



Acts Affecting Children

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Notice to Readers

This report provides summaries of new laws (public acts and special acts) significantly affecting children enacted during the 2021 regular session and June special session (JSS). OLR's other Acts Affecting reports, including Acts Affecting Education, are, or will soon be, available on OLR's website: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/olr/actsaffecting.asp>.

Each summary indicates the public act (PA) or special act (SA) number. Not all provisions of the acts are included. The report does not include vetoed acts unless the veto was overridden. Complete summaries of public acts are, or will soon be, available on OLR's website: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/olr/olrsums.asp>.

Readers are encouraged to obtain the full text of acts that interest them from the Connecticut State Library, House Clerk's Office, or General Assembly's website: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/>.

A number of new laws affect schools and students, including early childhood education. Please refer to OLR's Acts Affecting Education report for these new laws.

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Child Health and Safety

Background Checks for Certain Youth Camp Employees and Youth Sports Coaches

Starting October 1, 2022, a new law requires Office of Early Childhood (OEC)-licensed youth camps to require prospective employees age 18 or older to submit to comprehensive background checks if they are applying for positions that provide care or involve unsupervised access to any child attending the youth camp. Starting this same date, it also generally requires municipalities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations operating youth athletic activities to require prospective employees or volunteers age 18 or older and applying for a position as a coach, instructor, or athletic trainer to also submit to comprehensive background checks ([PA 21-82](#), effective October 1, 2021).

Best Interest of the Child Factors

A new law expands the list of factors a court-appointed guardian ad litem or counsel for the minor child must consider in determining a child's best interest to include the child's physical and emotional safety. The act makes the same change to the list of factors a court may consider in custody decisions and making and modifying related orders ([PA 21-78](#), §§ 8 & 9, effective October 1, 2021).

Certified Homeless Youth

A new law expands the statutory definition of "certified homeless youth" to include youth certified as homeless by the director of a municipal or nonprofit program that contracts with the Department of Housing's homeless youth program. (By law, a certified homeless youth is a 15- to 17-year-old person, not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian, who is a homeless child or youth as defined in specified federal law.)

The act also establishes a definition for a "certified homeless young adult," which is an 18- to 25-year-old person who has been certified as homeless in the same manner as for certified homeless youth.

It also permits the fees to be waived when issuing these individuals certified copies of birth certificates or state identity cards ([PA 21-121](#), §§ 70-72, effective July 1, 2021).

Children’s Mental Health Services Resource Document

A new law requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF), in consultation with the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council (BHPOC), the Mental Health and Addiction Services and Public Health departments, and the DCF Youth Suicide Advisory Board, to develop a document for each mental health region describing the behavioral and mental health evaluation and treatment resources available to children. Among other things, the act requires (1) BHPOC to distribute the documents electronically to each licensed hospital with an emergency department and each local and regional board of education, and (2) hospital emergency departments to provide a copy of the documents to parents or guardians of each child upon the child’s discharge from the emergency department ([PA 21-116](#), various effective dates).

Dental, Health, and Vision Insurance for Children

A new law requires certain dental, health, and vision insurance policies to continue coverage for a child, stepchild, or other dependent child until the policy anniversary date on or after the date the child turns age 26 ([PA 21-149](#), effective January 1, 2022).

Health Assessments for Children With Asthma

A new law requires school boards to report on students who are diagnosed with asthma in grades 9 or 10, instead of grades 10 or 11 as under prior law. In doing so, it aligns the reporting schedule with the schedule school boards must follow for conducting student health assessments required under existing law ([PA 21-121](#), § 67, effective July 1, 2021).

Healthcare Regardless of Immigration Status

A new law requires the Department of Social Services (DSS) to extend eligibility for medical assistance, subject to income limits and within available appropriations, to (1) children under age 9, beginning January 1, 2023, regardless of immigration status and (2) women for 12 months after giving birth, beginning April 1, 2023, who do not qualify for Medicaid due to immigration status. It also requires the state to cover prenatal care for certain women under the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) by April 1, 2022. Under the act, the Office of Health Strategy must study expanding coverage to older children as well ([PA 21-176](#) and [PA 21-2](#), June Special Session (JSS), § 344, both effective October 1, 2021, except the study requirement is effective upon passage).

