete such training not later than one year after beginning such
392 employment.

393 Sec. 9. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
394 "postsecondary education" means any program that leads to an
395 academic degree or certification in a vocation or trade.

396 (b) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department of Children and
397 Families shall establish a postsecondary education grant program for
398 the purpose of providing grant payments to fund the postsecondary
399 education of youths (1) adopted through the department's foster care
400 program on or after January 1, 2005, and prior to turning eighteen years
401 of age, and (2) committed to the department who consent to remain in
402 the care of the Commissioner of Children and Families upon reaching
403 eighteen years of age pursuant to section 46b-129 of the general statutes,
404 as amended by this act. The department shall establish (A) an
405 application process, (B) a list of postsecondary education programs
406 approved by the department, (C) a formula for the distribution of such
407 grant payments, and (D) eligibility criteria for such youths. No such
408 youth shall participate in the program after such youth reaches twenty-
409 one years of age, except that the commissioner may permit any youth
410 that enrolled in the program prior to turning twenty-one years of age to
411 continue to participate until such youth turns twenty-four years of age
412 or completes such youth's postsecondary education program,

413 whichever occurs earlier. The department shall require any youth
414 participating in the program to complete for each year such youth is
415 enrolled in postsecondary education, as a condition to such
416 participation, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and
417 applications for any appropriate scholarships and grants, including, but
418 not limited to, through any scholarship application portal administered
419 by the provider of such postsecondary education.

420 (c) Not later than July 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Children and
421 Families shall submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of
422 section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of
423 the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.
424 Such report shall include a description of the status of the postsecondary
425 education grant program established pursuant to this section, including,
426 but not limited to, (1) the number of applications to such program
427 received by the Department of Children and Families to date, (2) the
428 number of applicants accepted to participate in the program to date, and
429 (3) any challenges the department encountered in implementing the
430 program.

431 (d) Not later than January 1, 2028, the Commissioner of Children and
432 Families shall submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of
433 section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committees of
434 the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children,
435 higher education, appropriations and government oversight, and the
436 Auditors of Public Accounts. Such report shall include, but need not be
437 limited to, information concerning (1) the number of applicants to such
438 program and any similar program offered by the Department of
439 Children and Families, in each year any such program was offered, (2)
440 the number of applicants that received a grant payment under such
441 program or any such similar program, in each year any such program
442 was offered, (3) the total amount of grant payments provided pursuant
443 to such program and any such similar program, in each year any such
444 program was offered, and the amount of each individual grant in each
445 such year, (4) the average amount of each grant payment provided
446 pursuant to such program and any such similar program, per student

447 annually and per student over the duration of such students'
448 participation in any such program, (5) the specific postsecondary
449 education programs attended by participants in such program during
450 the prior year, including the names of the institutions offering such
451 programs and the degrees toward which participants are working, (6)
452 the percentage of participants who have completed a postsecondary
453 education program while participating in such program and any such
454 similar program, (7) the number of participants who have requested to
455 remain in such program or any such similar program after reaching
456 twenty-one years of age, and the number of participants who have been
457 approved by the department to do so, (8) the reasons the department
458 has provided applicants to such program, and any such similar
459 program, for denying such applicants from participating in such
460 programs, (9) the reasons the department has provided participants in
461 such program, and any such similar program, for denying such
462 participants' requests to remain in such programs after reaching twenty-
463 one years of age, (10) the length of time any such similar program has
464 existed pursuant to department policy, and (11) demographic data
465 pertaining to participants in such program and any such similar
466 program.

467 Sec. 10. (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than July 1, 2028, the
468 Auditors of Public Accounts shall conduct a performance audit of the
469 postsecondary education grant program established pursuant to section
470 9 of this act. Said auditors shall conduct such performance audit in
471 accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards or
472 by another method said auditors deem appropriate. Said auditors shall
473 submit a report, in accordance with section 11-4a of the general statutes,
474 to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having
475 cognizance of matters relating to children, higher education,
476 appropriations and government oversight. Such report shall include,
477 but need not be limited to, (1) such audit; (2) information concerning (A)
478 the number of applicants to such program and any similar program
479 offered by the Department of Children and Families, in each year any
480 such program was offered, (B) the number of applicants that received a

481 grant payment under such program or any such similar program, in
482 each year any such program was offered, (C) the total amount of grant
483 payments provided pursuant to such program and any such similar
484 program, in each year any such program was offered, and the amount
485 of each individual grant in each such year, (D) the average amount of
486 each grant payment provided pursuant to such program and any such
487 similar program, per student annually and per student over the
488 duration of such students' participation in any such program, (E) the
489 specific postsecondary education programs attended by participants in
490 such program during the prior year, including the names of the
491 institutions offering such programs and the degrees toward which
492 participants are working, (F) the percentage of participants who have
493 completed a postsecondary education program while participating in
494 such program and any such similar program, (G) the number of
495 participants who have requested to remain in such program or any such
496 similar program after reaching twenty-one years of age, and the number
497 of participants who have been approved by the department to do so, (H)
498 the reasons the department has provided applicants to such program,
499 and any such similar program, for denying such applicants from
500 participating in such programs, (I) the reasons the department has
501 provided participants in such program, and any such similar program,
502 for denying such participants' requests to remain in such programs after
503 reaching twenty-one years of age, (J) the length of time any such similar
504 program has existed pursuant to department policy, and (K)
505 demographic data pertaining to participants in such program and any
506 such similar program; and (3) any recommendations for improving the
507 administrative efficiency or effectiveness of such program.

508 Sec. 11. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2027,
509 the Department of Children and Families shall establish an Internet web
510 site, which may be within the department's Internet web site, that
511 includes the following:

512 (1) A public, online dashboard to provide real-time information
513 concerning the department's administration of and performance with
514 respect to the state-wide program of services described in section 17a-3

515 of the general statutes. Such information shall include, but need not be
516 limited to, the information identified by the working group established
517 pursuant to section 12 of this act and each annual report submitted
518 pursuant to sections 3, 4 and 5 of this act. Such dashboard shall (A) be
519 integrated with any electronic data collection and tracking tools utilized
520 by the department to ensure that such information is consistently and
521 continually updated, and (B) present such information in a manner that
522 permits users to access and understand such information without
523 specialized knowledge or training.

524 (2) Information for the public concerning offices, programs and
525 services administered and offered by the department, including, but not
526 limited to, the Office of Community Relations, housing and
527 homelessness programs, the Careline established pursuant to section
528 17a-103a of the general statutes and text message programs.

529 (3) Information concerning the identification of child abuse and
530 neglect and how to report child abuse and neglect to the department.

531 (4) The educational training program developed pursuant to section
532 17a-101 of the general statutes, in a video format that members of the
533 public may access without creating a username or password for use on
534 such Internet web site, and any accompanying training materials.

535 Sec. 12. (*Effective from passage*) (a) There is established a working
536 group to identify information to be included on the online dashboard
537 established pursuant to section 11 of this act concerning the Department
538 of Children and Families' administration of and performance with
539 respect to the state-wide program of services described in section 17a-3
540 of the general statutes.

541 (b) The working group shall consist of the following members: (1)
542 Members of the General Assembly, as designated by the chairpersons of
543 the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having
544 cognizance of matters relating to children; (2) the ranking members of
545 the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having
546 cognizance of matters relating to children, or their designees; (3) the

547 Commissioner of Children and Families, or the commissioner's
548 designee; and (4) any individuals such chairpersons deem relevant and
549 necessary to carry out the duties of the working group.

550 (c) The administrative staff of the joint standing committee of the
551 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children
552 shall serve as administrative staff of the working group.

553 (d) Not later than October 1, 2026, the working group shall submit a
554 report on its findings, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a
555 of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General
556 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. The
557 working group shall terminate on the date that it submits such report or
558 October 1, 2026, whichever is later.

559 Sec. 13. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) The parent or guardian
560 of a child who (1) is the subject of an investigation conducted pursuant
561 to section 17a-101g of the general statutes, as amended by this act, (2) is
562 under protective supervision, as defined in section 17a-93 of the general
563 statutes, (3) is receiving protective services, as defined in section 17a-93
564 of the general statutes, or (4) resides with a child described in
565 subdivisions (1) to (3), inclusive, of this subsection, shall notify the
566 Commissioner of Children and Families, in a form and manner
567 prescribed by the commissioner, if such child will be removed from the
568 state for a period exceeding fourteen consecutive days. Such notification
569 shall be provided not less than forty-eight hours prior to any such
570 removal, and include the (A) address of each location at which such
571 child will sleep during such removal, and (B) duration of such removal.
572 If the duration of any such removal is extended, such parent or guardian
573 shall notify the commissioner, in a form and manner prescribed by the
574 commissioner, as soon as is practicable.

