



Connecticut Department of Public Health

**Testimony Presented Before the Committee on Children
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Senate Bill 204 - An Act Concerning Campers' Education.

The Department of Public Health provides the following information with regards to Senate Bill 204:

Section 1 of this bill requires the Department to work in consultation with groups representing Lyme disease and other tick-borne disease prevention, education and awareness programs in the state to identify or develop best practices for the prevention, identification, diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases and disseminate information through its website and printed materials. The Department feels that this provision is duplicative of efforts that have already taken place in the state and on the national level. Three state agencies provide the people of Connecticut with information about how to prevent tick-borne diseases: the DPH, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES), and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). This past year, the Department of Public Health revised its website, incorporating suggestions from legislators and other parties to include comprehensive materials for the public about the prevention of tick-borne diseases. This information can be found at <http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3136&q=395590>. At the request of the National Institutes of Health, the Institute of Medicine held a workshop in 2010 to examine the state of the science in Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases. Speakers discussed current research and knowledge gaps; criteria for diagnosing tick-borne diseases; the groups most vulnerable to acquiring tick-borne diseases; and the experiences of those with tick-borne diseases. The workshop report was released in 2011 and is available for free online at <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/Critical-Needs-and-Gaps-in-Understanding-Prevention-Amelioration-and-Resolution-of-Lyme-and-Other-Tick-Borne-Diseases.aspx>

The Department also notes that the public health approach to Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases is focused on disease prevention. The Department does not make recommendations concerning the diagnosis and treatment of any disease. The ultimate decision regarding care of a particular patient should be made between the healthcare provider and patient.

Section 2 of this bill mandates licensed camps to develop or approve a Lyme disease education program, consisting of written and oral components, which includes information pertaining to: identification of ticks and other parasitic or potentially harmful insects, identification of early warning signs associated with Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases, proper procedures for campers to notify youth camp staff members of a suspected tick bite, proper methods of conducting tick checks, and current best practices for avoiding

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exposure to ticks and other parasitic or potentially harmful insects. Prior to each camp session, this bill requires the youth camps to distribute the written materials to parents of each camper and present the oral component of the education program to each camper. Youth camp staff do not have the knowledge or expertise to develop and present a comprehensive educational program on Lyme disease. The necessity and/or appropriateness of these requirements are also questionable as many camps operate in urban settings and serve children as young as 3 years of age. This mandate could become impracticable for many youth camps due to the length and number of sessions for each camp; many camps have new sessions each week and/or have new campers arriving each day.

Section 3 of this bill mandates youth camps to develop or approve a camper injury and abuse education program consisting of written and oral components, designate a staff member as an injury or abuse resource counselor and identify this staff member's designation to each camper and describe the procedure for contacting the staff member if any camper suffers injury or abuse or suspects that a camper has suffered injury or abuse, notify the camper's parent or legal guardian or the camper's emergency contact of a report of an incident of injury or abuse, and permit campers to contact his or her parent, legal guardian or emergency contact within twelve hours of requesting to do so. It also requires youth camps to distribute the written components of the education program to the parent of each camper and present the oral component of the education program to each camper, prior to each camp session. Combining the procedures for injuries and abuse into one education program is problematic. Current statutes and regulations require camps to maintain and train staff on policies pertaining to the prevention and reporting of child abuse and neglect. Separately, camps are currently required to designate personnel who are trained in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation to manage the health care at the camp. Similar to a Lyme disease education program, the age of the campers and the length and number of sessions of many camps make one question the appropriateness and/or practicality of these additional requirements.

Section 4 of this bill requires youth camps to conduct state and national criminal history records checks on any director or assistant director which is employed or volunteers at the licensed youth camps, and for youth camps to recognize background checks conducted for immigration purposes not earlier than six months prior to the individual's employment or volunteering to meet this requirement. In 2013, DPH licensed over 500 youth camps and issued initial approval to 467 directors and assistant directors. Currently, there are 5,508 individuals approved as youth camp directors. The processing time for fingerprint supported background check results can range from 8 weeks to 16 weeks. Additional response time for follow up on results that indicate criminal history can also be expected. The bill does not specifically indicate who is responsible for conducting the criminal background check and necessary follow-up of background check results that indicate a criminal history. Federal law prohibits outside parties (e.g. youth camps) to conduct national fingerprint criminal background checks. Should the state licensing agency be required to process the background checks on all youth camp directors and assistant directors, significant resources would be needed for additional staffing.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's comments on this bill.

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