Home Visiting System

A new law changes the name of the Nurturing Families Network to the Connecticut Home Visiting System and modifies the program’s scope to include young children as well as infants ([PA 21-172](#), §§ 4 & 11-14, effective July 1, 2021).

Ice Cream Truck Safety

The legislature passed a law to enhance children’s safety when buying from ice cream trucks. Among other things, the law (1) requires trucks, by May 1, 2022, to have and use signal arms, flashing lights, and other safety equipment; (2) establishes operating rules for ice cream trucks, generally limiting the locations where vendors may sell and the conditions under which they may do so; and (3) requires drivers, when approaching an ice cream truck displaying its flashing lights and signal arm, to stop and proceed past the truck at 5 mph or less, yielding to any pedestrians. First violations of the law’s requirements are generally infractions, but warnings must be given for certain violations occurring between July 1 and September 30, 2021 ([PA 21-20](#), most provisions effective July 1, 2021).

Newborn Screening Program

A new law makes several changes to the state’s Newborn Screening Program, including, among other things, (1) extending newborn screening requirements for health care institutions to licensed nurse-midwives and midwives; (2) requiring newborn screenings to be performed using bloodspot specimens; and (3) specifying timeframes for specimen collection and notification ([PA 21-121](#), § 75, effective upon passage).

Outpatient Mental Health Treatment for Minors

Under existing law, a psychiatrist, psychologist, independent social worker, or marital and family therapist may provide outpatient mental health treatment to a minor without the consent or notification of a parent or guardian under certain conditions. A new law allows minors to request and receive as many such treatment sessions from these providers as necessary; prior law limited this to six sessions unless the provider determined that this requirement would be seriously detrimental to the minor’s well-being.

The act allows a provider to notify a parent or guardian about this treatment without the minor’s consent or notification if (1) the provider determines that notification or disclosure is necessary for the minor’s well-being, (2) the treatment provided to the minor is solely for mental health and not for a substance use disorder, and (3) the minor is given an opportunity to object to the notification or disclosure ([PA 21-46](#), § 10, effective July 1, 2021).

Physician Assistants

A new law adds physician assistants (PAs) to various statutes (including some specifically related to children) that previously only referenced physicians or advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). For example, it allows PAs to authorize emergency treatment for a child hospitalized for

psychiatric disabilities if parental consent is withheld or immediately unavailable and the PA determines that treatment is necessary to prevent serious harm ([PA 21-196](#), effective October 1, 2021).

Qualified Residential Treatment Programs

The legislature passed legislation regarding qualified residential treatment programs (QRTPs). Under federal law, a QRTP is a program that, among other things, has a trauma-informed treatment model designed to address the needs, including clinical needs, of children with serious emotional or behavioral disorders or disturbances. For example, the new law requires:

1. the DCF commissioner to adopt regulations and establish standards for QRTPs and qualified individuals (i.e., trained professionals or licensed clinicians who are not state employees, and who are not connected to or affiliated with any setting in which children are placed by the state); and
2. DCF to submit evidence documenting (a) the child's specific treatment or service needs that will be met in the placement and the length of time the child is expected to require treatment or services and (b) efforts made by DCF to prepare the child to return home or to be placed with a family member, legal guardian, adoptive parent, or in a foster family ([PA 21-140](#), §§ 6-8, effective upon passage).

Solnit Center Licensure

A new law requires the Albert J. Solnit Children's Center's hospital and psychiatric residential treatment facility units to obtain Department of Public Health (DPH) licensure, and the DPH commissioner to adopt regulations regarding these residential facilities' licensure. The act also allows the DPH commissioner, under certain conditions, to implement policies and procedures about the licensure of these facilities while in the process of adopting the regulations ([PA 21-2](#), JSS, §§ 29-31, various effective dates).

Voluntary Blood Donation

A new law allows a 16-year-old, with his or her parent's or guardian's written authorization, to (1) donate blood, or any of its components, and (2) consent to blood withdrawal at a voluntary blood donation program. Existing law already allows a person age 17 or older to do so without parental or guardian consent ([PA 21-26](#), § 5, effective July 1, 2021).

Child Protection and Welfare

DCF Software Application

A new law requires the DCF commissioner, by February 1, 2022, to develop and maintain a software application for use on computers and mobile devices to facilitate (1) the reporting of nonemergent incidents to DCF by mandated reporters and (2) communication between children in the commissioner's care and custody and social workers assigned to them ([PA 21-46](#), § 22, effective July 1, 2021).