575 (b) Upon the (1) removal from the state by the parent or guardian of
576 a child described in subsection (a) of this section for a period exceeding
577 fourteen consecutive days, where notification has not been provided
578 pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, or (2) extension of the duration

579 of any removal by a parent or guardian where notification has not been
580 provided pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Commissioner
581 of Children and Families shall (A) attempt to contact a parent, guardian
582 or other family member of such child on three consecutive days
583 following such removal or extension, to ascertain such child's location,
584 if unknown, and evaluate such child's safety, except that the
585 commissioner may discontinue efforts to contact such parent, guardian
586 or other family member if contact is made during such three-day period,
587 and (B) if such child's location is known, (i) contact the child welfare or
588 law enforcement agency for the jurisdiction in which such child is
589 located and request that such agency conduct an in-person visit to such
590 child's location for the purpose of evaluating such child's safety, (ii)
591 follow up with such child welfare or law enforcement agency on three
592 consecutive days following such request to determine whether such
593 visit was conducted and discuss any findings, except that the
594 commissioner may discontinue efforts to follow up with such agency if
595 the commissioner determines such visit was conducted during such
596 three-day period, and (iii) conduct an in-person visit to evaluate such
597 child's safety or, if such in-person visit is not feasible, attempt to conduct
598 a visit by means of a video conferencing platform for the purpose of
599 evaluating such child's safety. The commissioner shall document in
600 writing all attempts to contact and communicate with any child, parent,
601 guardian, family member, child welfare agency or law enforcement
602 agency pursuant to this subsection.

603 (c) The provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall not apply
604 where the Commissioner of Children and Families is not notified of the
605 removal of a child described in subsection (a) of this section until after
606 such child's return to the state.

607 (d) The Commissioner of Children and Families shall provide written
608 notice of the provisions of this section to the parents or guardians of
609 each child described in subsection (a) of this section.

610 (e) The Commissioner of Children and Families may (1) undertake
611 the actions described in subsection (b) of this section with respect to any

612 child described in subsection (a) of this section who has been removed
613 from the state for a period of fourteen or fewer consecutive days, or (2)
614 require the parent or guardian of any such child to notify the
615 commissioner if such child will be removed from the state for a period
616 of fourteen or fewer consecutive days.

617 Sec. 14. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) Evidence that the parent or
618 guardian of a child has voluntarily sought treatment from or is being
619 voluntarily treated by a mental health professional for mental health
620 concerns, including, but not limited to, a perinatal mood or anxiety
621 disorder, shall not form the sole basis for any action or proceeding by
622 the Department of Children and Families, provided nothing in this
623 section shall preclude any action or proceeding by such department
624 based on harm or risk of harm to a child or the use of information
625 concerning such treatment in any action or proceeding where
626 authorized.

627 Sec. 15. Subsection (b) of section 17a-101g of the general statutes is
628 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
629 *1, 2026*):

630 (b) The Commissioner of Children and Families shall establish
631 protocols for the investigation of and response to reports of child abuse
632 or neglect of children from birth to three years of age. Such protocols
633 shall include, but need not be limited to, (1) appropriate supervision of
634 the case, (2) appropriate visitation by department personnel to such
635 children, (3) documentation of case activities relevant to the safety and
636 well-being of such children, and (4) a case supervision tool specific to
637 the unique needs and risk status of children from birth to three years of
638 age. All investigations of a report of child abuse or neglect pursuant to
639 this section shall include a home visit at which the child and any siblings
640 are observed, if appropriate, a determination of the nature, extent and
641 cause or causes of the reported abuse or neglect, a determination of the
642 person or persons suspected to be responsible for such abuse or neglect,
643 the name, age and condition of other children residing in the same
644 household and an evaluation of the parents and the home. During any

645 such observation, department personnel shall consider any opinions
646 expressed by the child or other children residing in the household
647 concerning whether such child was abused or neglected. The report of
648 such investigation shall be in writing. The investigation shall also
649 include, but not be limited to, a review of criminal conviction
650 information concerning the person or persons alleged to be responsible
651 for such abuse or neglect and previous allegations of abuse or neglect
652 relating to the child or other children residing in the household or
653 relating to family violence. After an investigation into a report of abuse
654 or neglect has been completed, the commissioner shall determine, based
655 upon a standard of reasonable cause, whether a child has been abused
656 or neglected, as defined in section 46b-120. If the commissioner
657 determines that abuse or neglect has occurred, the commissioner shall
658 also determine whether: (A) There is an identifiable person responsible
659 for such abuse or neglect; and (B) such identifiable person poses a risk
660 to the health, safety or well-being of children and should be
661 recommended by the commissioner for placement on the child abuse
662 and neglect registry established pursuant to section 17a-101k. If the
663 commissioner has made the determinations in subparagraphs (A) and
664 (B) of this subsection, the commissioner shall issue notice of a
665 recommended finding to the person suspected to be responsible for such
666 abuse or neglect in accordance with section 17a-101k. If the child is
667 represented by an attorney or guardian ad litem, the commissioner shall
668 notify the child's attorney or guardian ad litem in writing not less than
669 five days prior to the date of any meeting in which the department is
670 considering removing the child from the household, except, if the
671 commissioner, or the commissioner's designee, has authorized the
672 immediate removal of a child from his or her household pursuant to the
673 provisions of subsection (e) of this section, the commissioner, or the
674 commissioner's designee, shall not be required to provide advance
675 written notice of such removal to the child's attorney or guardian ad
676 litem.

677 Sec. 16. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
678 "personal emergency communication device" means a global

679 positioning system-enabled, wearable device that allows an individual
680 to contact local police by pressing a button or through another
681 mechanism.

682 (b) On and after January 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Children and
683 Families shall (1) provide personal emergency communication devices
684 to employees of the Department of Children and Families who regularly
685 conduct visits to or evaluations of the homes of children under the
686 supervision of the commissioner and desire access to such devices
687 during such visits or evaluations, and (2) develop guidelines and a
688 training program for the use of such devices.

689 Sec. 17. (*Effective July 1, 2026*) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027,
690 the Department of Children and Families shall establish an urgent crisis
691 center, as defined in section 38a-477aa of the general statutes, in the city
692 of Stamford.

693 Sec. 18. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) There is established a
694 Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee. The committee shall
695 evaluate and make recommendations concerning (1) the operation,
696 policies and service outcomes of state agencies providing services
697 relating to and supporting child welfare in the state, and (2) the efficacy
698 and continued operation of existing state-wide boards, committees and
699 councils charged with oversight and evaluation of child welfare
700 services.

701 (b) The committee shall consist of the following members:

702 (1) Two members appointed by the speaker of the House of
703 Representatives, one of whom shall be a mental health professional
704 employed at an urgent crisis center, as defined in section 19a-179f of the
705 general statutes;

706 (2) Two members appointed by the president pro tempore of the
707 Senate, one of whom shall be a regional social worker supervisor
708 employed by the Department of Children and Families;

709 (3) Two members appointed by the majority leader of the House of
710 Representatives, one of whom shall be a private provider of child
711 welfare services;

712 (4) Two members appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, one
713 of whom shall be a foster parent licensed pursuant to section 17a-114 of
714 the general statutes, as amended by this act;

715 (5) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the House of
716 Representatives, one of whom shall be an expert in child welfare
717 employed by an institution of higher education in the state;

718 (6) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the Senate, one
719 of whom shall be a relative or fictive kin caregiver, as defined in section
720 17a-114 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, with whom a
721 child in the care and custody of the Commissioner of Children and
722 Families has been placed;

723 (7) The chairpersons and ranking members of the joint standing
724 committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
725 relating to children;

726 (8) The chairpersons and ranking members of the joint standing
727 committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
728 relating to appropriations;

729 (9) The Commissioner of Children and Families, or the
730 commissioner's designee;

731 (10) The Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee;

732 (11) The Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services, or
733 the commissioner's designee;

734 (12) The Commissioner of Developmental Services, or the
735 commissioner's designee;

736 (13) The Commissioner of Social Services, or the commissioner's

737 designee;

738 (14) The Commissioner of Housing, or the commissioner's designee;

739 (15) The Commissioner of Correction, or the commissioner's
740 designee;

741 (16) The Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, or the
742 secretary's designee;

743 (17) The Chief Court Administrator, or the Chief Court
744 Administrator's designee;

745 (18) The Probate Court Administrator, or the Probate Court
746 Administrator's designee;

747 (19) The Chief Public Defender, or the Chief Public Defender's
748 designee; and

749 (20) The Child Advocate, or the Child Advocate's designee.

