



January 30, 2024

To the Committee on Health and Human Services,

This testimony is regarding H7154 Chapter 21.2: Licensing of Youth Camps.

My name is Dana Borrelli-Murray. I am the CEO of the Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England. This year, Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England will serve over 7000 Girl Scout youth and adult volunteers throughout RI and 13 communities in MA and CT. Our mission is to grow girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.

For generations, Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England has run popular day and overnight camps at our multiple camp locations. Our camps often reach capacity during the first week of registration in February.

As a member of the American Camp Association, GSSNE is nationally accredited, adhering to a strict set of guidelines and standards. Details are included here:

- Yearly ACA membership at a cost of over \$2000
- Annual completion of a comprehensive statement of compliance
- An annual review across 18 nationally normed standards, including health and safety checklists, staff training, rental group procedures, emergency protocols, maintenance schedules, HR screening, background checks, and risk assessments- many hours of staff time each year to complete this review.
- ACA accreditation visits every five years by ACA-trained camp professionals. This visit lasts multiple days and includes observations of all 18 normed standards, documentation review, and stakeholder discussions.

Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England agrees that all camps should follow a set of standards to ensure the safety of youth in care. However, this bill as written places an unnecessary burden on camp staff, especially camp programs already nationally accredited by the ACA and other nationally accrediting organizations. This bill also may ultimately decrease the number of youth camp choices in RI, which will place an additional burden on working families.

Our recommendations:

- Exempt RI camps already accredited by national standards and norms through organizations such as the American Camp Association
- Study the impact of this bill on small independent camps and city/recreation departments, as they provide valuable support to RI families
- It is increasingly harder to hire seasonal camp staff. We recommend that any state standards for camps consider the impact an additional burden could place on organizations already struggling to meet staff-to-camper ratios and consider incentives the state could provide to support seasonal staff hiring
- Implementing a bill such as H7154 as written with fidelity will place quite a burden on DHS and other state departments. We recommend working with organizations such as the American Camp Association to better understand the time, energy, and impact of camp accreditation.

Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Borrelli-Murray'.

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