DCF Voluntary Admission Case Transfers

A new law adds certain reviews of DCF voluntary admissions and related matters to the types of probate court transfers that must occur through electronic means. In these cases, if a probate court grants a party's motion to transfer the matter to another district, the act requires the electronic transfer of the case from one probate court to another. The court issuing the transfer order must transmit a digital image of each document ([PA 21-100](#), § 14, effective July 1, 2021).

DCF Written Removal Notice

Generally, if DCF receives a complaint of child abuse or neglect, at the first face-to-face contact with the child's parent or guardian DCF must provide a written notice explaining certain matters in plain language, including that the parent or guardian is entitled to seek the representation of an attorney and to have an attorney present when the parent or guardian is questioned by a DCF representative. The new law specifies that this includes at any meeting conducted to determine whether the child should be removed from the home ([PA 21-46](#), § 23, effective July 1, 2021).

Distribution of Child Sexual Abuse Information

A new law requires the Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children, in collaboration with a national association of adult survivors of child abuse, by December 1, 2021, to develop (1) instructional guidelines for youth coaches on best practices regarding appropriate interaction with youth athletes and (2) child sexual abuse informational guidelines that describe (a) abusers' grooming techniques, (b) victim behavior, and (c) if abuse has occurred, how to contact the appropriate authorities and communicate that one is a victim to a parent or other adult.

The new law requires youth athletic activity operators and youth camp licensees, starting January 1, 2022, to distribute a copy of the child sexual abuse informational guidelines to the parent or guardian of each activity or camp participant upon enrollment or registration. Additionally, youth athletic activity operators must by January 1, 2022, and annually thereafter, distribute a copy of the instructional guidelines to their youth coaches ([PA 21-64](#), effective upon passage).

Remote Visitation of Children in DCF Care and Custody

Under a new law, in the event of a pandemic or communicable disease outbreak resulting in a governor-declared public health emergency or president-declared national emergency, a child in DCF care and custody must be given opportunities to communicate with his or her parents and siblings by telephone, video, or other conferencing platform instead of in-person visitation. The commissioner must ensure that opportunities for these visits occur as often as reasonably possible, based on the child's best interest ([PA 21-46](#), § 21, effective July 1, 2021).

Youth Suicide Prevention Training Program

A new law requires the Youth Suicide Advisory Board and the Office of the Child Advocate to jointly administer an evidence-based youth suicide prevention training program in each local and district health department and offer it by July 1, 2022, and at least once every three years after that. It requires the training program to provide certification in Question, Persuade and Refer (QPR) Institute Gatekeeper training, which is an educational program designed to teach lay and professional individuals who work with youth the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to respond ([PA 21-46](#), § 1, effective July 1, 2021).

Courts and Criminal Law

1st Degree Stalking

A new law limits 1st degree stalking of someone under age 16 to situations in which the actor is age 22 or older. By law, a person is guilty of 1st degree stalking when he or she commits 2nd degree stalking with an additional factor (e.g., stalking due to a person's age) ([PA 21-56](#), § 1, effective October 1, 2021).

Cannabis Regulation and Juvenile Matters

A new law legalizes the possession of cannabis (marijuana) for adult recreational use (age 21 or older) up to a specified possession limit, and in doing so addresses certain matters related to children. For example, it:

1. provides certain protections for (a) parents or guardians of a child or newborn or (b) pregnant women if traces of cannabinoid metabolites are detected in their bodily fluids, prohibiting the presence of these metabolites from being the sole or primary basis for any DCF action or proceeding;
2. prohibits minors from being adjudicated delinquent for a first or second offense for possessing under five ounces of cannabis or equivalent product amounts or combined amounts;

3. removes most cannabis sales from the list of serious juvenile offenses; and
4. prohibits cannabis establishments and anyone advertising any cannabis or cannabis-related services from, among other things, advertising cannabis or related goods or services in ways that target or are designed to appeal to those under age 21 ([PA 21-1](#), JSS, §§ 3, 5, 33 & 94, effective July 1, 2021).

Enticing a Juvenile to Commit a Crime

A new law establishes the crime of “enticing a juvenile to commit a criminal act” and makes (1) a first violation a class A misdemeanor and (2) subsequent offenses a class D felony. A person is guilty of this crime if he or she is at least age 23 and knowingly causes, encourages, solicits, recruits, intimidates, or coerces a person under age 18 to commit or participate in committing a crime ([PA 21-33](#), § 12, October 1, 2021).