750 (c) Any vacancy shall be filled by the appointing authority. Members
751 of the committee shall serve without compensation.

752 (d) The chairpersons of the joint standing committee of the General
753 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children, or the
754 chairperson's designees, and the Secretary of the Office of Policy and
755 Management, or the secretary's designee, shall serve as cochairpersons
756 of the committee. Such cochairpersons shall schedule the first meeting
757 of the committee, which shall be held not later than sixty days after the
758 effective date of this section. The committee shall meet quarterly, and
759 more often upon the call of the cochairpersons. The cochairpersons may
760 designate subcommittees to carry out the functions of the committee.

761 (e) The committee shall complete its duties under this section in
762 consultation with one or more organizations that focus on relevant
763 issues regarding child welfare, including an independent institution of
764 higher education in the state. The committee may accept administrative

765 support and technical and research assistance from any such
766 organization.

767 (f) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter until such
768 time as the committee is terminated pursuant to subsection (g) of this
769 section, the committee shall submit a report, in accordance with the
770 provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing
771 committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
772 relating to children, concerning its evaluation and recommendations.

773 (g) On or after January 1, 2031, the committee may, upon making a
774 determination that its work is no longer necessary or beneficial to the
775 provision of services relating to and supporting child welfare in the
776 state, by majority vote of the committee, terminate.

777 Sec. 19. (*Effective from passage*) The Departments of Children and
778 Families and Emergency Services and Public Protection shall conduct a
779 joint study to identify ways to improve (1) communication between said
780 departments with respect to the provision of child welfare services, and
781 (2) existing policies and practices relating to the removal of children
782 from such children's homes pursuant to sections 17a-101g, of the general
783 statutes, as amended by this act, and 46b-129 of the general statutes, as
784 amended by this act. Not later than January 1, 2027, the Departments of
785 Children and Families Emergency Services and Public Protection shall
786 jointly submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-
787 4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General
788 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. Such report
789 shall include the departments' findings and recommendations for
790 improvements.

791 Sec. 20. (*Effective from passage*) The Department of Children and
792 Families and the Office of the Child Advocate shall conduct a joint study
793 to identify ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure
794 the immediate removal from an out-of-home placement made by the
795 Commissioner of Children and Families of any child who becomes a
796 victim of physical or sexual assault occurring in or as a result of such

797 out-of-home placement. Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department
798 of Children and Families and the Office of the Child Advocate shall
799 jointly submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-
800 4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General
801 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. Such report
802 shall include the department's and office's findings and
803 recommendations for improvements.

804 Sec. 21. Section 46b-486 of the general statutes is repealed and the
805 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

806 The Department of Public Health may release information relating to
807 an acknowledgment of parentage to (1) a signatory of the
808 acknowledgment, (2) the child if such child is eighteen years of age or
809 older, (3) a guardian of the person whose parentage is acknowledged,
810 (4) an attorney representing a person to whom such information may be
811 released, (5) a court, (6) a federal agency, (7) an authorized
812 representative of the Department of Social Services, (8) an authorized
813 representative of the Department of Children and Families, (9) the child
814 support agency of this state, (10) any agency acting under a cooperative
815 or purchase of service agreement with the child support agency of this
816 state, and (11) the child support agency of another state.

817 Sec. 22. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Notwithstanding the
818 provisions of subsection (a) of section 17a-101g of the general statutes,
819 following the third accepted report of child abuse or neglect pursuant
820 to sections 17a-101a to 17a-101c, inclusive, of the general statutes, or
821 section 17a-103 of the general statutes, in which (1) the child who is the
822 subject of the report, (2) a sibling, half-sibling, step-sibling or other child
823 residing in the same home as such child, or (3) any combination of
824 children described in subdivisions (1) and (2) of this section, has been
825 identified as the subject of prior accepted reports during the previous
826 twelve-month period, the commissioner shall commence an
827 investigation as described in section 17a-101g of the general statutes, as
828 amended by this act. Such investigation shall not be conducted by any
829 employee of the Department of Children and Families who conducted

830 an investigation into an allegation of child abuse or neglect concerning
831 any child described in subdivisions (1) and (2) of this section during the
832 previous twelve-month period. Nothing in this section shall (A)
833 preclude the commissioner from authorizing the removal of any child
834 from such child's surroundings pursuant to subsection (e) of section 17a-
835 101g of the general statutes, or (B) be construed to require the
836 department to assign a different employee to investigate any report of
837 child abuse or neglect concerning any such child made subsequent to
838 the completion of any investigation required pursuant to this section.

839 Sec. 23. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) On and after October 1,
840 2026, not later than one week following the release from a correctional
841 institution of a person sentenced to a period of parole or probation
842 following such person's conviction for a violation of section 53-20, 53-
843 21, 53-23, 53a-70c, subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of section 53a-86,
844 section 53a-90a, sections 53a-196 to 53a-196f, inclusive, or section 53a-
845 196i of the general statutes, the Commissioner of Correction, or the
846 commissioner's designee, or the executive director of the Court Support
847 Services Division of the Judicial Branch, or the executive director's
848 designee, as applicable, shall notify the Commissioner of Children and
849 Families, or the commissioner's designee, if an individual under the age
850 of eighteen resides at the residential address to which such person was
851 released.

852 (b) (1) Upon receipt of a notification pursuant to subsection (a) of this
853 section, the Commissioner of Children and Families, or the
854 commissioner's designee, shall determine whether any individual
855 under the age of eighteen residing at such residential address is under
856 protective supervision, as defined in section 17a-93 of the general
857 statutes, or receiving protective services, as defined in section 17a-93 of
858 the general statutes. Not later than one week following a determination
859 that any such individual is under such supervision or receiving such
860 services, the commissioner, or the commissioner's designee, shall
861 conduct a visit to such address for the purpose of evaluating the safety
862 of any such individual. The commissioner, or the commissioner's
863 designee, shall conduct a visit to such home not less than monthly

864 thereafter, until such period of probation or parole ends or an individual
865 under the age of eighteen no longer resides at such address.

866 (2) The Commissioner of Children and Families, or the
867 commissioner's designee, shall notify the Commissioner of Correction,
868 or the commissioner's designee, or the executive director of the Court
869 Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, or the executive
870 director's designee, as applicable, if no individual under the age of
871 eighteen residing at such residential address is under such supervision
872 or receiving such services. Upon receipt of such notification, and not less
873 than every three months thereafter until such period of probation or
874 parole ends or an individual under the age of eighteen no longer resides
875 at such address, the Commissioner of Correction, or the commissioner's
876 designee, or the executive director of the Court Support Services
877 Division of the Judicial Branch, or the executive director's designee, as
878 applicable, shall inquire with such probationer or parolee concerning
879 the welfare of any individual under the age of eighteen residing with
880 such probationer or parolee.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	17a-114
Sec. 2	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	46b-129(b)
Sec. 3	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 4	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 5	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 6	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 7	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 8	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 9	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 10	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 11	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 12	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 13	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 14	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 15	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	17a-101g(b)
Sec. 16	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section

Sec. 17	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 18	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 19	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 20	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 21	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	46b-486
Sec. 22	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 23	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Children & Families, Dept.	GF - Cost	At least 1,293,900	At least 437,900
Children & Families, Dept.	GF - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Cost	47,200	113,400
Social Services, Dept.	GF - Cost	See Below	See Below

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation

The bill, which establishes several new Department of Children and Families (DCF) programs and services and makes other changes regarding DCF, results in an estimated General Fund cost of at least \$1,341,100 in FY 27 and \$551,300 annually thereafter as described below. This estimate does not include any grant or stipend costs related to such programs created by the bill, as those costs are dependent on the amount of funding provided.

