
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 215 (File 136, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH CAMPS.

SUMMARY

This bill makes various changes affecting the regulation of youth camps, including the following:

1. requiring the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to repeat the facility inspection required under current law for initial youth camp licensure within 72 hours after the (a) camp operations start and (b) office approves a corrective action plan, and then weekly after that until it determines the licensee fully complies with the plan (§ 1);
2. establishing a priority order OEC must follow when inspecting youth camps, giving priority to initial licensure applicants and single-week youth camps (§ 1);
3. authorizing the OEC commissioner to take various disciplinary actions (e.g., license refusal, suspension, or revocation) against a youth camp licensee if the operator or an employee held a youth camp license in another state that was revoked (§ 4); and
4. establishing a Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council within OEC to advise the commissioner on youth camp safety (§ 2).

The bill also makes minor and technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

*Senate Amendment "A" (1) increases the frequency of OEC's inspections of youth camp facilities by requiring the office to repeat the initial inspection within 72 hours after approving a corrective action plan and weekly after that until the licensee is fully compliant and (2)

eliminates the provision in the underlying bill that would have required unlicensed youth camps to report to OEC on fatalities and certain injuries.

§§ 1 & 4 — OEC YOUTH CAMP LICENSURE

Facility Inspection Frequency

Current law requires OEC, before issuing an initial youth camp license, to inspect, or cause to be inspected, the camp's facilities. The bill requires OEC to repeat the inspection within 72 hours after the (1) youth camp starts operating and (2) office approves a corrective action plan for the licensee, and then weekly after that until the office determines that the licensee fully complies with the plan.

Existing law, unchanged by the bill, also requires OEC to annually inspect, or cause to be inspected, all licensees' facilities.

Facility Inspection Priority

When inspecting youth camps, the bill requires OEC to prioritize initial licensure applicants and licensees who operate single-week youth camps. For the latter, the inspections must be done within 48 hours after the youth camp starts operating in a given year.

Conversely, it requires OEC to give less priority to licensees that (1) are nationally accredited by the American Camp Association or the Boy Scouts of America's National Camp Accreditation Program or (2) have no complaints or violations filed against them during the prior five years.

License Refusal, Suspension, or Revocation

The bill authorizes the OEC commissioner to (1) refuse to license a person to establish or maintain a youth camp; (2) suspend or revoke a license; or (3) take any other action authorized under regulation if a person who establishes, conducts, or maintains a youth camp or an employee in a position connected with providing care to a child or involving unsupervised access to a child held a youth camp license in another state that was revoked by that state's licensing authority.

Existing law already authorizes the commissioner to take these actions if a person or employee has:

1. been convicted of certain crimes in any state (e.g., injury or risk of injury to or impairing the morals of children) or
2. a criminal record that the commissioner reasonably believes makes the person unsuitable to establish, conduct, maintain, or be employed by a youth camp.

By law, the commissioner's refusal of a license must follow the human rights and opportunities statutes prohibiting discrimination based on erased criminal history record information.

§ 2 — YOUTH CAMP SAFETY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Membership

The bill establishes a Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council within OEC to advise the commissioner on youth camp safety. The council's membership must at least include the following 11 appointees who serve three-year terms without compensation:

1. a Connecticut Camping Association representative appointed by the House speaker;
2. a Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association representative, appointed by the Senate president pro tempore;
3. two representatives of Connecticut nonprofit youth service organizations with a camping program, appointed one each by the House and Senate majority leaders;
4. two representatives of day camps, appointed one each by the House minority leader and Children's Committee House chairperson;
5. two representatives of resident camps, appointed one each by the Senate minority leader and Children's Committee Senate chairperson;

6. a sports camp representative and an independent school camp representative, both appointed by the governor; and
7. a representative of a university that hosts or conducts a summer camp, appointed by the OEC commissioner.

Under the bill, appointing authorities must make their appointments by September 1, 2024, and fill any vacancy. The commissioner may appoint any additional members based on their expertise and the council's needs.

Meetings and Governance

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to schedule and hold the council's first meeting by September 15, 2024. At the first meeting, and annually after that, the members must elect the council's chairpersons from among the members. The council may also elect other officers it deems necessary.

The council must meet at least quarterly and when the chairperson deems it necessary or a majority of members request it. The OEC commissioner must meet at least annually with the council.

Under the bill, any member who fails to attend 50% of all meetings held during any calendar year must be deemed to have resigned from the council.

The bill requires OEC to provide administrative assistance to facilitate the council's activities.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 15 Nay 3 (03/12/2024)