

**Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood**  
**Before the Committee on Children**  
**H.B. 6952 – An Act Concerning Certain Recreational and Educational Children’s Programs**  
**Thursday, February 20, 2025**

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Good afternoon, Senator Maher, Representative Paris, Senator Martin, Representative Dauphinais and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. I am Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am submitting written testimony concerning **H.B. 6952 – An Act Concerning Certain Recreational and Educational Children’s Programs**.

We appreciate the intent of H.B. 6952, which proposes to require licensed-exempt municipal youth camps to put into place certain health and safety requirements with the purpose to protect children. For years there has been interest in bringing municipally run youth camps in line with the statutes and regulations for OEC licensed youth camps, as all children, not just those who attend licensed youth camps, deserve to be cared for in environments where their health and safety is paramount.

The current OEC youth camp licensing statutes and regulations address health and safety concerns related to such things such as sanitation and fire safety and ensure accountability and oversight of baseline standards in critical areas such as abuse and neglect, staff-child ratios, staff qualifications, health care, and physical plant safety. While this bill assumes administrative oversight and accountability of a program by a municipality, it goes a step further by requiring background checks that are the same as those required of licensed youth camp staff, adds paid staff in such programs who are 21 years of age or older to the list of mandated reporters, and specifically requires such staff members complete the DCF Mandated Reporter Training on an annual basis.

While the DCF Mandated Reporter Training is available to all persons mandated to report child abuse and neglect, the requirement to complete the training on an annual basis is not required of licensed youth camps. Rather, staff must be trained on the camp’s policies and procedures pertaining to preventing and reporting child abuse and neglect which may include annual DCF Mandated Reporter Training. The OEC supports this language and will consider incorporating similar language into the OEC youth camp regulations.

Finally, while background checks and mandated reporter training are basic safeguards to ensure the health and safety of children, we also recognize the importance of appropriate staff-child ratios to ensure children receive adequate attention, individual interactions, and educational instruction from staff. Licensed youth camps include staff/child ratios of 1 staff member for each 9 children under age 6 and 1 staff member for each 12 children aged 6 and older. This bill falls short of our ratio requirement, but it is a step forward to ensure adequate staffing.

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

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*The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood advances a two-generation family-centered approach in our pursuit of optimal health, safety, and learning outcomes for young children. Through our core programs, we support infant and toddler care, preschool, after-school care, child care and youth camp licensing, home visiting, and early intervention to address developmental delays. OEC is working toward better-coordinated, cost-effective services that support Connecticut's youngest children and families.*