
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5277

AN ACT CONCERNING MIXED MARTIAL ARTS.

SUMMARY:

This bill legalizes amateur and professional mixed martial arts (MMA), exempting it from the ban on prize fights, and generally subjects MMA matches to the same laws that govern professional boxing, including regulation by the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), licensing, taxing, match rules, condition of fighters, age limits, and violations and penalties.

The bill defines “MMA” as unarmed combat involving techniques from different martial arts disciplines, including grappling, kicking, jujitsu, and striking.

Among other things, the bill:

1. requires MMA match promoters, referees, sponsors, and participants to be licensed by DESPP (§ 1(g), 2, & 8)
2. prohibits the DESPP commissioner from issuing a license to conduct MMA matches where prohibited by local ordinance (§ 15);
3. prohibits anyone under age 18 from engaging in MMA matches (§ 12);
4. prohibits anyone from competing in a MMA match unless certified by a doctor as physically fit (§ 10);
5. prohibits betting on MMA matches (§ 13);
6. (a) requires organizations, gymnasiums, or clubs hosting matches to register with DESPP and pay a \$100 registration fee (§ 1(f)) and (b) imposes a 5% tax on gross admission receipts

- after federal taxes have been deducted (§ 3);
7. allows the commissioner to investigate match venues for safety (§ 1(c));
 8. requires DESPP- licensed and- approved referees to be present at all MMA matches (§§ 7 & 8);
 9. prohibits MMA matches on Christmas Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, and Veterans' Day (§ 9); and
 10. requires the commissioner to adopt regulations governing MMA match safety, conduct, and supervision, including establishing procedures and fees for match sponsors and participants (§ 1(g)).

The bill allows minors of any age to attend professional MMA and boxing matches as long as the minor accompanied by his or her parent or guardian (§ 14).

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2013

§ 1 — JURISDICTION OVER MMA MATCHES

MMA Regulation

With exceptions for MMA matches held under the auspices of schools or amateur athletic associations connected to schools, the bill gives the DESPP commissioner jurisdiction over amateur and professional MMA matches in Connecticut (§ 1(b)).

As is currently the case for professional boxing, (1) the commissioner may appoint inspectors to represent him at MMA matches and (2) may contract with people to serve as inspectors.

Enforcement

The bill extends to MMA matches the authority the commissioner or his representative has to investigate professional boxing matches. This means he can investigate match location, paraphernalia, equipment, and other matters pertaining to MMA matches to determine if they will be reasonably safe for participants and attendees (§ 1(c)).

Injury Reports

The bill requires the owner of a venue where a serious physical injury or death from a MMA match occurs to report it, within four hours after the occurrence, to the commissioner or his designee, who must investigate the incident within four hours after the report (§ 1(d)).

Regulations

The bill requires the commissioner to adopt regulations governing the conduct, supervision, and safety of MMA matches, including licensing of match sponsors and participants and setting reasonable fees for such licenses (1(g)).

§ 2 — LICENSING

The bill allows the commissioner to grant or deny, and revoke for cause, a license to hold or conduct MMA matches. License applicants must file a bond, which must be conditioned for the payment of the tax on gross MMA match receipts from admissions (see §§ 3 & 4 below).

§§ 3 & 4 — TAX PAYMENTS

The bill imposes a 5% tax on promoters and sponsors of MMA matches and penalties for violation of the tax provision. The tax, which is on the gross receipts from admissions after federal taxes have been deducted, must be paid to the State Treasury. Failure to pay the tax may result in (1) the violator losing his license and being disqualified from getting a new license and (2) a \$500 fine. It eliminates these provisions for wrestling exhibitions.

§ 5 — OVERSELLING TICKET VIOLATIONS

The bill makes it illegal to sell more MMA match tickets than there are seats at the match venue. A first violation is punishable by a fine of up to \$200. Any subsequent violation carries a \$500 fine and license forfeiture, and the violator is disqualified from receiving a new license.

§ 6 — PUBLICIZING TICKET PRICES

The bill requires MMA match seat and admission prices to be published in at least three separate editions of a newspaper published and circulated in the host town, city, or borough or, if no newspaper is

published in the area, in a newspaper having a substantial circulation in the area.

§§ 7, 8, & 10 — MMA MATCH RULES

Referees and Limits on Rounds

The bill imposes a five-round limit on MMA matches and a minimum one-minute rest period between rounds.

It prohibits matches unless a referee approved by the commissioner controls the match (§ 7).

Referee License

The bill requires the commissioner to select and license MMA match referees. It also requires him to select and license referees for boxing matches, instead of boxing exhibitions. As under current law for boxing exhibitions, the boxing match requirement does not apply to amateur matches held (1) under the supervision of an educational institution having an academic course of study or the recognized athletic association connected with the institution or (2) under the auspices of an amateur athletic association that the commissioner has determined can ensure participants' health and safety (§ 8).

Physical Condition of Fighters

The bill requires a Connecticut-licensed doctor approved by the commissioner to (1) examine and certify that match contestants are physically fit and (2) attend the entire match for which the examination is made (§ 10).

The person, club, organization, or corporation conducting the match must pay the doctor's fee.

§ 11 — FINES

The bill subjects to a \$200 fine a principal, manager, second, promoter, or matchmaker who receives or takes money or other payment from any competitor in a MMA match for any special privilege or any type of discrimination relating to a match.

§§ 12 — AGE LIMITS FOR PARTICIPANTS

As is currently the case for professional boxing matches, the bill prohibits anyone under age 18 from participating in professional MMA matches. It also prohibits anyone under age 16 from participating in amateur MMA matches, except matches held under the:

1. supervision of (a) a school, college, or university having an academic course of study or (b) the recognized athletic association connected with the institution or
2. auspices of any amateur athletic association determined by the commissioner to be capable of ensuring the health and safety of the participants.

The bill also eliminates the 18-year minimum age requirement for participating in wrestling exhibitions.

§ 14 — AGE LIMITS FOR ADMITTANCE TO MATCHES

The bill prohibits anyone under age 18 from being admitted to any professional boxing or MMA match unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Under current law for professional boxing exhibitions, people under 14 cannot be admitted and people between ages 14 to 18 can only be admitted if accompanied by a parent or guardian.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 20 Nay 3 (03/19/2013)