Sections 1 and 2 result in no fiscal impact. They give emergency placement and court proceedings preference to a child's relative or fictive kin, as well as require written documentation and explanation in instances where the DCF commissioner deviates from such placement

¹The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 41.82% of payroll in FY 27.

preference. Section 1 additionally requires certain written disclosures after an initial foster care license application is denied and allows for appeal.

Sections 3 and 4 establish two new DCF grant programs for certain caregivers to help cover: (1) child necessities; and (2) after school program and child care service costs. This results in a cost of at least \$64,100 in FY 27 and \$128,100 annually thereafter for one new Grants and Contracts Specialist to administer both grant programs. The annualized salary for this position is approximately \$90,300, plus \$37,800 in fringe benefits.² The costs of the grants are dependent on the funding provided and provisions of the grant programs,³ with half-year costs in FY 27.

Section 5 requires DCF to establish paid social worker internship and first-year social worker employee mentorship programs. This results in a cost of at least \$96,000 in FY 27 and \$128,100 annually thereafter for one new training program supervisor to implement the mentorship program, including providing training. The annualized salary for this position is approximately \$90,300, plus \$37,800 in fringe benefits.⁴

There are additional costs to provide participants in both the internship and mentorship programs with stipends beginning in FY 27, with half-year costs in the first fiscal year, subject to provided funding and provisions of each program. For the mentorship program, only mentors are required to be provided stipends. The department is allowed to pay a stipend to each mentee who completes the program.

Sections 6 through 8 require DCF to provide several mandatory employee training programs regarding perinatal mood and anxiety disorder, human trafficking, and cultural sensitivity. This results in: (1) a potential cost of up to \$30,000 in FY 28 to develop new trainings; and

² The FY 27 cost is \$45,200 in salary and \$18,900 in fringe benefits.

³ The necessities grants are maximum \$625 to any eligible caregiver. Additionally, the after school program and child care services grant amounts provided in any fiscal year must not exceed 50% of the available program funding for that year.

⁴ The FY 27 cost is \$67,700 in salary and \$28,300 in fringe benefits.

(2) a cost of \$90,300 (plus \$37,800 fringe benefits) in FY 28 and annually thereafter to hire one training program supervisor who will provide the trainings.

Section 9 expands existing DCF postsecondary education assistance to certain youth receiving DCF services post majority who are between 18 and 21 years old, with continued assistance possible until age 24. The bill creates a new grant program for this purpose (and available to younger youth receiving services post majority), resulting in cost to DCF beginning in FY 27 (half-year costs for the first fiscal year) subject to: (1) program participation; and (2) the grant formula. There are approximately 220 youth in DCF services post majority.

DCF currently offers postsecondary education (PSE) financial assistance for youth ages 18 through 20 (with extensions possible through age 23) who were/are: (1) foster children adopted as minors; or (2) either committed to DCF or receiving DCF services post majority. An eligible student may receive PSE assistance equivalent to the Central Connecticut State University comprehensive rate. DCF's current agency budget for the PSE program is approximately \$15 million.

Section 10 requires the Auditors of Public Accounts (APA) to conduct a performance audit of the postsecondary education grant program, resulting in no fiscal impact because the APA has the necessary staff and expertise to meet the requirements of the bill.

Section 11 requires DCF to create a website to provide information regarding agency programs and services, including a public online dashboard providing real-time information. This results in a one-time cost to DCF of at least \$100,000 to \$200,000 in FY 27, and an ongoing annual maintenance cost of approximately \$5,000 beginning in FY 28. These costs reflect the bill's requirement to develop and service another website (instead of using DCF's existing website infrastructure).

This preliminary estimate does not consider additional costs related to building the initial dashboard infrastructure such as data connection and structuring. Costs related to this may be substantial due to the

technical complexity of live-update interactive dashboards and the agency's inexperience with the new CT-KIND System. Additionally, costs may vary depending on the capabilities of existing staff and potential need for outside consultants.

While DCF has indicated some data is currently transferrable to a web-based dashboard that is in early development, it is less technically complex than what the bill specifies for update frequency. Additional costs are also dependent on the total amount, availability, and complexity of information required to be included on the dashboard as determined by the working group established in Section 12.

In addition to the dashboard, the website must also include public information regarding DCF programs and services, information on child abuse and neglect identification and reporting, and free mandated reporter educational training accessible to the public without a username or password. The agency has the capacity to display these existing materials publicly.

Section 12 establishes a working group to determine additional information to be displayed on the new service dashboard, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 13 mandates an out-of-state child notification and welfare check procedure to be initiated by the DCF Commissioner when a DCF-involved youth is out of state for more than 14 days. This results in no fiscal impact as the agency has the capacity to make the required contacts as required by the bill.

Section 14 prohibits a caregiver's voluntary mental health treatment from being the basis of DCF action, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 15 requires DCF personnel to consider opinions expressed by children in their investigations, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 16 requires DCF to provide personal emergency communication devices to certain DCF staff who wish to avail

themselves, resulting in an anticipated net cost of \$81,000 to \$121,500 in FY 27 and \$162,000 to \$243,000 annually thereafter.

The agency would acquire approximately 1,000 to 1,500 units (with an anticipated monthly cost of \$27 each, with no one-time start-up cost) to outfit DCF staff who frequently make in-home visits. The mobile GPS alert units require a recurring subscription to connect to a 24/7 emergency response center. These ongoing costs would qualify for partial reimbursement (50%) through federal Title IV-E funding.

Section 17 requires DCF to establish an urgent crisis center (UCC) in Stamford for the duration of FY 27, resulting in: (1) a cost of \$1 million to \$2.5 million to DCF in FY 27 only; and (2) additional Medicaid costs to the Department of Social Services (DSS).

DCF does not operate or manage any UCCs, but historically has licensed and contracted private providers for this purpose. From FY 23 through FY 25, DCF grant funding through ARPA subsidized the cost of UCC development and care for non-Medicaid eligible children experiencing a mental health crisis. The operational cost to DCF for the new Stamford location is estimated to be similar to past expenditures, dependent on regional service utilization differences.

Current funding for UCCs mainly relies on allocations in the state budget through Medicaid. DSS will incur increased Medicaid costs, which are dependent on Medicaid eligible patients and associated utilization of services at the new UCC.

Section 18 establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee to evaluate: (1) recommendations concerning the operation, policies, and service outcomes of state agencies providing child welfare services; and (2) the efficacy and continued operation of existing state-wide boards, committees and councils charged with oversight and evaluation of child welfare services. This results in no fiscal impact as the Committee may obtain administrative support from a consulting child welfare organization.

Sections 19 and 20 require DCF and collaborating agencies to produce new reports on: (1) DCF service collaboration with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP); and (2) ways to ensure the immediate removal from an out-of-home placement of any child who becomes an assault victim in or due to such placement. This results in no fiscal impact, as the agencies have the necessary expertise to meet the requirements of the bill.

Section 21 makes certain procedural changes authorizing the Department of Public Health in certain circumstances to release information relating to an acknowledgment of parentage, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 22 expands the scope of child abuse and neglect reports necessitating immediate investigation and tightens the timeframe, resulting in a potential cost to DCF beginning in FY 27 to the extent⁵ these case prioritizations require additional staff to efficiently manage overall caseloads.

House "A" strikes the underlying bill and its associated fiscal impact, resulting in the impacts described above.

House "C" requires DCF to conduct in-home safety evaluations of any individual under the age of 18 who resides with certain individuals on probation or parole, resulting in a potential cost to the agency beginning in FY 27. DCF may require additional staff and resources to accommodate the visitation schedules required by the bill. The extent of the potential cost is dependent on: (1) the number of individuals on probation or parole for certain offenses that share a residence with a child; (2) the length of probation or parole for the individuals; and (3) the duration each child resides with such individuals.

⁵ Investigations of child abuse or neglect reports typically begin within 24 to 72 hours from receipt of an initial report unless a child is in imminent risk of physical harm or the abuse or neglect claim is against a parent/guardian, or certain other circumstances apply. DCF must make its "best efforts" to commence an investigation of such reports within two hours of their receipt, pursuant to CGS Sec. 17a-101g.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation and participation in the postsecondary education grant program.

