

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: House Bill 5493

Title: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A YOUTH SPORTS GRANT PROGRAM.

JeVote Date: 4/3/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/20/2024

File No.: 562

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Finance Revenue and Bonding Committee
Representative Jason Rojas, 9th District

Co-sponsors:

Representative Julio A. Concepcion, 4th District
Senator Tony Hwang, 28th District
Representative Jason Doucette, 13th District

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill establishes a youth sports grant program that provide grants to distressed municipalities to support qualifying nonprofit youth sports organizations. It directs 2% of the state's revenue from sports wagering to a new Youth Sports Grant Account to fund the program, requires the Office of Policy and Management to annually notify the chief elected official in each distressed municipality of the grant's application period, and establishes grant use reporting requirements for municipalities. Increasingly, youth sports are pay-to-play, which diminishes a child's opportunity to participate in sports if their family does not have the resources to pay for the program. This bill aims to level the playing field and afford all children the opportunity to play team sports.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language pushes out the effective date by one year.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Jeffrey Beckham, Secretary, Office of Policy and Management](#), highlights that a revenue intercept would be required to implement this bill, and the funds would be deposited into an off-budget account that would be spent outside of an important fiscal guardrail – the spending cap.

The spending cap limits the overall growth in appropriations by Connecticut taxpayers' ability to pay as measured by the growth in personal income or inflation. Authorizing off-budget spending would not be fiscally responsible and would set the state back from how far we have come over the last seven years since the historic bipartisan budget in 2017, which implemented and enhanced the beneficial fiscal guardrails. Such off-budget spending also circumvents the appropriations process and reduces transparency. The Governor prefers to add taxpayers rather than increase taxes, which this bill would also do.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Jason Rojas, House Majority Leader, Connecticut General Assembly](#), supports youth sports programs because of their benefits to our children and their families. Children who participate in sports experience lower rates of anxiety and depression, see improved physical health across the board, and develop social and emotional skills that will benefit them in all aspects of life. This session, we have placed a significant emphasis on disconnected youth. Youth sports programs are a way to connect young people with positive programs outside of school as well as with caring adults and role models, both of which are key to mitigating the impacts to at-risk youth. Unfortunately, there is a systemic resource gap that exists for our most distressed municipalities. Over time, the local economies of urban core cities, inner-ring suburbs, and many rural areas have been weakened because of increasing poverty, lower residential property values and the concentration of both poverty and wealth by community. These resource constraints make it more difficult for youth sports organizations to secure coaches and business sponsors, help families afford registration fees and equipment, and to simply get the word out about the opportunity of youth sports. Connecticut's children deserve a wealth of opportunity, regardless of the neighborhood or home in which they grow up.

[Peter Frintzilas, Chief Executive Officer, TeamSnap](#), notes numerous studies show that participation in sports is linked to better long-term physical and mental wellbeing, higher grades, and success later in life. Young players develop the work ethic and leadership skills they need to thrive as adults. There has been a gradual uptick in sports participation among kids from the lowest income households, but a significant participation gap remains. Additionally, underserved communities often have a shortage of recreation opportunities and lack the funds to pay for facilities, equipment, or to renovate athletic fields that have fallen into disrepair. All children deserve the opportunity to participate in youth sports and this bill brings the state one step closer to that reality.

[Scott Staniar, Chief Executive Officer, New HYTES \(New Haven Youth Tennis and Education\)](#), emphasizes that this legislation would change the trajectory of so many youth through sports organizations. Tennis may not be associated with urban youth, but tennis can become a metaphor for life, and frankly an escape from the challenges children face in school or often home lives. When the kids play, they laugh, have fun, get excited when they improve and are thrilled when they win. When they lose, they're often disconsolate; sometimes crying or running behind a curtain to hide their emotions. It is in these moments that the value of sports shines – for it is then that our coaches teach essential socioemotional skills.

[Stephen Boyle, Executive Director, 2-4-1 CARE](#), testifies that his years in public education were profoundly rewarding, yet they often felt like an endless cycle of triage. We patched up crises as they erupted, always reacting, seldom preventing. Now, through the work of 2-4-1, our compass points towards prevention—towards building robust frameworks that nurture

physically, socially and emotionally healthy, well-rounded individuals from the get-go. House Bill 5493 represents a critical step on this journey, offering a sustainable pathway to fund programs that are not just about intervention, but about forging a brighter, healthier future for our children using the play-filled power of sports to belong and play. Connecticut can become a global exemplar by passing this bill.

[Julie Goldstein, Chief Program Officer, 2-4-1 CARE](#), discusses a growing equity issue called the physical divide. Last March, the New York Times published an article based on a CDC report highlighting a national gap that grew wider during the COVID pandemic; while children in affluent families participated in sports increased to 70%, participation in low-income families fell to 31%. This gap has everything to do with income and access; it will only grow wider if it is not addressed. In July, the CT Insider published an alarming report about how the physical divide shows up here in Connecticut; the disparities between affluent and low-income communities include children's access to the number of sports, the types of sports, and the overall enrollment. The cumulative adverse effects are correlated with personal issues like mental health, attendance, academics, and social factors regarding access and quality of high school athletics.

She underscores that, over the last three years, school districts have allocated a small portion of American Rescue Plan Act federal funds to physical enrichment programs like 2-4-1 Sports to offset learning loss related to COVID-19. In September of 2024, when those funds draw to a close, the result will include the tragic restoration of a pre-existing barrier to children living in distressed municipalities.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: April 15, 2024