Human Trafficking

A new law makes various changes to laws related to human trafficking crime and victims. Among other things it:

1. extends vacatur relief by allowing individuals who committed certain crimes due to being human trafficking victims to apply to have those convictions vacated;
2. establishes an affirmative defense for a trafficking victim who is a minor charged with trafficking in persons;
3. broadens the crime of “commercial sexual abuse of a minor” to include taking these actions in exchange for anything of value, instead of only for paying a fee, as under prior law; and
4. reduces, from annually to every three years, the required frequency of the DCF refresher training in human trafficking awareness for certain professions and extends the training requirement to emergency medical services personnel ([PA 21-103](#), §§ 3-7, effective October 1, 2021).

Immunity for Minors Possessing Alcohol Who Seek Assistance

A new law gives individuals under age 21 immunity from criminal prosecution for possessing alcohol when they call 9-1-1 to prevent someone else’s death or serious injury under certain conditions (e.g., the person is the first to make the call and provide certain identifying information). By law, a first violation for possession of alcohol by an underage person is an infraction, and a second violation is punishable by a fine of \$200 to \$500; convicted individuals also face driver’s license sanctions ([PA 21-142](#), effective October 1, 2021).

Uniform Parentage Act

A new law adopts the Uniform Parentage Act, cited as the Connecticut Parentage Act. Among other things, the act:

1. provides for equal treatment under the law for children born to same-sex couples by, among other things, removing certain gender-specific references (e.g., changing “maternity” and “paternity” to “parentage”);
2. expands recognition of non-biological parents;
3. provides guidance on adjudicating parentage (e.g., creates best interest of the child factors the court must consider);
4. creates processes to establish presumptive, de facto, acknowledged, and genetic parentage and parentage through surrogacy; and
5. generally allows individuals conceived through assisted reproduction to access medical and identifying information about gamete donors ([PA 21-15](#), most provisions effective January 1, 2022).

Early Childhood and Childcare Programs

Background Checks for Child Care Workers

A new law expands the types of child care employees who must undergo pre-employment background checks and conforms current standards to federal regulations regarding when these new employees can begin working. The law also increases the minimum age threshold, from 16 to 18, for mandatory background checks for household members of family child care homes ([PA 21-172](#), §§ 7 & 8, effective October 1, 2021).

Birth-to-Three Coordinator Disciplinary Protections

Existing law prohibits local or regional boards of education from disciplining, suspending, terminating, or otherwise punishing any planning and placement team (PPT) member employed by the board who discusses or makes recommendations about providing special education and related services for a child during a PPT meeting. A new law extends this protection to Birth-to-Three service coordinators or qualified personnel concerning PPT meetings or transition plans ([PA 21-46](#), § 26, effective July 1, 2021).

Birth-to-Three Program Expansion

A new law eliminates the requirement that the OEC commissioner charge a fee on a sliding scale for the Birth-to-Three program, making it cost-free to Connecticut families. New laws also (1) require

the OEC commissioner, by July 1, 2022, to expand the program to enrolled children who are eligible for certain preschool programs but turn three during the summer break before the new school year and (2) generally extend to these children certain health insurance coverage for medically necessary early intervention services ([PA 21-46](#), §§ 24 & 28, effective upon passage; [PA 21-2](#), JSS, §§ 419-421, effective July 1, 2021).

Birth-to-Three Teaching Credentials

The legislature enacted a law allowing the education commissioner greater leeway in the credential necessary to teach in the Birth-to-Three program. It authorizes her to allow someone to teach within the program if they hold a teaching endorsement in (1) special education, (2) integrated early childhood and special education, (3) partially sighted, (4) blind, or (5) hard of hearing ([PA 21-172](#), § 15, effective July 1, 2021).

Care 4 Kids Expansion

The legislature passed a new law expanding eligibility for Care 4 Kids child care subsidies to people who are enrolled or participating in certain postsecondary or adult education programs or job training or employment programs. The act specifies that these groups are only eligible for Care 4 Kids benefits if federal COVID-19 related relief funds are available.

Additionally, the act requires the OEC commissioner to add specified new categories of parents and caretakers to the list of people who must receive preference in the Care 4 Kids priority intake and eligibility ([PA 21-171](#), § 3, effective July 1, 2021).

