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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

Beth Bye
Commissioner

**Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner
Office of Early Childhood
Before the Committee on Children
H.B. 5336 – An Act Requiring Background Checks for
Certain Employees of Licensed Youth Camps
H.B. 5328 – An Act Concerning the Role of Birth-To-Three Service Providers at
Planning and Placement Team Meetings
March 3, 2020**

Good morning Senator Moore, Representative Linehan, Senator Kelly, Representative Green and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. My name is Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am here today to testify concerning H.B. 5336 – An Act Requiring Background Checks for Certain Employees of Licensed Youth Camps and H.B. 5328 – An Act Concerning the Role of Birth-to-Three Service Providers at Planning and Placement Team Meetings.

**H.B. 5336 – An Act Requiring Background Checks for
Certain Employees of Licensed Youth Camps**

H.B. 5336 would require licensed youth camps to have staff 18 years and older undergo comprehensive fingerprint-based background checks. Background checks help to protect the health and safety of children. This requirement would align background check policy with that which is currently applied universally to all licensed family child care homes, group child care homes, and child care centers.

Current federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) law requires that any youth camp - licensed or license-exempt - that receives Care 4 Kids child care subsidy must have staff undergo comprehensive fingerprint-based background checks. This policy is currently in place. This bill would expand the comprehensive background checks to all licensed youth camps regardless of the Care 4 Kids subsidy participation. The OEC staff have thought long and hard about this situation and believe that all children attending camp, regardless of Care 4 Kids participation, deserve the same health and safety protections.

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Furthermore, the OEC has concerns that if background checks do not apply to all licensed youth camps, camps that have a long history of accepting Care 4 Kids will stop doing so, leaving hundreds of lower-income households with no care for their children during the summer months. This would potentially leave young children in unsafe conditions without access to licensed youth camp care.

The OEC has made significant strides over the past 12 months to improve the background check system. By working collaboratively with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), the time to process checks has been reduced from as long as four months to two to four weeks. LiveScan fingerprint devices that allow for digital collection and electronic submission of fingerprints to the State Police have been purchased and are ready to be made available locally to providers. These machines increase the availability of fingerprint collection sites, dramatically reduce fingerprint rejections, and eliminate collection fees.

In addition, the OEC will launch a background check information management system that will allow programs to verify when fingerprints have cleared for each individual staff member. Finally, DESPP is building out a new criminal background check system that, once in place, will reduce turnaround to 24-48 hours.

The OEC has met with the Connecticut Youth Camp Association leadership and the Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council to discuss our proposal. There are areas of disagreement and we want to continue that conversation throughout the session and beyond. We acknowledge improvements to the background check process are ongoing and some issues are unresolved. The OEC is open to thoughtful discussion and planning around timelines, modifications, and implementation of background check requirements for youth camps. Ultimately, OEC's priority is to ensure the health and safety of children.

H.B. 5328 – An Act Concerning the Role of Birth-to-Three Service Providers at Planning and Placement Team Meetings

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) appreciates the intent of HB 5328. The OEC believes it *is optimal* that Birth to Three practitioners attend Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings to support a smooth transition from Part C to Part B services. This bill also seeks to ensure that Birth to Three staff have a voice while supporting families.

Section 1 of the bill states that parents shall have a right to have the Birth to Three service coordinator present at the PPT meeting. This is a very important standard. We feel this language is not needed, as school districts are already required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to invite service coordinators to PPT meetings *at the request of the family*.

Supports provided to families through Part C of the IDEA are very different from the education services provided by schools. It is the role of the Planning and Placement Team to determine the appropriate services for an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The role of the Birth to Three practitioners at a PPT meeting is to assist and support caregivers with enhancing the functional development of the child with an emphasis on specific developmental areas appropriately tailored to each child's needs. We need to be very careful in defining that role because this, as an early intervention (EI) service, is described in the state plan for Medicaid. Changing that role could jeopardize Medicaid reimbursement for their ability to attend the PPT at all.

Regarding Section 2 of the bill, we want to clarify that OEC does not hire Birth to Three practitioners directly and does not have procedures or policies that recommend disciplining, suspending, terminating, or punishing individuals. The OEC believes that each Birth to Three program understands best how to support their staff and subcontractors to implement evidence-based and recommended practices.

The OEC appreciates the intent of this bill to ensure an appropriate and supportive transition from Part C to Part B services. We are open to discussion about how best to promote the best possible outcomes families and their children with special needs.

About the OEC

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) 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. The OEC is working toward better coordinated, cost-effective services that support Connecticut's youngest children and families.