

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 13-259—sHB 5277

Public Safety and Security Committee

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

SUMMARY: This act legalizes amateur and professional mixed martial arts (MMA), exempting MMA, like boxing, from the ban on prize fights (§§ 16 & 17). It generally subjects MMA matches to the laws governing professional boxing, including those pertaining to regulation by the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), licensing, taxes, match rules, ticket prices, minimum age limits, and violations.

Among other things, the act:

1. requires MMA match promoters, referees, sponsors, and participants to be licensed by DESPP (§§ 1(g), 2, & 8);
2. bars the DESPP commissioner from issuing a license to conduct MMA matches where prohibited by local ordinance (§ 15);
3. prohibits anyone from competing in an MMA match unless certified as physically fit by a doctor approved by the commissioner (§ 10);
4. prohibits betting on MMA matches (§ 13);
5. allows the commissioner to investigate MMA match venues for safety (§ 1(c));
6. requires DESPP-licensed and -selected referees to be present at, and direct, MMA matches, except amateur matches exempt from DESPP jurisdiction (§ 8);
7. prohibits MMA matches on Christmas Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, and Veterans' Day (§ 9); and
8. requires the commissioner to adopt regulations to (a) govern MMA match safety, conduct, and supervision, including the licensing of match sponsors and participants, and (b) set reasonable license fees (§ 1(g)).

The act prohibits anyone under age 18 from engaging in a professional MMA match and, with exceptions, prohibits anyone under age 16 from engaging in an amateur MMA match (§ 12). It allows minors of any age to attend professional MMA and boxing matches as long as the minor is accompanied by his or her parent or guardian (§ 14).

The act eliminates the provisions on wrestling exhibitions, which, under current practice, the state does not regulate. This includes provisions (1) banning betting on these exhibitions and prohibiting minors under age 18 from participating in them, (2) banning wrestling exhibitions on certain days, and (3) requiring reports of ticket sales and gross receipts.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2013

§ 1 — JURISDICTION OVER MMA MATCHES

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Definition

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

MMA Regulation

With minor exceptions, the act gives the DESPP commissioner sole jurisdiction over amateur and professional MMA matches in Connecticut (§ 1(b)). It generally exempts from his jurisdiction amateur MMA matches held under the (1) supervision of an educational institution having an academic course of study or athletic associations connected to such institutions or (2) auspices of an athletic association the commissioner determines to be capable of ensuring the participants’ health and safety. But the commissioner may assume jurisdiction if he determines that the participants’ health and safety are not being sufficiently safeguarded.

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

Enforcement

The act authorizes the commissioner or his representative to investigate MMA matches, just like professional boxing matches. This includes investigating match locations, paraphernalia, equipment, and other matters to determine if the matches will be reasonably safe for participants and attendees (§ 1(c)).

Injury Reports

The act requires the owner of a venue where a serious physical injury or death from an MMA match occurs to report it, within four hours after it occurs, to the commissioner or his designee, who must investigate the incident within four hours after receiving the report (§ 1(d)). A “serious physical injury” is one that creates a substantial risk of death or causes serious (1) disfigurement, (2) health impairment, or (3) loss or impairment of the function of any body organ (see *Related Act*).

§ 2 — LICENSING AND BONDING

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

§§ 3 & 4 — TAX PAYMENTS

As is the case with boxing, the act imposes a 5% tax on MMA match promoters and sponsors, which is payable to the State Treasury. The tax is on the gross receipts from admissions after federal taxes have been deducted.

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The act requires sponsors and promoters, within 24 hours after a match ends, to give the commissioner a written, verified report on the number of tickets sold for the match, gross receipts, and any other information the commissioner prescribes.

The commissioner may (1) examine the books or records of a violator who did not file the report by the deadline or failed to include sufficient information and (2) subpoena and examine the violator under oath to determine the amount of the gross receipts and tax due. He may then fix the amount of tax due. Licensees who fail to pay the tax owed, plus expenses the commissioner incurred in conducting the examination within 20 days after being notified, forfeit their license and cannot be relicensed. They must also pay a \$500 fine.

§ 5 — OVERSELLING TICKET VIOLATIONS

The act 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. For any subsequent violation, the club, corporation, association or person must forfeit its license and pay a \$500 fine. Additionally, the officers must be fined up to \$200.

§ 6 — PUBLICIZING TICKET PRICES

The act requires MMA match seat and admission prices, like those in boxing, to be published in 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. The publication must be made in at least three separate editions of the paper and must be no less than two inches by three inches wide.

§§ 7, 8, & 10 — MMA MATCH RULES

Referees and Limits on Rounds

The act prohibits the conduct of an MMA match unless a referee approved by the commissioner is in attendance and controls the match (§ 7). It imposes a five-round limit on matches and a minimum one-minute rest period between rounds.

Referee License

With exemptions for matches exempt from the commissioner's jurisdiction, as specified above, the act requires the commissioner to select and license MMA match referees, as well as boxing referees (§ 8).

Physical Condition of Fighters

The act requires a Connecticut-licensed doctor approved by the commissioner to (1) examine and certify that MMA match competitors, like boxers, 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 for this examination. The commissioner may assess the cost

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of any other physical examination required by the law on the person, club, corporation, or association conducting the next MMA match in which the competitor is scheduled to compete.

§ 11 — FINES

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

§ 12 — AGE LIMITS FOR PARTICIPANTS

As is currently the case for boxing matches, the act prohibits anyone under age (1) 18 from participating in a professional MMA match or (2) 16 from participating in an amateur MMA match, 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 an amateur athletic association the commissioner determines is capable of ensuring the participants' health and safety.

§ 14 — AGE LIMITS FOR ADMITTANCE TO MATCHES

Under prior law, anyone under age 18 was barred from attending a professional boxing match, except that a person age 14 to 18 could attend if accompanied by a parent or guardian.

The act prohibits anyone under age 18 from attending an MMA or professional boxing match unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.

BACKGROUND

Related Act

PA 13- 247 (§ 67) makes anyone who contracts with a person to compete in an MMA match liable for any health care costs the competitor incurs for injury or illness resulting from participating.

OLR Tracking: VR:JO:PF:ts