Child Care Evaluation and Improvement

The legislature enacted a law that adds group and family child care homes to the definition of “early care and education and childhood development programs” in the law requiring OEC to conduct program evaluations and pilot innovative service delivery. The legislature also removed the condition that OEC keep its quality improvement services and licensing services separate and distinct when monitoring and evaluating child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes ([PA 21-172](#), §§ 4 & 6, effective July 1, 2021).

Developmental and Social-Emotional Delay Screenings

A new law requires that within two months after certain children are determined to be ineligible for participation in preschool programs under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, the child and his or her family receive a referral to register for a mobile application designated by the OEC

commissioner to continue screening for developmental and social-emotional delays in partnership with the school board for the district where the child lives ([PA 21-46](#), § 27, effective July 1, 2021).

Family Child Care Home Licenses for Partnership Providers

The legislature passed a new law allowing the OEC commissioner to issue up to seven family child care home licenses to a person or group who provide child care services in a commissioner-approved space provided through a partnership with an association, organization, corporation, institution, or public or private agency. These licenses must be issued in accordance with existing law (unless otherwise specified under the act) and may be issued in FYs 22-26 for up to one space in each of the following cities: Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, Stamford, or Waterbury ([PA 21-171](#), § 1, effective July 1, 2021).

Hearing Process for Operating a Youth Camp Without a License

A new law creates a notification and hearing process for youth camp operators accused of operating without a license. It specifies what information OEC must include in the notification and the steps the operator must take to request a hearing ([PA 21-172](#), § 16, effective upon passage).

OEC Duties

A new law adds the following responsibilities to OEC's list of required programs and services: (1) working with incarcerated parents, (2) promoting doula work to help women with high-risk pregnancies, and (3) supporting homeless diversion for families with young children ([PA 21-172](#), § 12, effective July 1, 2021).

Planning and Placement Team Meetings (PPTs)

Among other things, a new law:

1. requires that during any PPT meeting at which an educational program for a child or pupil is developed, each recommendation made in the child's or pupil's Birth-to-Three individualized transition plan be addressed by the PPT;
2. gives the parent, guardian, pupil, or surrogate parent the right to have the child's or pupil's Birth-to-Three service coordinator, if any, attend and participate in any part of the meeting at which an educational program for the child or pupil is developed, reviewed, or revised; and
3. requires each local or regional board of education to monitor the developmental delay of certain children ([PA 21-46](#), § 25, effective July 1, 2021).

Use of Public Campaign Funds for Child Care

A new law requires the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) to amend the Citizens' Election Program (CEP) regulations to permit expenditures for child care services. It authorizes qualified candidate committees (i.e., those of participating CEP candidates that SEEC has approved for a Citizens' Election Fund (CEF) grant) to make expenditures for these services using CEF grants, subject to certain limits and conditions, after SEEC amends the regulations. Currently, participating CEP candidates who have qualified for a grant may use CEF grants for these expenditures under a 2020 Superior Court decision ([PA 21-49](#), effective July 1, 2021).

Juvenile Justice

Court Operations Related to Juveniles

A new law makes various unrelated changes in laws related to court procedures and operations pertaining to juveniles. Among other things, the new law:

1. replaces references to "juvenile detention center" with a new term "juvenile residential center" in statutes on juvenile matters;
2. allows certain education and service providers to visit juvenile residential centers and interact with residents and staff, prohibits disclosure of confidential information, and imposes a penalty for violations;
3. gives the Judicial Review Council's members and employees access to juvenile records when required, including for investigations;
4. requires the court clerk to promptly schedule a hearing instead of setting the matter down for a short calendar hearing in matters related to a child support withhold where the obligor (person from whom support is due) claims mistake of fact;
5. allows parties to settle, by arbitration, issues related to child support, visitation, and custody, which was prohibited under prior law in divorce matters;
6. addresses the child support guidelines and family support magistrates' powers and duties; and
7. gives victims, and their next of kin, access to the private proceedings of juveniles being tried on the adult criminal docket ([PA 21-104](#), various sections, most effective upon passage).

Feasibility Study on Reducing Child Recidivism

A new law requires the judicial branch to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of (1) decreasing the time between a child's arrest and initial court appearance and (2) establishing a diversionary program for arrested children where the participants would report to various people

(e.g., judge) on a weekly basis. The act requires the judicial branch to report its findings to the Judiciary and Children's committees by January 1, 2022 ([PA 21-33](#), § 13, effective upon passage).

