



CONNECTICUT

Department of Children and Families



2024 LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Department of Children and Families Legislative Summary

The following is a compilation of legislation of interest to the Department of Children and Families that passed during the 2024 Regular Session of the General Assembly. Click on the Public Act Number below to review the statutory language of the Public Act.

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Contents

	PAGE
<u>Special Act 24-9 (S.B. 327)</u> - AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE EFFECTS OF HATE SPEECH AND BULLYING ON CHILDREN	1
<u>Special Act 24-10 (S.B. 217)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING A UNIVERSAL PATIENT INTAKE FORM FOR RECIPIENTS OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN	1
<u>Special Act 24-24 (H.B. 5428)</u> - AN ACT REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO REPORT ON PROGRAM UTILIZATION	2
<u>Public Act 24-19 (S.B. 1)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CONNECTICUT RESIDENTS	2
<u>Public Act 24-30 (H.B. 5197)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL WORKERS	3
<u>Public Act 24-41 (H.B. 5436)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION, TEACHERS, PARAEDUCATORS AND MANDATED REPORTER REQUIREMENTS	3
<u>Public Act 24-45 (H.B. 5437)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION MANDATE RELIEF, SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND DISCONNECTED YOUTH	4
<u>Public Act 24-79 (S.B. 127)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES RELATING TO BACKGROUND CHECKS, CERTAIN SUBSIDIES, URGENT CRISIS CENTERS, DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS AND SPECIAL POLICE OFFICERS	4
<u>Public 24-81 (H.B. 5523)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING ALLOCATIONS OF FEDERAL AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDS AND PROVISIONS RELATED TO GENERAL GOVERNMENT, HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025	5
<u>Public Act 24-83 (H.B. 5058)</u> - AN ACT ADOPTING THE NURSE LICENSURE COMPACT	7
<u>Public Act 24-92 (S.B. 126)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING HOME VISITS AND EVALUATIONS CONDUCTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	7
<u>Public Act 24-118 (H.B. 5262)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE	7

<u>Public Act 24-122 (H.B. 5293)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES STATUTES	8
<u>Public Act 24-126 (H.B. 5382)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE	8
<u>Public Act 24-139 (H.B. 5508)</u> - AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE	10

Special Act 24-9 - S.B. 327 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE EFFECTS OF HATE SPEECH AND BULLYING ON CHILDREN

The act establishes a 17-member task force to study the effects and social impact of hate speech and bullying on children. The DCF Commissioner, or designee, is a member of the task force. The study is due to the legislature by January 1, 2025, and must include:

1. Analyses of the (a) effects of hate speech and bullying on children's mental and physical health and academic achievement of children, (b) settings and environments in which children are most likely to encounter and participate in hate speech or bullying, and (c) factors that may contribute to a child's likelihood of encountering, and a child or adult's likelihood of perpetrating, hate speech or bullying;
2. An examination of whether children encounter hate speech or bullying that is perpetrated by children or adults; and
3. Recommendations for strategies to prevent, reduce and address the effects of hate speech and bullying in Connecticut's communities and schools.

The act also defines "hate speech" as any form of expression through which a child or adult intends to vilify, humiliate or incite hatred against a child on the basis of such child's race, religion, skin color, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, body weight or body type or national origin.

The act defines "bullying" as unwanted and aggressive behavior among children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Special Act 24-10 - S.B. 217 - AN ACT CONCERNING A UNIVERSAL PATIENT INTAKE FORM FOR RECIPIENTS OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

The act requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) Commissioner to convene a working group of agency and community collaborators to make recommendations for a universal patient intake form to be provided to and completed by patients of children's behavioral health services providers and the patients' parents and guardians. The DCF Commissioner, or designee, is a member of the task force. The recommendations are due to the legislature by January 1, 2026, and must include:

1. A proposed universal patient intake form, and
2. Requirements and guidelines for the form's use.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Special Act 24-24 - H.B. 5428 - AN ACT REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO REPORT ON PROGRAM UTILIZATION

The act requires DCF to submit a report to the legislature on program utilization for FY 2023 and FY 2024 by February 1, 2025. The report must include the following:

1. Participation in each department program, quality controls in place and expenditures in relation to utilization;
2. Department funding and expenditures by account;
3. The percentage of contracted utilization and whether utilization is increasing or decreasing and the reasons for any decline in utilization or utilization that falls below eighty-five per cent, including an evaluation of whether the trend reflects decreased need for the service or workforce limitations;
4. The number of referrals to each contract and the reasons that referrals go unserved;
5. For each contracted service, whether (a) procurement rates include costs for staff training, data collection or quality assurance expectations or (b) a child or family was required to be in the department's care or custody as a criteria for referral or admission,
6. For each contract, whether the service is billable under Medicaid and the geographic scope for delivery; and
7. For each service, information concerning achievement of contracted service expectations regarding attainment of treatment goals based on initial assessment.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Public Act 24-19 - S.B. 1 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CONNECTICUT RESIDENTS

This act was a priority of Senate leadership this year. The act includes several provisions, however, only two sections directly affect DCF.

Section 27: Requires the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to establish, within available appropriations, a program for persons diagnosed with recent-onset schizophrenia spectrum disorder for specialized treatment early in such persons' psychosis. DMHAS must consult with DCF to develop the program. Funding was not included in the budget for this initiative.

Section 28: Requires the chairs of the Public Health Committee to establish a working group to study and make recommendations concerning methods of addressing loneliness and isolation experienced by persons in the state and to improve social connection among such persons. The DCF Commissioner, or designee, is a member of the working group.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Public Act 24-30 - H.B. 5197 - AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL WORKERS

Under this act, Connecticut enters into the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. The compact creates a process for social workers to obtain a multistate license allowing them to practice in any of the member states, including telehealth appointments.

Connecticut licensing requirements, overseen by DPH, remain enforced and CT social workers must comply with the laws and standards of the member states in which they are practicing.

The compact must have seven states enter into the agreement before it can take effect. Currently, two states have adopted it.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Public Act 24-41 - H.B. 5436 - AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION, TEACHERS, PARAEDUCATORS AND MANDATED REPORTER REQUIREMENTS

This act contains several changes to education statutes. While many of these changes do not affect DCF, the Department did sponsor the revisions to the mandated reporter statutes, in collaboration with the CT Education Association, the CT Association of Public School Superintendents and parents' organizations.

The relevant sections are as follows:

Sections 40 and 43: Clarify that mandated reporters may conduct a preliminary inquiry to determine whether there is reasonable cause to make a report of alleged child abuse or neglect. Section 43 also clarifies that the Department must conduct an assessment instead of an investigation when there is an allegation that a mandated reporter failed to report abuse or neglect. The law still requires the Department to notify the State's Attorney's office when there is reason to believe that a mandated reporter failed to make such a report.

Section 41: Restores the "good faith exception" that generally provides immunity from civil and criminal liability to mandated reporters who, in good faith, do not report an allegation of child abuse or neglect.

Section 49: Requires DCF to update its mandated reporter training to provide guidelines for mandated reporters to conduct preliminary inquiries to ensure they are limited to determining reasonable cause to make a Careline report and distinguish these inquiries from investigations.

Sections 42, 44 through 48: Make conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Public Act 24-45 - H.B. 5437 - AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION MANDATE RELIEF, SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND DISCONNECTED YOUTH

Sections 23 & 24: Requires boards of education, at the request of a youth service bureau (YSB) to enter into a memorandum of agreement to share student records with the YSB under specified circumstances. The act requires that such record sharing and maintenance must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Section 29: Establishes a 12-member task force to develop recommendations for the creation and administration of a statewide program to provide free bereavement and grief counseling services to children and families. The DCF Commissioner, or designee, is a member of the task force.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Public Act 24-79 - S.B. 127 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES RELATING TO BACKGROUND CHECKS, CERTAIN SUBSIDIES, URGENT CRISIS CENTERS, DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS AND SPECIAL POLICE OFFICERS

This act is DCF's legislative proposal this session.

Sections 1 and 10: This act repeals the emergency placement statute (C.G.S. section 17a-115a), which permitted DCF to place a child with a relative or fictive kin (a person with a family-like relationship with a child) on an emergency basis when the child's primary caregiver is suddenly unavailable. The act instead permits placement with a kin caregiver after a home study and immediate criminal history and child protection checks are completed. By allowing for these placements, the state is eligible to receive Title IV-E reimbursement upon the placement of the child in the kin home. Currently, the state is unable to claim federal reimbursement until the kin caregiver is licensed as a foster parent.