OLR Bill Analysis**sHB 5004 (as amended by House "A" and "C")*****AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE ACCOUNTABILITY AND
TRANSPARENCY.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

SUMMARY§ 1 — RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN IN EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

Requires, rather than permits, the DCF commissioner to make an emergency placement of a child to an unlicensed relative or fictive kin caregiver if certain conditions are met; requires the commissioner to document in writing the reasons for denying these placements

§ 1 — FOSTER PARENT LICENSE DENIAL

Provides those denied a foster care license the ability to appeal the decision to the DCF commissioner; requires the commissioner to decide on the appeal within 60 days

§ 2 — RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN AND ABUSE AND NEGLECT
PROCEEDINGS

Explicitly includes a fictive kin caregiver in the placement options for an abuse and neglect proceeding; requires the state agency to give primary consideration to placement with them

§ 3 — RELATIVE OR FICTIVE KIN CAREGIVER GRANT FOR
NECESSITIES

Establishes a grant program to make payments to certain caregivers for clothing, food, safety-related purchases, and other necessities for children in their care after an emergency placement

§ 4 — AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GRANTS FOR FOSTER
CAREGIVERS

Establishes a grant program giving financial support to caregivers to help cover the cost of after school programs for foster children in their care

§ 5 — ESTABLISHMENT OF PROSPECTIVE SOCIAL WORKER
INTERNSHIP AND FIRST YEAR SOCIAL WORKER MENTORSHIP
PROGRAMS

Requires training for DCF staff on perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, human trafficking, and cultural sensitivity and implicit bias

§§ 9 & 10 — POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM FOR
YOUTHS IN DCF CARE

Requires DCF to establish a postsecondary education grant program for young people who were adopted before turning 18 and those who consent to stay in DCF care after turning 18

years old; requires the state auditors to audit the program; and establishes reporting requirements

§§ 11 & 12 — DCF ONLINE DASHBOARD AND ASSOCIATED WORKING GROUP

Requires DCF to make a public website with an online dashboard and various information related to DCF programs and procedures and child welfare by January 1, 2027; creates a working group to identify information for the online dashboard

§ 13 — DCF PROCEDURES WHEN A CHILD UNDER PROTECTIVE SUPERVISION OR SERVICES IS TAKEN OUT OF STATE BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Requires DCF to carry out specified procedures when a child who is the subject of a DCF investigation, under protective supervision, receiving protective services, or residing with a child who meets one of these criteria is taken out-of-state by a parent or guardian

§ 14 — PROHIBITION OF USING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AS SOLE OR PRIMARY REASON FOR DCF ACTION

Generally prohibits DCF from using evidence that a parent or guardian has voluntarily sought or received mental health treatment as the sole reason to pursue any action or proceeding

§ 15 — CONSIDERATION OF CHILD'S EXPRESSED OPINION IN DCF HOME VISITS

Requires DCF personnel to consider children's opinions during home visits when investigating a report of child abuse or neglect of a young child

§ 16 — PERSONAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION DEVICES FOR DCF STAFF DURING HOME VISITS

Requires DCF to offer employees who do visits to the homes of children under DCF supervision personal emergency communication devices

§ 17 — URGENT CRISIS CENTER

Requires DCF to establish an urgent crisis center in Stamford for FY 27

§ 18 — CHILD WELFARE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee charged with making recommendations about the state agencies providing services relating to child welfare

§ 19 — DCF AND DESPP COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENT AND CHILD WELFARE POLICIES STUDY

Requires DCF and DESPP to study and report on improving their communication with one another and their policies on removing children from home

§ 20 — IMMEDIATE REMOVAL FOR CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT FROM OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS REPORT

Requires DCF and OCA to study and report on ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure a child's immediate removal from an out-of-home placement if they become a victim of physical or sexual assault

§ 21 — RELEASING ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PARENTAGE INFORMATION

Permits DPH to release acknowledgment of parentage information to DCF

§ 22 — REQUIRING AN INVESTIGATION AND NEW DCF INVESTIGATOR IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES

Regardless of the DCF process for evaluating accepted reports and choosing a response based on the severity of the situation, requires DCF investigation and assignment of a new investigator in certain circumstances of alleged abuse or neglect

§ 501 — ADDITIONAL OVERSIGHT AND NOTIFICATIONS ON PEOPLE CONVICTED OF CERTAIN CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

Requires additional follow-up and oversight of people who are convicted of certain crimes and then live with a minor child and requires notification to DCF when people convicted of these crimes are released from incarceration

SUMMARY

This bill makes numerous changes to child welfare law. A section-by-section analysis follows.

*House Amendment “A” makes various changes to the bill, including (1) adding the ability to appeal the denial of a foster care license; (2) changing aspects of the caregiver grant for necessities, including narrowing eligibility and specifying a \$625 maximum grant; (3) adding the provisions on releasing information relating to an acknowledgment of parentage and requiring an investigation and a new investigator in certain Department of Children and Families (DCF) abuse and neglect cases; (4) adding the Appropriations Committee chairs and ranking members to the policy and oversight committee and allowing the committee to vote to terminate itself in five years; making various minor and technical changes.

Amendment “A” also modifies the (1) after school program grant program for foster caregivers by extending it to certain relative or fictive kin caregivers and setting a spending limit; (2) social worker mentorship and internship programs by requiring DCF to report on them and allowing DCF to pay a stipend to certain participants; (3) postsecondary education grant program for youths in DCF care, including by lowering the maximum age (from 26 to 21) to participate and allowing participation past this age with DCF’s permission; (4) DCF online dashboard, including by allowing it to be on the department’s existing website, requiring additional information, and adding the ranking

members of the Committee on Children to the associated working group; and (5) procedures for a parent or guardian to take a child under protective supervision or services out of state.

This amendment also removes from the underlying bill the (1) stipends for DCF employees providing training, (2) requirement for a DCF public awareness campaign, (3) provision prohibiting DCF from using a parent or guardian's mental health treatment as the primary reason to pursue any action (but it keeps the prohibition on it being the only reason), (4) report on foster care licensure requirements for relative and fictive kin caregivers, and (5) provision on the subsidized guardianship program.

*House Amendment "C" adds a provision that requires additional follow-up and oversight of people who are convicted of certain crimes and then live with a minor child.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Various, see below.

§ 1 — RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN IN EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

Requires, rather than permits, the DCF commissioner to make an emergency placement of a child to an unlicensed relative or fictive kin caregiver if certain conditions are met; requires the commissioner to document in writing the reasons for denying these placements

The bill requires, rather than permits, the DCF commissioner to make an emergency placement of a child to a relative or fictive kin caregiver (an unrelated person at least 21 years old who has a significant emotional connection with the child or family), even if the person is not DCF-licensed or -approved when the placement is deemed in the child's best interest. As under current law, DCF must first do a basic family assessment, including a home visit. By law, an "emergency placement" is the placement of a child in the home of a relative or fictive kin caregiver due to the sudden unavailability of the child's primary caretaker.

As part of this process, the commissioner must order a criminal history and child abuse registry check of anyone 18 years old or older living in the home after the placement is approved. By law, the criminal

history can result in the denial of the placement and removal of the child. The bill requires the commissioner to document the reason for any denial of a placement with, or removal from, a relative or fictive kind caregiver.

The bill also requires the commissioner, when placing a child with someone who is not a relative or fictive kind caregiver, to document why doing so, rather than placing the child with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, is in the child's best interests.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 1 — FOSTER PARENT LICENSE DENIAL

Provides those denied a foster care license the ability to appeal the decision to the DCF commissioner; requires the commissioner to decide on the appeal within 60 days

Upon the denial of an initial foster care license, the bill requires DCF to disclose, in writing, the reason for the denial to the applicant. Any applicant denied an initial license can appeal the denial to the commissioner within 30 days after the denial, in a way the commissioner establishes. The commissioner must grant the license or affirm the denial, in writing, within 60 days after the applicant makes the appeal.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 2 — RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN AND ABUSE AND NEGLECT PROCEEDINGS

Explicitly includes a fictive kin caregiver in the placement options for an abuse and neglect proceeding; requires the state agency to give primary consideration to placement with them

Under current law, following a petition to the court alleging child abuse or neglect, a court can consider vesting the child's care and custody temporarily with a relative, agency, or other person. The bill explicitly includes a fictive kin caregiver in the list of possible temporary care and custody placement options a court can consider during these proceedings and when these orders are made ex parte (on behalf of one party).