Free Phone Calls for Detained Juveniles

A new law requires the judicial branch's Court Support Services Division (CSSD), beginning October 1, 2022, to provide free phone services to children detained in a juvenile detention facility. The CSSD executive director may supplement phone services with other telecommunications services, including video communication and email, as long as the service is free to the children and to people initiating or receiving the communication ([PA 21-54](#), most provisions effective upon passage).

Juvenile Records

A new law generally allows information obtained about a child during a detention screening or assessment to be disclosed to CSSD. For children being discharged from certain state supervision or custody, it also requires CSSD to provide the child and the child's parent or guardian written notice, explaining that they may file a petition in Superior Court for erasure of certain juvenile records if the court finds the child meets existing requirements ([PA 21-174](#), §§ 9 & 14, various effective dates).

Minimum Age for Children Subject to Delinquency Proceedings

A new law increases the lower age of a child who may be subject to juvenile court jurisdiction for delinquency matters and proceedings from seven to 10 years of age ([PA 21-174](#), § 1, effective July 1, 2021).

Treatment of Incarcerated Juveniles

A new law makes several changes affecting the treatment of children in the juvenile justice system. Among other things, it requires:

1. the DOC commissioner to review the department's use of chemical agents on anyone under age 18 in DOC-operated facilities;
2. a team (with representatives from school boards and several state agencies) to develop plans for mandatory prearrest diversion of low-risk children;
3. the judicial branch to develop an implementation plan to securely house in its custody anyone under age 18 who is arrested and detained before sentencing or disposition; and
4. DCF to create and implement a plan for an educational unit to improve educational and vocational outcomes for children who are incarcerated or in a juvenile justice facility ([PA 21-](#)

[174](#), §§ 2-3 & 11-13, most provisions effective upon passage, with various reporting dates for the described initiatives).

Schools and Education

Community Resources Document

A new law requires the State Department of Education (SDE) commissioner, starting by December 1, 2021, to develop and annually update a document for local and regional boards of education that provides information on educational, safety, mental health, and food insecurity resources and programs available for students and their families ([PA 21-46](#), § 15, effective upon passage).

Remote Parent-Teacher Conferences

A new law requires each school district, beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, to offer parents the option of attending any parent-teacher conference by telephone, video conference, or other conferencing platform ([PA 21-46](#), § 14, effective July 1, 2021).

School Immunization Requirements

A new law eliminates the state's religious exemption from immunization requirements for individuals attending (1) public and private schools, including higher education institutions, and (2) child care centers and group and family day care homes. It grandfathered in students enrolled in grades kindergarten or higher who submitted a religious exemption prior to the bill's passage (April 28), and continues to do so if they transfer to another public or private primary or secondary school in the state.

Children with prior religious exemptions who are enrolled in pre-kindergarten or other preschool programs generally must comply with immunization requirements by September 1, 2022, or within 14 days after transferring to a different public or private program, whichever is later. But the act allows these children to extend the timeframe if they present a written declaration from the child's physician, PA, or APRN that an alternative immunization schedule is recommended ([PA 21-6](#), effective upon passage).

School Lunch Debt

A new law requires local or regional boards of education, starting with the 2021-2022 school year, to include in its policies or procedures for collecting unpaid school meal charges, among other things, a prohibition on publicly identifying or shaming a child for any unpaid meal charges, including refusing to serve a meal to the child. The act also allows boards of education to accept

gifts, donations, or grants from any public or private source to pay off unpaid meal charges ([PA 21-46](#), § 20, effective July 1, 2021).

School Readiness

The legislature passed legislation addressing school readiness. A new law requires, starting with the 2022-2023 school year, any school district serving a town that has not convened or established a local or regional school readiness council to designate a school readiness liaison. The liaison must:

1. be an employee of the school district, and
2. serve as an informational resource for parents of children transitioning from the Birth-to-Three program to enrollment in a public elementary school in the school district.

For established local or regional school readiness councils, a new law requires that the council membership include at least 25% parents of program-eligible children and changes how the council chairperson is selected. The same law also adds facilitating racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of children, families, and staff to the list of goals for the network of school readiness programs.