Section 1 also streamlines the FBI fingerprinting process for family members and fictive kin who have a child placed with them. Under the act, relative and fictive kin do not have to submit to state and national criminal history checks a second time while being licensed by DCF if they have already submitted to these checks during the previous twelve months. Only household residents 18 years of age and older must submit to the background check, rather than those who are 16 years of age and older as under prior law.

Section 2: Allows for the adoption subsidy for a child that was in the care and custody of DCF prior to adoption to "follow" the child when an adoptive parent dies or is unable to care for the child due to incapacitation or serious illness. Under the act, the subsidy follows the child to a successor guardian appointed by a court of competent jurisdiction, ensuring that the child will continue to receive support and reducing the risk of a return to DCF custody.

Sections 3 & 4: Redefine urgent crisis centers (UCC) to be DCF-certified rather than DCF-licensed. This allows UCC's to be licensed by state agencies other than DCF but still operate under DCF oversight. The Department will certify the UCCs, which is required for Medicaid claiming purposes, and will continue to contract and oversee the delivery of services by these centers even in the absence of direct licensure by DCF.

Section 5: Allows DCF to disclose patient records without the subject's consent to the Department of Public Health (DPH) for the purposes of Solnit Center licensure.

Section 6: Clarifies that for those children in juvenile justice facilities or incarcerated, DCF is a "state educational authority" under FERPA and as such may have access to educational records for the children in juvenile justice facilities or who are incarcerated.

Sections 7 & 8: Authorize the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to appoint two persons nominated by the Commissioner to act as special police officers. In practice, DCF currently employs two police officers that are POST certified who perform critical functions for the department, including conducting background checks, participating in threat assessments, performing physical plant safety analysis and serving as liaison with local and state police. This act will provide these officers with the authority to act as special police officers.

Section 9: Makes minor technical changes to the statute relating to children's behavioral services.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Public 24-81 - H.B. 5523 - AN ACT CONCERNING ALLOCATIONS OF FEDERAL AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDS AND PROVISIONS RELATED TO GENERAL GOVERNMENT, HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025

The legislature did not amend the existing biennial budget that was passed last year. However, the legislature did reallocate Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that were not spent or obligated. This act also includes the State Agency Deficiency Act, which shifts money between accounts to make up any shortfalls in agency budgets.

DCF ARPA funding includes:

Fiscal Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES				
Fostering Community	10,000	[10,000]		
Casa Boricua-Meriden	50,000	50,000		

Children's Mental Health Initiatives	10,500,000			
Child First	5,100,000	5,100,000		
Expand Mobile Crisis Intervention Services		8,600,000	8,600,000	8,600,000
Support Additional Urgent Crisis Centers and Sub-Acute Crisis Stabilization Units		21,000,000		
Support for Improved Outcomes for Youth (YSBs and JRBs)		2,000,000		
Social Determinant Mental Health Fund		1,000,000	1,000,000	
Family Assistance Grants		1,000,000		
Expand Access Mental Health		990,000		
Resource Guide		50,000		
Peer to Peer Training for Students		150,000		
Respite for non-DCF Children		[85,000] <u>84,996</u>		
Children in Placement, Inc.		25,000		
Girls for Technology		100,000		
R-Kids		100,000		
<u>Children's Behavioral Health</u>				<u>10,000,000</u>
<u>Urgent Crisis Centers</u>				<u>7,000,000</u>
<u>Middletown Office</u>				<u>667,856</u>
<u>Community Guidance Clinic</u>				<u>100,000</u>
<u>Fixing Fathers One Dad at a Time, Inc.</u>				<u>75,000</u>

As indicated, the funding provides \$7 million to Urgent Crisis Centers next fiscal year. This continues the funding as the state examines if the new Medicaid rates established for the centers will sustain their operations.

Lastly, the Department will be working with state policy makers to determine how the \$10 million allocated for children's behavioral health will be spent.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Public Act 24-83 - H.B. 5058 - AN ACT ADOPTING THE NURSE LICENSURE COMPACT

Under this act, Connecticut will enter into the Nurse Licensure Compact on October 1, 2025, until January 1, 2028. The compact creates a process for registered nurses (RNs) or licensed practical/vocational nurses) to get a multistate license to practice, including by telehealth, in other states that have joined the compact.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Public Act 24-92 - S.B. 126 - AN ACT CONCERNING HOME VISITS AND EVALUATIONS CONDUCTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

This act requires DCF to conduct home visits in-person in accordance with the safety plan, which conforms to existing policy and practice requirements.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Public Act 24-118 - H.B. 5262 - AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Section 1: Starting July 1, 2026, the act requires school administrators to complete the sexual abuse and assault awareness prevention survey as part of the Connecticut School Health Survey administered by DPH annually to high school students.

