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Representative Linehan, Senator Anwar and members of the Committee on Children, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

My name is Denise Learned and I am the CEO of Camp Hazen YMCA. We are in support of H.B. 6417, yet do have some concerns.

At Camp Hazen YMCA, we believe that a statutory requirement for youth camps to complete Comprehensive Background Checks (CBC) on all staff is a necessary step to ensuring our children's safety. I am concerned, however, with the logistics and specific methods that are currently included within the bill.

Staff background checks are a mandatory standard for all American Camp Association (ACA) Accredited Camps. Camp Hazen YMCA currently (and for the past 20+ years) has completed background checks on prospective and current employees through 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendors. The specific checks have evolved throughout the years. Currently, the checks for US staff include: Social Security Trace; County Criminal Conviction Search (for all counties that SS# has been attached with); Enhanced Nationwide Criminal Search; State Sex Offender Search; and Dept. of Justice Nationwide Sex Offender Search. We believe that these checks are accurate, dependable and achieve the same results that are sought in this bill. In addition, we have approximately 50-60 (35% of total staff) staff members each summer from around the globe. As part of the Exchange Visitor Program (J-1 Visa) process through the US Department of State, a Criminal Background Check Certificate from their home country must be presented to obtain their 'Certificate of Eligibility (DS-2019)' for their visa, issued by a US Department of State-designated sponsor organization.

The administration requirements, as outlined in the current bill's language, would require each potential staff member to submit to FBI fingerprinting for their CBC. A staff member would not be able to begin working with children in a youth camp until they satisfactorily meet all requirements. Currently, this process is taking 4-8 weeks for child care staff in the state. And – the organization is only receiving negative results or error results requiring an individual to resubmit fingerprints. As many of our staff do not arrive in the state or country until their employment begins, obtaining fingerprints through the State of CT and then waiting 4-8 weeks would not be feasible. Although OEC is currently working to reduce the turnaround time for results to 24-48 hours, I am not confident that the need to provide this service for over 16,000 staff (total # staff in CT licensed youth camps) in a one-week period is completely understood. On a second note, the current fee for this service to OEC is over \$88/person. We are currently

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paying \$25-\$35/person. To more than double the cost for a service that would net the same results would cause a hardship. It would mean that dollars that could be given to families for financial assistance might need to be reduced.

Finally, I would like to add that Camp Hazen YMCA knows that our job is to protect kids to the best of our ability. We believe that our current practices, in regards to CBCs, are both responsible and effective. We believe that all youth camps in CT, both licensed camps and unlicensed Municipal Camps, should be screening staff through CBCs, and that a statutory requirement at this time is necessary. I do hope that this committee considers the methodology for conducting such CBCs, and the cost involved are taken under consideration so that each camp can meet the requirements and continue to meet the needs of Connecticut's children and families.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our position. I would welcome any questions and would be happy to provide further information.

Sincerely,

Denise Learned  
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