Current law requires the state agency with authority for the child to give primary consideration to placing the child in the town where the child lives. Under the bill the agency must give primary consideration to placement with a relative or fictive kin caregiver. If that placement is denied, the agency must give secondary consideration to placing the child in the town where the child lives.

By law, the agency must file, in writing, with the court clerk the reasons for a child's particular placement. The bill adds that the filing must include confirmation that the placement selected for the child, if the placement is not with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, serves the best interests of the child.

The bill makes related minor and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 3 — RELATIVE OR FICTIVE KIN CAREGIVER GRANT FOR NECESSITIES

Establishes a grant program to make payments to certain caregivers for clothing, food, safety-related purchases, and other necessities for children in their care after an emergency placement

The bill establishes a grant program to make payments to caregivers for clothing, food, safety-related purchases, and other necessities for the children in their care upon the DCF placement of these children. For purposes of the grant, a "caregiver" is a relative or fictive kin caregiver who has accepted emergency placement of a child by DCF.

It requires the DCF commissioner, by January 1, 2027, to develop a distribution formula for the grant payments, which must set the maximum total grant payment at \$625, and guidelines for the appropriate expenditure of grant payments.

The bill requires each caregiver receiving a grant payment to file an expenditure report with the DCF commissioner as she determines. A caregiver must pay back any amounts not spent in line with the commissioner's guidelines.

By January 1, 2028, and each following year, the DCF commissioner must submit a report to the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee (see § 18) and the Committee on Children. The report must include, for the preceding year, the number of grant payments made, and the amount of each one, and the length of each placement that has ended.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

§ 4 — AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GRANTS FOR FOSTER CAREGIVERS

Establishes a grant program giving financial support to caregivers to help cover the cost of after school programs for foster children in their care

The bill establishes a grant program to give financial support to caregivers to cover, either fully or partially, the costs of after school programs for children placed in their care. Under the bill, after school programs take place after regular school hours and provide educational, enrichment, and recreational activities for children grades kindergarten through 12. “Caregivers” are generally those who are either a (1) relative or fictive kin caregiver who has accepted emergency placement of a child or (2) licensed foster care provider caring for a child for whom reunification with the parent is unlikely within the foreseeable future.

Grant payments must be prioritized for caregivers who are eligible for foster care maintenance payments or a guardianship subsidy, but who have not yet received an initial payment or subsidy. The bill also specifies that no more than 50% of the total funds available in any fiscal year for the grant program can be for either after school program or child care service costs.

For the grant program, the bill requires DCF to develop the following by January 1, 2027:

1. an application process;
2. caregiver eligibility criteria;
3. appropriate expenditure guidelines for the caregiver grants; and

4. a grant distribution formula, including the maximum grant available.

Each caregiver who receives a grant must (1) file an expenditure report with DCF and (2) return unexpended funds to DCF.

Beginning by January 1, 2028, the bill also requires DCF to annually report to the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee (see § 20) on the number of applications it received and grants it provided.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

§ 5 — ESTABLISHMENT OF PROSPECTIVE SOCIAL WORKER INTERNSHIP AND FIRST YEAR SOCIAL WORKER MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Requires DCF to establish a (1) first-year social worker mentorship program for their newly hired social workers and (2) prospective social worker internship program for people enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree program in a relevant field

The bill requires DCF to establish a (1) first-year social worker mentorship program and (2) prospective social worker internship program (in consultation with higher education institutions). Under the bill, DCF must (1) establish both the internship and mentorship program by January 1, 2027, and (2) pay a stipend to each intern and mentor who successfully completes either program.

For both programs, DCF must:

1. establish an application process and acceptance criteria,
2. set mentor-selection criteria, and
3. recruit social workers to be mentors.

Additionally, the bill requires DCF to annually report on these two programs to the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee (see § 18 below) and the Committee on Children, beginning by January 1, 2028. The report must include, for the preceding year, (1) the number of program participants, (2) each program's cost, (3) whether adequate resources have been allocated to each program, and (4) participant

recruitment and retention statistics.

Prospective Social Worker Internship Program

The bill requires DCF, in consultation with institutions of higher education in Connecticut, to establish a prospective social worker internship program for people enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree program in a relevant field, including, among others, social work, applied sociology, child development, clinical psychology, nursing, social services, education, or criminal justice.

The program, administered through at least one academic semester, must (1) include opportunities for internship experiences, job shadowing, support, and coaching, and (2) offer participants insight into the challenges and benefits of social work.

First-Year Social Worker Mentorship Program

The bill requires DCF to establish a first-year social worker mentorship program for their newly hired social workers. The program, administered during participants' first year as a social worker, must include opportunities for job shadowing, support, and coaching.

Under the bill, DCF may pay a stipend to each newly hired social worker who successfully completes the program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§§ 6-8 — TRAINING ON PERINATAL MOOD AND ANXIETY, HUMAN TRAFFICKING, AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Requires training for DCF staff on perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, human trafficking, and cultural sensitivity and implicit bias

The bill requires the DCF commissioner to develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees in three areas: (1) perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, (2) human trafficking, and (3) cultural sensitivity in the delivery of the department's services and implicit bias.

For all three types of training, DCF employees hired before January

1, 2028, must initially complete each training by December 31, 2028. Employees hired on or after January 1, 2028, must initially complete each training not later than one year after beginning employment. The perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and human trafficking trainings must be completed at least once, and the cultural sensitivity and implicit bias training at least once every two years.

All three trainings must be ready by January 1, 2028, and be offered at least every six months. Each training must include the respective guidance to the employees.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (§ 6)

The DCF commissioner must develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees about (1) perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and (2) trauma-informed, non-stigmatizing practices for interacting with people suffering from these disorders. The commissioner must do this in consultation with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services commissioner.

Human Trafficking (§ 7)

The DCF commissioner must develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees about human trafficking and trauma-informed, non-stigmatizing practices for interacting with child and adult victims of human trafficking. The commissioner must do this in consultation with the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity's executive director, and the Emergency Services and Public Protection commissioner.

Cultural Sensitivity and Implicit Bias (§ 8)

The DCF commissioner must develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees about implicit bias and delivering the agency's services with cultural sensitivity. Under the bill "implicit bias" means an attitude or internalized stereotype that

affects a person's perceptions, actions, and decisions in an unconscious way and often contributes to unequal treatment of someone based on their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or other characteristic.

§§ 9 & 10 — POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM FOR YOUTHS IN DCF CARE

Requires DCF to establish a postsecondary education grant program for young people who were adopted before turning 18 and those who consent to stay in DCF care after turning 18 years old; requires the state auditors to audit the program; and establishes reporting requirements

The bill requires DCF to establish a postsecondary education grant program by January 1, 2027. The program must give grants to fund postsecondary education, meaning programs that lead to an academic degree, vocation certification, or trade, for youths who were adopted through DCF's foster care program on or after January 1, 2005, prior to turning 18 years old, and (2) consent to remain in DCF care after turning 18 years old. Under the bill, young people cannot participate in the program after they turn 21 years old. However, with DCF's permission, they may continue to participate until they (1) turn 24 years old or (2) complete their postsecondary education program, whichever happens first.

DCF must establish:

1. an application process,
2. a list of DCF-approved postsecondary education programs,
3. a grant distribution formula, and
4. eligibility criteria.

Each year, participants must complete (1) the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and (2) applications for any appropriate scholarships and grants, including any available through a scholarship application portal administered by an education provider.

DCF must report to the Committee on Children on (1) the number of

applicants received and accepted and (2) any challenges implementing the program by July 1, 2027.

The bill also requires DCF to report, by January 1, 2028, to the Children, Higher Education and Employment Advancement, Appropriations, and Government Oversight committees, and to the State Auditors of Public Accounts on this program and any similar program. It must include information on:

1. the number of applicants received and accepted;
2. grant payment information, including the total grant payments offered and average grant payment amount per participant;
3. postsecondary education program information, including what postsecondary programs participants enrolled in and the percentage of participants who completed the postsecondary program;
4. the number of participants who have requested, and have been approved, to remain in the program after turning 21 years old;
5. reasons why DCF denied initial applicants and existing participants' requests to remain in the program after turning 21;
6. demographic information; and
7. how long any similar program has existed.

