

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7049

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE REGARDING OVERSIGHT OF CHILDREN'S AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER SERVICES AND THE INFANT MORTALITY REVIEW

Title: PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 3/5/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/3/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill allows the commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to share information each department believes is necessary to perform its duties regarding the operation of the Infant Mortality Review Program. DPH would disclose information to the (OCA) regarding the Infant Mortality Review Program, and the OCA would share information regarding infant deaths. Each department must follow existing standards concerning the confidentiality of the information.

The substitute language removed sections 1-5 of the original bill regarding background checks for behavioral health analysts and a task force to focus on children with autism.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Manisha Juthani, Commissioner of DPH:

The commissioner testified that section 1 of the bill concerning background checks for behavioral health analysts would create several logistical issues the department would need to navigate as well as require a cost to the department not included in the Governor's proposed budget.

Christina Ghio, Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate (OCA):

Ms. Ghio's testimony focused on Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA). ABA is a critically important medical treatment for children with challenging needs and behaviors, most frequently children on the autism spectrum. Early and intensive treatment is the most effective. In 2023, the OCA was notified of concerns that facilities providing ABA were in environments like childcare centers but without regulations designed to ensure the safety of the children as well as without state oversight. OCA found that while there are laws, regulations and policies that provide some oversight of ABA services to children, there is no statutory or regulatory framework. The OCA is concerned that there are significant gaps in oversight that may impact the safety and well-being of children receiving these services. The OCA is recommending a task force to consider these issues and make recommendations to address this concern.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Judith Palazzo, VP of Behavioral Services for Milestones Behavioral Services:

Ms. Palazzo testified in opposition to sections 1 and 5 of the bill. Milestones requires background checks for all employees. However, she feels that requiring background checks for behavioral analysts for licensure is not in keeping with the requirements of similar professions. In addition, no other profession in the state licensed by DPH has the additional oversight of a task force to review delivery of services. This gives the appearance that behavioral analysts, unlike the many other licensed professionals in the state, need more intense scrutiny.

Arlene Dworkin Kaye, Public Policy and Legislative Chair, Connecticut Association for Behavioral Analysis:

The Association opposes sections 1 and 5 of the legislation. behavioral analysts are being singled out as a profession regarding background checks as a requirement for licensure when this is not required of other professions working with vulnerable or at-risk populations. Board Certified behavior analysts and registered behavior technicians are regularly required to undergo background checks when they seek employment, which is the procedure in place for other health care professionals. We also have concerns with the creation of a task force, which would seem unnecessary at least, and discriminatory as behavior analysts are already provided oversight by the DPH and Behavior Analyst Certification Board.

22 individuals in the behavioral health field submitted testimony expressing the same concerns with section 1 and 5 of this bill as that of Ms. Palazzo and Ms. Dworkin Kaye.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza

Date: March 7, 2025