Additionally, the legislature expanded the type of entities that may receive school readiness financial assistance (i.e., grants) beyond towns with a priority school district (PSD) and eliminated the prior way these grant amounts were determined. The same law also expands the eligibility for state contracts for child-care facility development grants to include group and family child care homes ([PA 21-172](#), §§ 1-3 & 5, and [PA 21-46](#), § 29, both effective July 1, 2021).

Social-Emotional Learning

A new law requires, starting with the 2021-2022 school year, local and regional boards of education to integrate the principles and practices of social-emotional learning throughout the components of their district's professional development programs. The act also requires each board of education to include integrating these practices and principles in its statement of educational goals ([PA 21-46](#), §§ 11-13, effective July 1, 2021).

Student Mental Health Wellness Days

A new law requires, starting with the 2021-2022 school year, local or regional boards of education to allow any student enrolled in grades kindergarten through 12 to take two non-consecutive mental health wellness days during the school year ([PA 21-46](#), § 19, effective July 1, 2021).

Suspension and Expulsion Alternatives

A new law establishes a 14-member committee to study and report on the effects of, and possible alternatives to, student suspension and expulsion. The committee must complete two reports: one due January 1, 2022, concerning students in preschool through second grade; and one due January 1, 2023, concerning students in grades three to eight and grades nine to 12. The committee must submit its findings and recommendations related to each completed study to the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.

The act requires the report to include, among other things, (1) funding recommendations for any proposed alternatives to suspension and expulsion, (2) timelines for potential implementation, and (3) data-based individual school district needs ([PA 21-174](#), § 8).

Task Force to Study Children's Needs

A new law establishes a 25-member task force to study the (1) comprehensive needs of children in the state and (2) extent to which these needs are being met by educators, community members, and local and state agencies.

Among other things, the task force must (1) identify children's needs using certain tenets of the whole child initiative developed by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and (2) recommend new programs or changes to existing programs operated by educators or local or state agencies to better address children's needs. The task force must report to the Children's Committee by January 1, 2022 ([PA 21-46](#), § 30, effective upon passage).

Virtual Learning

A new law allows local and regional school boards, starting with the 2022-2023 school year, to authorize virtual learning to students in grades nine through 12 if the boards:

1. provide instruction in compliance with standards developed by SDE under the act, and
2. adopt a policy on student attendance requirements during virtual learning, which must (a) comply with SDE guidance and (b) count attendance of any student who spends at least one-half of the day during virtual instruction engaged in virtual classes or meetings, activities on time-logged electronic systems, and turning in assignments.

The act requires the State Board of Education to make a corresponding change to the definition of the terms "excused absence" and "unexcused absence." It also requires the SDE commissioner to develop, and update as necessary, standards for virtual learning (i.e., instruction by means of one

or more Internet-based software platforms as part of an in-person or remote learning model) ([PA 21-46](#), §§ 16-18, various effective dates).

Miscellaneous

Amusement Park Operators

A new law lowers the minimum age for amusement park ride or device operators from 18 to 16. The new minimum age requirement does not extend to transient carnivals ([PA 21-38](#), effective July 1, 2021).

Connecticut Baby Bond Trust

The bond act establishes the Connecticut Baby Bond Trust program, administered by the state treasurer, and authorizes up to \$600 million in bonds for the program from FYs 23 through 34. Under this program, the treasurer must create accountings for babies born on or after July 1, 2021, whose births were covered under HUSKY (i.e., designated beneficiaries) and may deposit up to \$3,200 into each designated beneficiary's accounting at birth. Once they have reached age 18, designated beneficiaries that meet the act's eligibility requirements may receive the funds in their accountings, including any investment earnings, to be used for an eligible expenditure. Eligible expenditures generally include those for education, home-buying, business investments, and personal financial investments ([PA 21-111](#), §§ 103-111, as amended by [PA 21-2](#), JSS, §§ 485-486, effective July 1, 2021).

Temporary Family Assistance

A new law makes several changes to Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), the state's cash assistance program for low-income families administered by DSS. Principally, it (1) excludes benefits received during the declared COVID-19 public health emergency from the program's time limit; (2) eliminates penalties for families with children born after program enrollment; and (3) beginning in FY 24, requires benefit increases to be provided in years when the program lapses funds, if certain conditions are met ([PA 21-2](#), JSS, § 327, effective November 1, 2021).

JC:kl