The auditors then must do a performance audit of the program by July 1, 2028, and submit a report to the same committees. The report must include results of the audit, any recommendations on the grant program under the bill, and cover generally the same information as the report DCF provided the auditors, described above.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except the provision requiring the program to be audited is effective October 1, 2026.

§§ 11 & 12 — DCF ONLINE DASHBOARD AND ASSOCIATED WORKING GROUP

Requires DCF to make a public website with an online dashboard and various information related to DCF programs and procedures and child welfare by January 1, 2027; creates a working group to identify information for the online dashboard

The bill requires DCF to make, by January 1, 2027, a public, online dashboard with information on DCF's state-wide programs relating to services for abused, neglected, and uncared for children and young people, as well as children and young people who have mental health needs and substance use disorders. The dashboard also must (1) include information identified by the working group (see *Online Dashboard Working Group* below); (2) include information identified in the annual reports relating to caregiver grant programs and social worker internship and mentorship programs established through the bill (see §§ 3, 4 & 5 above); (3) be integrated with any electronic data collection and tracking tools DCF uses; and (4) present information in an accessible way.

The dashboard must be web-based and may be within DCF's existing website, and must also include information on:

1. DCF offices, programs, and services, including the Office of Community Relations, housing and homelessness programs, the child abuse and neglect Careline, and text message programs for the public; and
2. child abuse and neglect identification and how to report child abuse and neglect.

The website must also include the mandated reporter video training program and any accompanying training materials in a publicly-accessible format that does not require a username or password.

Online Dashboard Working Group

The bill creates a working group to identify information to be included on the online dashboard. The working group must consist of:

1. members of the General Assembly, as designated by the

- Committee on Children chairpersons;
2. the ranking members of the Committee on Children or their designees;
 3. any people the chairpersons find relevant and necessary to carry out the duties of the working group; and
 4. the DCF commissioner or her designee.

The Committee on Children's administrative staff serve as the working group's administrative staff.

The working group must submit a report with its findings to the Committee on Children by October 1, 2026, and ends on that date or when it submits its report, whichever is later.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except the provision creating the working group is effective upon passage.

§ 13 — DCF PROCEDURES WHEN A CHILD UNDER PROTECTIVE SUPERVISION OR SERVICES IS TAKEN OUT OF STATE BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Requires DCF to carry out specified procedures when a child who is the subject of a DCF investigation, under protective supervision, receiving protective services, or residing with a child who meets one of these criteria is taken out-of-state by a parent or guardian

The bill requires the parent or guardian of a child who (1) is the subject of a DCF investigation, (2) is under protective supervision or receiving protective services, or (3) residing with a child who meets at least one of these two previous criteria must notify DCF if the child will be taken out of the state for more than 14 consecutive days. The bill also allows DCF, to require the parent or guardian to notify DCF if the child will be taken out-of-state 14 or fewer days.

The bill also requires DCF to give written notice of these provisions to the parents or guardians of each eligible child.

Notification Requirements

The parent or guardian must give this notice to DCF at least 48 hours

before taking the child out of state and must include (1) the address of each place where the child will sleep during this period and (2) how long the child will be out-of-state and, if this changes, the parent must notify DCF as soon as is practicable.

Failure to Notify Procedures

The bill requires DCF to follow specified procedures when a parent or guardian removing a covered child out-of state fails to notify DCF in the way previously described. It also allows DCF to follow these procedures when a covered child is taken out-of-state for 14 or fewer days.

In these situations, DCF must attempt to contact a parent, guardian, or other family member on three consecutive days to determine the child's location (if unknown) and evaluate the child's safety. If contact is made and the child's location is determined, DCF must (1) contact the child welfare or law enforcement agency in the jurisdiction where the child is located (the "local agency") and ask them to do an in-person visit to the child to ensure the child's safety, (2) follow-up with the local agency on three consecutive days following the initial visit request to ensure the child was actually visited and to discuss any findings, and (3) directly visit with the child in-person (or virtually if in-person is not feasible) to evaluate the child's safety. DCF must document in writing all attempts to contact the child, parent, guardian, family member, and local agency.

The bill also specifies that if DCF is not notified of the child's removal from the state until after they have already returned, they do not need to follow the above procedures.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 14 — PROHIBITION OF USING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AS SOLE OR PRIMARY REASON FOR DCF ACTION

Generally prohibits DCF from using evidence that a parent or guardian has voluntarily sought or received mental health treatment as the sole reason to pursue any action or proceeding

The bill generally prohibits DCF from using evidence that a parent or guardian has voluntarily sought or received professional mental health treatment as the sole reason to pursue any action or proceeding related to harm or risk of harm. Under the bill, this treatment can be sought for mental health concerns including, among others, perinatal mood or anxiety disorders.

But the bill specifies that DCF can still (1) act when a child is harmed or at risk of harm and (2) use mental health treatment evidence in an action or proceeding if otherwise authorized.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 15 — CONSIDERATION OF CHILD’S EXPRESSED OPINION IN DCF HOME VISITS

Requires DCF personnel to consider children’s opinions during home visits when investigating a report of child abuse or neglect of a young child

By law, all DCF investigations into reports of child abuse or neglect for children from birth to age three must include a home visit to, among other things:

1. observe the child and any siblings;
2. evaluate the parents, home, and condition of other children living in the household; and
3. if appropriate, determine the nature and extent of, and who is responsible for, the reported abuse or neglect.

The bill requires that during these home visits, DCF personnel consider any opinions expressed by the child or other children living in the household about whether the child was abused or neglected.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 16 — PERSONAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION DEVICES FOR DCF STAFF DURING HOME VISITS

Requires DCF to offer employees who do visits to the homes of children under DCF supervision personal emergency communication devices

The bill requires the DCF commissioner, beginning January 1, 2027, to give all DCF employees who regularly do visits to, or evaluations of, the homes of children under the commissioner's supervision personal emergency communication devices if the employees chose to use the devices during these visits or evaluations. The commissioner must also develop guidelines and a training program for their use.

The bill defines "personal emergency communication device" as a GPS-enabled, wearable device that allows someone to contact local police by pressing a button or through another mechanism.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 17 — URGENT CRISIS CENTER

Requires DCF to establish an urgent crisis center in Stamford for FY 27

The bill requires DCF to establish an urgent crisis center in Stamford for FY 27. Urgent crisis centers are walk-in clinics that provide immediate access to mental health services for children who do not require medical emergency department care.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

§ 18 — CHILD WELFARE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee charged with making recommendations about the state agencies providing services relating to child welfare

The bill establishes a 32-member Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee. The committee is charged with evaluating and making recommendations about the operation, policies, and service outcomes of state agencies providing services relating to and supporting child welfare in the state and (2) the efficacy and continued operation of existing statewide boards, committees, and councils charged with oversight and evaluation of child welfare services.

The committee is made up of members named by position and appointed members. The members named by position are the (1) Children and Appropriations Committee chairpersons and ranking members and (2) following agency heads or their designees: (a) the

commissioners of Children and Families, Education, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Developmental Services, Social Services, Housing, and Correction, and (b) the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary, the chief court administrator, the probate court administrator, the chief public defender, and the child advocate.

Table: Appointed Committee Members

<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Number of Members</i>	<i>Qualifying Description</i>
House speaker	2	One is a mental health professional employed at an urgent crisis center
Senate president pro tempore	2	One is a DCF regional social worker supervisor
House majority leader	2	One is a private provider of child welfare services
Senate majority leader	2	One is a licensed foster parent
House minority leader	2	One is an expert in child welfare employed by an in-state higher education institution
Senate minority leader	2	One is a relative or fictive kin caregiver with whom a child in DCF's care and custody has been placed

Any vacancy will be filled by the appointing authority. Members of the committee serve without compensation.

The Committee on Children chairpersons, or their designees, and the OPM secretary, or the secretary's designee, serve as co-chairpersons. The co-chairpersons must schedule the first committee meeting, which must be held within 60 days after the bill becomes law. The committee must meet quarterly, and more often upon the call of the co-chairpersons. The co-chairpersons may designate subcommittees to carry out committee duties.

