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## OLR Bill Analysis

### sSB 6

## **AN ACT CONCERNING RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS AND DISCONNECTED YOUTHS.**

### TABLE OF CONTENTS:

#### SUMMARY

##### §§ 1 & 2 — CACFP ADMINISTRATION OF CACFP

*Designates OEC, instead of SDE, the lead agency for administering and distributing CACFP funds*

##### § 3 — ANNUAL REPORT ON DISCONNECTED YOUTH

*Requires P20WIN to submit its annual report to the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and the Two-Generational Advisory Board; requires the legislature to hold a hearing on each annual report; requires P20WIN, when preparing its 2027 annual report, to incorporate data provided by specified state agencies and sets related requirements*

##### § 4 — KINDERGARTEN PREPARATORY ACADEMIES

*Requires SDE to develop guidance for local and regional boards of education on administering kindergarten preparatory academies*

##### § 5 — CONNECTICUT SMART START COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

*Increases maximum grant amounts awarded under the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program and allows grants to be used to establish or expand kindergarten preparatory academies*

##### §§ 6 & 7 — MUNICIPAL YOUTH CAMPS

*Subjects municipal youth camps to OEC licensure, which they are exempt from under current law*

##### § 8 — EARLY CHILDHOOD CABINET MEMBERSHIP

*Adds the Connecticut Library Consortium's executive director to the membership of the Early Childhood Cabinet*

##### §§ 9-11 — BIRTH-TO-THREE AND HELP ME GROW PROGRAMS

*Requires OEC to (1) update and expand the content of its one-page developmental milestone document, (2) conduct a quarterly review of children deemed ineligible for Birth-to-Three, and (3) provide certain supports to teen parents through the Help Me Grow program*

##### § 12 — SPARKLER MOBILE APPLICATION

*Requires OEC to develop a report on its use of the Sparkler mobile application and submit its report to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2026*

## **SUMMARY**

This bill contains various provisions affecting resources and supports for infants, toddlers, and disconnected youth.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

### **§§ 1 & 2 — CACFP ADMINISTRATION OF CACFP**

*Designates OEC, instead of SDE, the lead agency for administering and distributing CACFP funds*

The bill designates the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), instead of the State Department of Education (SDE), as the lead agency for administering and distributing federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) funds.

It correspondingly requires OEC, rather than SDE, to encourage child care centers and group and family child care homes to participate in the program, including by (1) annually advertising the program to non-participating child care centers and group and family child care homes and (2) sharing relevant data between the office and other state agencies.

The bill also makes related technical and conforming changes.

### **§ 3 — ANNUAL REPORT ON DISCONNECTED YOUTH**

*Requires P20WIN to submit its annual report to the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and the Two-Generational Advisory Board; requires the legislature to hold a hearing on each annual report; requires P20WIN, when preparing its 2027 annual report, to incorporate data provided by specified state agencies and sets related requirements*

By law, the executive board of the Connecticut Preschool Through Twenty and Workforce Information Network (P20WIN) must submit an annual report on disconnected youth (i.e. certain youth ages 14 to 26 who are at-risk students and not enrolled in high school) to the Appropriations, Children, Education, Human Services, Judiciary, Labor and Public Employees, and Public Health committees. The bill additionally requires the board to give the annual report to the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and the Two-Generational Advisory Board.

Under the bill, the legislative committees listed above must hold a

hearing on the report between January 1 and February 1 in the year after the report's submission.

Additionally, the bill requires the executive board, when preparing its January 1, 2027, report, to include a plan to incorporate data provided by OEC, the Department of Developmental Services, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, and the Office of Health Strategy (OHS) through an enterprise memorandum of understanding (MOU) (see *Background — Enterprise MOU*).

Under the bill, this data may at least include the following: (1) OEC child-level data on the Care 4 Kids program, Birth-to-Three Program, Early Start CT, Family Bridge Program, early childhood home visiting programs, and early care and education programs, and (2) OHS data from the all-payer claims database.

