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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
 Early Childhood

Beth Bye
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**Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood
 Before the Committee on Children
 S.B. 215 – An Act Concerning Youth Camps
 Thursday, February 29, 2024**

Good morning, Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Senator Seminara, Representative Dauphinais, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. My name is Liz Proietti, and I am the Director of the Licensing Division at the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). The Licensing Division is responsible for licensing and regulating childcare and youth camp programs, and I am here today to testify concerning **S.B. 215 – An Act Concerning Youth Camps**.

Section 1 would require OEC licensing staff to inspect a newly licensed youth camp no later than 48 hours after the licensee commences operations. The OEC would be required to give priority to applicants for an original license and those licensees who operate a camp for a single week. The bill also requires the OEC to give less priority to licensees who hold a national accreditation and where there are no complaints or violations from the previous year. The American Camping Association is an organization that accredits camps and focuses on health and safety. While we know there are 47 ACA accredited camps in Connecticut, where 34 are day camps and 13 are overnight camps, the OEC does not currently seek to obtain such information on the application for a youth camp license.

The OEC finds the proposal in Section 1 to be reasonable with the intent of ensuring the health and safety of our young children. For the 2023 camp season, the OEC received approximately 40-45 new youth camp license applications. While it may be possible to conduct inspections for those new licensees within 48 hours, we do recommend that the length of time from commencement of operations for new camps for their annual inspection be 72 hours. The first day of camp involves administrative and organizational activities so an inspection on day 2 or 3 would indicate how the camp is operating in a more typical manner. We also think it’s important to note that the OEC’s current practice is to prioritize one-week camps for inspections. We also track which camps should be prioritized for inspections sooner than others based on their previous compliance history.

Section 2 would establish a Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council within the Office of Early Childhood. The Council would provide advice to the OEC Commissioner on matters related to safety issues at youth camps. The OEC would be charged with providing administrative assistance to facilitate the activity of the Council, including ensuring individuals are appointed as members, scheduling and posting notice of meetings, working with the chairs to create meeting agendas, taking minutes, posting minutes, and ensuring any follow-up work is completed. This will require additional OEC youth camp staff time.

The OEC currently partners with the Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council. The Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council was originally enacted in state statute in 1970 yet was sunsetted around 1979. Since such time, the Council has continued to voluntarily meet with the Youth Camp Division of the OEC. Members are appointed to a two-year term by the Commissioner and make recommendations to the OEC concerning safety issues in youth camp activities based on their expertise. Current members represent nonprofit day and residential youth camps, for-profit day and residential youth camps, nonprofit residential special needs youth camps, college and university youth camps, and community members. The OEC is available and happy to meet with Committee chairs and proponents about this proposal

Section 3 would require the licensee to submit an annual report to the OEC not later than October 1 and detail how the camp was operated, staffed, and supervised and how the camp responded to medical and safety incidents during the year. The OEC does not oppose this section but finds it duplicative since the OEC already captures this information from licensing inspections and investigations.

Section 4 would give the OEC Commissioner the discretion to refuse a camp applicant that has held a camp license in another state that has been revoked by that state's licensing authority.

The OEC recently revised its youth camp [licensing application](https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OEC-2024-YC-Application.pdf) to include questions about a camp's history in Connecticut or another state. The updated application has been posted on our website: <https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OEC-2024-YC-Application.pdf> (see pages 4-5). Questions include:

- *Have you ever operated a youth camp in this or any other state?*
- *Was the youth camp or any person employed by the youth camp the subject of an investigation by law enforcement?*
- *Was the youth camp or any person employed by the youth camp the subject of an investigation by a child protection agency?*
- *To the best of your knowledge, has the person listed as the Youth Camp Director, Youth Camp Assistant Director, or Director of First Aid been disciplined, terminated, or placed on probation from any position that involves the care or supervision of children?*

Additional questions appear below each question listed above. The OEC added these questions on the application to ensure we can prevent entities from operating a youth camp with a history of concern to operate and to better protect the health and safety of young children.

Thank you for your time and attention. The OEC is committed to work together—with legislators, the executive branch, providers, advocates, and parents—to better serve our families with young children.