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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

Beth Bye
Commissioner

**Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood
Before the Committee on Children
H.B. 6417 – An Act Requiring Background Checks for
Certain Employees of Licensed Youth Camps
February 18, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, Senator Martin, Representative Dauphinais and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. I am Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am here today to testify concerning **H.B. 6417 – An Act Requiring Background Checks for Certain Employees of Licensed Youth Camps.**

H.B. 6417 would require licensed youth camps to have staff 18 years and older undergo comprehensive fingerprint-based background checks. The language in this bill is similar to the bill introduced in this Committee in the 2020 legislative session. As we know, the 2020 legislative session came to halt last March in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency and therefore, the bill did not move forward.

The OEC supports the requirement for staff of licensed youth camps to undergo background checks to protect the health and safety of children. However, the OEC also recognizes the need to proceed cautiously to avoid implementing a background check requirement (i.e. fingerprint-based) that the current system in Connecticut is unable to support in a timely manner. Currently, the time it takes to process a fingerprint-based background check would make it impossible for camps to hire staff prior to the time such staff were needed to support the camp's operation. In some cases, the time it takes to process a fingerprint-based background check exceeds the period of operation of the camp.

The OEC has submitted language for consideration to the Education Committee requiring background checks for youth camps. The language would require any prospective youth camp employee age 18 and older in a position requiring the provision of care to a child, or involving unsupervised access to children, to submit to a background check. The check must include a: 1) national criminal background check; 2) check of the Connecticut Sex Offender Registry; 3) check of the National Sex Offender Registry Public Website maintained by the U.S. Department

of Justice; and 4) check of the child abuse and neglect registry maintained by the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

The OEC proposal does not require fingerprints but is a significant step in determining the suitability of staff to work in camps, and protecting children from adults who should not be working with children. DESPP is in the process of modernizing its fingerprint system that will vastly decrease the time for processing. We have had many conversations with DESPP and have a good working relationship through this modernization initiative. Once the new fingerprint system is in place, reducing the turnaround time for processing to 24-48 hours, the OEC believes that a requirement for fingerprint-based background checks for youth camps should be revisited.

We have been informed by the Children's Committee chairs that this bill is a work in progress and they want to work with youth camps and the OEC to forge an agreement on acceptable language. We look forward to having more discussions, both with committee members, the Connecticut Camp Association leadership, and the Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council.

Thank you for giving me the time to testify.

About the OEC

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) advances a two-generation family-centered approach in our pursuit of optimal health, safety and learning outcomes for young children. Through our core programs, we support infant and toddler care, preschool, after-school care, child care and youth camp licensing, home visiting, and early intervention to address developmental delays. The OEC is working toward better coordinated, cost-effective services that support Connecticut's youngest children and families.