#### ***Background — Enterprise MOU***

By law, an “enterprise MOU” is a foundational, multiparty agreement that sets forth details of how data is shared and the respective legal rights and responsibilities of each party to the process, which may also be used for new agencies to sign on to the data-sharing process, without having to re-sign as agencies sign on (or off) the agreement.

#### **§ 4 — KINDERGARTEN PREPARATORY ACADEMIES**

*Requires SDE to develop guidance for local and regional boards of education on administering kindergarten preparatory academies*

The bill requires SDE, by January 1, 2026, to develop guidance for local and regional education boards on administering kindergarten preparatory academies. These programs enroll students who turn five years old on or after September 1 of the school year and are ineligible to enroll in school that year.

Under the bill, the guidance must include information on the following:

1. the availability of meal and lunch grants or subsidies, including those offered through CACFP, for enrolled students;

2. whether families of enrolled students are eligible for Care 4 Kids subsidies;
3. whether OEC or State Board of Education regulations govern the administration of these academies, including regulations on student-to-teacher ratios, parental involvement and notification procedures, recess, classroom removal, special education identification, and curriculum requirements; and
4. whether these students qualify as “resident students” for purposes of education cost sharing (see *Background — Resident Students*).

The bill requires SDE to post the guidance on its website and make it available to local and regional school boards, upon request.

***Background — Resident Students***

“Resident students” is generally the number of students in a town enrolled in its public schools at the town’s expense as of October 1 each year. This definition additionally includes students who are enrolled in schools outside their hometown, such as magnet and vocational-agriculture schools and students in the Open Choice program.

The number of resident students is used as part of various education-related funding calculations, such as cost sharing grants and choice program grants. For Open Choice students, they are counted as 50% in the town the student resides in and 50% in the town where they attend school.

**§ 5 — CONNECTICUT SMART START COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM**

*Increases maximum grant amounts awarded under the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program and allows grants to be used to establish or expand kindergarten preparatory academies*

Under current law, the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program provides grants for capital and operating expenses for local and regional boards of education to establish or expand preschool programs. The bill also allows school boards to use the grants to establish or expand kindergarten preparatory academies and makes

related conforming changes.

Additionally, the bill increases the program's maximum grant amounts as follows:

1. for capital grants, from \$75,000 to \$105,000 per classroom to renovate an existing public school to accommodate or expand a preschool program or kindergarten preparatory academy and
2. for annual operating expenses grants, (a) from \$5,000 to \$7,000 per child served by the grant or (b) from \$75,000 to \$105,000 per preschool classroom for a period of five years, as long as the program continues to meet OEC standards.

Under existing law and the bill, to be eligible for a grant, an applicant board must demonstrate that they have a need to establish or expand a preschool program or kindergarten preparatory academy, submit a plan for spending grant funds, and submit a letter of support from the local or regional school readiness council, if applicable.

## **§§ 6 & 7 — MUNICIPAL YOUTH CAMPS**

*Subjects municipal youth camps to OEC licensure, which they are exempt from under current law*

The bill subjects municipal youth camps (those serving children ages 3 to 16) to state oversight by requiring them to obtain a license from OEC. Currently, municipal day camps are exempt from state licensure.

In doing so, the bill extends to municipal youth camps existing licensure requirements for non-municipal youth camps, including requirements related to immunizations, medication administration, inspections and investigations, criminal background checks, and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.

As under existing law, municipal day camps must apply to OEC for a license at least 30 days before opening the camp and pay the associated fee (currently \$815 for for-profit camps and \$315 for nonprofit camps). Licenses must be renewed annually.

Under the bill, OEC may take various disciplinary actions against

municipal youth camps under existing law, such as license suspension or revocation.

