



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
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House Bill 7154
AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- LICENSING OF
YOUTH CAMPS
House Health and Human Services Committee Members
January 30, 2024**

Representative Donovan and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 7154, An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Licensing of Youth Camps. My name is John Cattelan, and I am with the Rhode Island Alliance of YMCAs.

In 2018, the Federal Government notified the state of Rhode Island they would no longer be eligible to receive CCDBG funds to pay for children (via the CCAP program) to attend summer camp because camps are unlicensed. Because of this state policy, 1,374 children have lost the opportunity to attend an Rhode Island YMCA summer camp because the state is no longer able to use CCAP funding.

Because families are no longer able to use the CCAP program to attend summer camp it has challenged lower income families to find childcare during the summer.

In addition, Rhode Island YMCAs have lost \$346,500 in revenue due to the State of Rhode Island not allowing CCAP funding for summer camps that are not state licensed.

Most importantly, unlicensed summer camps create environments where children may be vulnerable to abuse due to the close interactions with adults in positions of authority.

YMCA summer camps in Rhode Island are either certified by the American Camp Association or licensed as childcare centers, which have some of the highest standards. This includes background checks for staff, training staff in proper health and safety measures, certifying all staff in child abuse

prevention, detection and mandatory reporting procedures, and developing emergency procedures.

Parents entrust the well-being of their children to summer camps, expecting a safe and nurturing environment. Background checks help ensure that individuals with a history of abuse are not placed in positions of authority over children. Individuals with a history of child abuse are known to target environments such as summer camps. Background checks are one of the many tools Rhode Island YMCAs use to help prevent child abuse and to avoid incidents of the recurrence of child abuse.

More importantly, child safety will always be a priority for our Ys. The health and welfare of children is threatened when camps are not held to certain operating standards. With proper camp licensing and standards in place for all summer camps, together we can keep our children safe while providing them with a lifetime of summer camp experiences and friendships.

I urge the members of the Committee to support this important legislation so that all Rhode Island families have access to a safe summer camping experience.

Thank you!