By January 1, 2028, the committee must submit its first annual report on its evaluation and recommendations to the Committee on Children. On or after January 1, 2031, the committee may choose, by its own majority vote, to terminate if it finds its work is no longer necessary or beneficial.

The committee must complete its duties under the bill in consultation with one or more organizations that focus on child welfare-related issues, including an independent institution of higher education in the state. The committee can accept administrative support as well as technical and research assistance from any such organization.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 19 — DCF AND DESPP COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENT AND CHILD WELFARE POLICIES STUDY

Requires DCF and DESPP to study and report on improving their communication with one another and their policies on removing children from home

The bill requires DCF and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to study ways to improve (1) communication between DCF and DESPP on child welfare services and (2) existing policies and practices on removing children from their homes.

The bill also requires DCF and DESPP to report on their findings and associated recommendations to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2027.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 20 — IMMEDIATE REMOVAL FOR CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT FROM OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS REPORT

Requires DCF and OCA to study and report on ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure a child's immediate removal from an out-of-home placement if they become a victim of physical or sexual assault

The bill requires DCF and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to jointly study ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure children are immediately removed from out-of-home placements made by DCF if they become a victim of physical or sexual assault occurring in, or because of, the out-of-home placement (presumably, this would apply when the perpetrator was someone living in the home or with access to it).

The bill also requires DCF and OCA to report on findings of the study and associated recommendations to the Committee on Children by

January 1, 2027.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 21 — RELEASING ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PARENTAGE INFORMATION

Permits DPH to release acknowledgment of parentage information to DCF

By law, the Department of Public Health (DPH) may release information relating to an acknowledgment of parentage to certain parties, including (1) a signatory of the acknowledgment, (2) the child if such child is 18 years of age or older, (3) a guardian of the person whose parentage is acknowledged, and (4) an authorized representative of the Department of Social Services. The bill also permits the information to be released to an authorized DCF representative.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 22 — REQUIRING AN INVESTIGATION AND NEW DCF INVESTIGATOR IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES

Regardless of the DCF process for evaluating accepted reports and choosing a response based on the severity of the situation, requires DCF investigation and assignment of a new investigator in certain circumstances of alleged abuse or neglect

The bill requires the DCF commissioner to begin a new investigation into reports of child abuse or neglect when a third report of abuse or neglect is accepted within a 12-month period concerning a child or a combination of children who are related or living in the same home. The investigation must be done by a different DCF employee than the one (or ones) who did the previous investigations during the 12-month period.

The requirement applies after the third accepted report of child abuse or neglect in which (1) the child who is the subject of the report; (2) a sibling, half-sibling, step-sibling, or other child residing in the same home as such child; or (3) any combination of children described in items (1) and (2), has been identified as the subject of prior accepted reports during the previous 12-month period. In a related change, the bill waives the DCF process of evaluating accepted reports and choosing

a response based on the severity of the situation (which may not include an investigation, but instead only a referral for family assessment and services).

The bill requires the investigation to be done as required by law, which includes (1) a home visit with observation of the child or children; (2) an evaluation of the parents; (3) a determination of the nature, extent, and cause or causes of the abuse or neglect; (4) a determination of the person or persons suspected to be responsible for the abuse or neglect; (5) and the name, age, and condition of other children residing in the same household.

The bill specifies that it (1) does not prevent the commissioner from removing a child from the child’s surroundings under her existing authority or (2) cannot be construed to require the department to assign a second, new investigator for any further reports of child abuse or neglect about a child made after completion of the investigation of a third report as required under the bill.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 501 — ADDITIONAL OVERSIGHT AND NOTIFICATIONS ON PEOPLE CONVICTED OF CERTAIN CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

Requires additional follow-up and oversight of people who are convicted of certain crimes and then live with a minor child and requires notification to DCF when people convicted of these crimes are released from incarceration

Beginning October 1, 2026, the bill requires notification to DCF and additional oversight of anyone convicted of certain crimes against children when they are released from a correctional institution and then live in a home with a minor child. The table below shows the 14 crimes for which this applies and a high-level summary for each. A minor child is a person under 18 years old.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

Table: Crimes Triggering Additional Oversight When Living With a Minor Child

Crime	CGS §	Description
Cruelty to persons	53-20	When a person intentionally tortures, torments, or unlawfully punishes another person or deprives them of necessary food, clothing, shelter, or physical care
Injury or risk of injury to, or impairing morals of, children; sale of children	53-21	When a person (1) causes or allows a child under age 16 to be placed in a situation where the child's life or limb is endangered or morals are likely to be impaired, (2) has sexual or indecent contact with the child's intimate parts, or (3) sells or buys permanent custody of the child
Abandonment of child under the age of six years	53-23	When a person having charge of a child under age six leaves the child in any place, with intent to abandon the child
Aggravated sexual assault of a minor	53a-70c	When any person commits certain crimes (for example, sexual assault) against a child under 13 and the crime is compounded by certain factors (for example, the victim was kidnapped, illegally restrained, or stalked, or the accused has been convicted of a violent sexual assault before)
Promoting prostitution of a person less than 18 years old in the first degree	53a-86(a)(2)	When a person knowingly advances or profits from the prostitution of a person under age 18
Enticing a minor	53a-90a	When a person uses an interactive computer service (such as the Internet) to knowingly persuade, induce, entice, or coerce someone under age 18, or who the person reasonably believes to be under 18, to engage in prostitution or unlawful sexual activity
Obscenity as to minors	53a-196	When a person knowingly promotes to a minor, for money, any material or performance that is obscene for minors
Employing a minor in an obscene performance	53a-196a	When a person employs a minor or allows a minor to be employed to promote any material or performance that is obscene for minors, regardless of whether the minor receives any consideration (is paid)
Promoting a minor in an obscene performance	53a-196b	When a person knowingly promotes any material or performance that employs a minor, whether or not the minor receives consideration, and the material or performance is obscene for minors
Importing child sexual abuse material	53a-196c	When a person knowingly imports or causes to be imported into the state three or more visual depictions of child sexual abuse

Crime	CGS §	Description
		material (sometimes referred to as “child pornography”)
Possessing child sexual abuse material in the first degree	53a-196d	When a person knowingly possesses (1) 50 or more images of child sexual abuse material, (2) one or more images of child sexual abuse material depicting the infliction or threatened infliction of serious injury, or (3) a series of images or a video depicting either multiple children engaging in sexually explicit conduct or more than one act of explicit conduct by one or more children
Possessing child sexual abuse material in the second degree	53a-196e	When a person knowingly possesses (1) between 20 and 49 images of child sexual abuse material or (2) a series of images or a video depicting a single act of sexually explicit conduct by one child
Possessing child sexual abuse material in the third degree	53a-196f	When a person knowingly possesses (1) fewer than 20 images of child sexual abuse material or (2) a series of images or a video depicting a single act of sexually explicit conduct by one child
Commercial sexual exploitation of a minor	53a-196i	When a person knowingly buys advertising space for an advertisement for a commercial sex act that includes a depiction of a minor

Under the bill, when someone convicted of a crime in the table above is released from incarceration and sentenced to a period of parole or probation, the correction commissioner or the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) executive director, as applicable, must notify the DCF commissioner within one week after the person is released about a minor child residing at the residential address to which the person was released.

Child Receiving DCF Services

Upon receiving the notification, the bill requires the DCF commissioner to check if any minor child residing at the residential address is under protective supervision or receiving protective services. Within a week of determining that there is a minor child under protective supervision or receiving protective services, the commissioner or DCF designee must conduct a visit to the address to evaluate the child’s safety. The visits must continue monthly until the

probation or parole ends or a minor child no longer resides at the address.

By law, “protective supervision” means a court determined a child was neglected, but DCF or another social agency is, at the court’s request, helping correct the neglect while the child stays in the home. “Protective services” are public welfare services provided to a family following a complaint of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, but where there is no ruling on the complaint.

Child Not Receiving DCF Services

DCF must notify the correction commissioner or the CSSD executive director, as appropriate, if no minor child at the residential address is under supervision or receiving protective services. Upon that notification and not less than every three months after it, the correction commissioner or the CSSD executive director, as applicable, must ask the probationer or parolee about the welfare of any minor child residing with them and must do so until the person’s probation or parole ends.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 14 Nay 2 (03/05/2026)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 50 Nay 0 (04/14/2026)