### **§ 8 — EARLY CHILDHOOD CABINET MEMBERSHIP**

*Adds the Connecticut Library Consortium's executive director to the membership of the Early Childhood Cabinet*

The bill increases the Early Childhood Cabinet's membership, from 31 to 32, by adding the Connecticut Library Consortium's executive director.

By law, the Early Childhood Cabinet (1) advises OEC, (2) develops an annual action plan that assigns state agencies certain tasks specified in the federal Head Start Act, and (3) submits an annual state-wide strategic report that addresses agencies' progress in meeting the action plan's requirements.

### **§§ 9-11 — BIRTH-TO-THREE AND HELP ME GROW PROGRAMS**

*Requires OEC to (1) update and expand the content of its one-page developmental milestone document, (2) conduct a quarterly review of children deemed ineligible for Birth-to-Three, and (3) provide certain supports to teen parents through the Help Me Grow program*

The bill makes various changes to notice and information collection requirements related to OEC's Help Me Grow and Birth-to-Three programs (see *Background*).

It requires OEC to update, as needed, its one-page developmental document required under existing law. Currently, the document must (1) list key developmental milestones for children from birth to age five and (2) notify parents and guardians concerned that their child has not yet met any developmental milestones that they may access the OEC Child Development Infoline for information on appropriate services.

The bill additionally requires the document to notify parents and guardians that they may also access the Help Me Grow program for information on the following:

1. accessing no-cost developmental screening and evaluation programs for children ages birth to five,

2. connecting to community and in-home programs and services,
3. parenting and healthy child development supports, and
4. early intervention and special education services.

Under the bill, OEC must also do the following:

1. conduct a quarterly review to determine how many children referred to the Birth-to-Three program were deemed ineligible and why;
2. notify parents and guardians of ineligible children that they may receive additional supports and services from the Help Me Grow program;
3. collect information on these ineligible children including (a) the types of supports and services and (b) additional referrals they receive under the Help Me Grow program; and
4. provide, through the Help Me Grow program, trainings and other social, educational, and workforce supports to teen parents in communities with teen birth rates greater than 10% (according to the Department of Public Health's most recent data).

***Background — Birth-to-Three***

By law, the Birth-to-Three program is designed to strengthen families' capacities to meet the developmental and health-related needs of their infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities. Generally, to be eligible for the program a child must (1) live in Connecticut, (2) be younger than three, and (3) have a developmental delay or a medical condition that most likely will result in a developmental delay.

***Background — Help Me Grow Program***

By law, the Help Me Grow program identifies children at risk for developmental or behavioral problems and connects them to existing community resources. Program components include, among other things, (1) training child health providers in effective developmental

surveillance; (2) creating a resource inventory of community-based programs supporting child development and families; (3) developing a coordinated, statewide referral system that links young children and families to existing services and support; and (4) collecting data and analyses of children’s developmental status and statewide resources.

## **§ 12 — SPARKLER MOBILE APPLICATION**

*Requires OEC to develop a report on its use of the Sparkler mobile application and submit its report to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2026*

The bill requires OEC to develop a report on its use of the “Sparkler” mobile application (see *Background — Sparkler Mobile Application*).

Under the bill, the report must address the following:

1. how Sparkler assesses whether or how much children and families are learning;
2. the intended and achieved outcomes of its coaching sessions, including whether the application measures the working alliance between the coach and parent or guardian;
3. whether Sparkler promotes early healthy brain development, and if so, how that development is measured;
4. how results are given to parents and guardians;
5. whether children are growing and developing over time and how the application measures and tracks this development; and
6. how Sparkler links families with health and education providers and whether it helps establish care teams and coordinated services.

The bill requires OEC to submit its report to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2026.

### ***Background — Sparkler Mobile Application***

Sparkler is a mobile application that gives parents and guardians with children ages birth to five social and emotional developmental

screenings. The application (1) tracks children’s developmental progress, (2) provides information on activities that can promote development, and (3) provides access to 211’s early childhood providers and care coordinators.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 12 Nay 5 (03/06/2025)