Sections 2 through 10: Replaces references to "child pornography" with "child sexual abuse material" in several sections of state law.

Section 11: Establishes a task force to study the responsiveness of state agencies and the Judicial Branch to issues concerning child sexual abuse. The task force will examine policies and practices relating to and impacting children in order to identify opportunities to detect, mitigate, prevent and effectively respond to such abuse. The DCF Commissioner, or designee, is a member of the task force. The task force must submit its findings and recommendations to the legislature by July 1, 2025.

Section 12: Requires the Office of the Child Advocate to review and submit a report on state agency practices and procedures for ensuring the care and protection of minors in Probate Court guardianship proceedings. The report must include:

1. Statutory requirements applicable to such proceedings;
2. Applicable court rules and policies and quality assurance measures;
3. Practices, procedures and quality assurance framework applicable to the work of DCF in Probate Court matters;

4. Training and contractual expectations for counsel assigned to minors and guardians ad litem in Probate Court guardianship matters; and
5. The Department of Social Services' (DSS) practices and procedures for providing guardianship subsidies to eligible recipients by and the quality assurance framework applicable to the administration of such benefits.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Public Act 24-122 - H.B. 5293 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES STATUTES

Section 16: This section allows DDS, after revoking the license of a community living arrangement or community care home operator due to abuse or neglect of a person with intellectual disability or who receives services from DDS, to share the identity of the revoked license holder and other relevant information with DCF, the state's other social service agencies, and other relevant employers.

This will enable employers and state agencies to make more informed decisions regarding the prospective employment and licensure of applicants.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Public Act 24-126 - H.B. 5382 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE

Section 1: Makes certain changes to the State Advisory Council on Children and Families (SAC) by:

1. Adds five additional Governor appointees to the SAC (three Youth Advisory Board members, one member of an organization that advocates for the legal rights of children and one member of an organization that advocates for child welfare policies);
2. Adds to SAC's duties by requiring it to review DCF data semiannually and conduct an annual evaluation to determine if DCF is discharging its child protection duties; and
3. Establishes a list of the priorities for the SAC to consider when implementing its duties.

Sections 2, 6 & 7: These sections identify additional information that DCF must provide to the court in the study to support a permanency plan when a child is placed in out-of-home care or in any court proceeding to review, modify, terminate, or extend an order of protective supervision. This information includes:

1. The dates of administrative case review meetings and permanency team meetings;

2. Whether DCF has received or obtained the most up-to-date information concerning the child's medical, dental, developmental, educational and treatment needs from any relevant service providers;
3. Whether the child has received services recommended by any such providers, and a description of any concerns identified by such providers;
4. A description of (A) any new report alleging abuse or neglect pertaining to the child or a parent of the child, (B) whether such report resulted in an investigation, and (C) the findings of any such investigation;
5. Any new criminal charges pending against any such parent;
6. For any child in the care and custody of the department, whether the child was placed in a licensed home or home eligible for licensure, and whether any applicable waivers have been obtained; and
7. For any child under age three, whether the child was screened for developmental and social-emotional delays, whether any such delays were identified and, if so, whether the child was referred to the Birth-to-Three program.

The court report and study templates will be updated to reflect the additional information that must be shared with the court.

Sections 3 & 4: Amends the DCF record confidentiality statute to align with federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) records disclosure requirements by specifying information the Department must disclose in the case of a child fatality or near fatality. The act permits DCF to withhold disclosure of this information if it affects the safety or well-being of the child or family or interferes with a pending criminal investigation.

Section 5: Defines "trial home visit" and establishes a process for DCF to authorize trial home visits for a limited time. Under the act, if the permanency plan filed with the court recommends reunification, DCF may authorize a trial home visit with the agreement of all the parties to the matter. DCF must provide notice of the intent to authorize a trial home visit at least 15 days before commencing the visits. A trial home visit plan must be shared with all parties. DCF must also file a motion for revocation of commitment no later than 30 days after starting the visits unless the Department removes the child from the home prior to that time.

Section 6: Requires DCF to provide (1) notice of any child welfare court proceedings to a foster parent or relative caregiver including access to any virtual platform used for the proceedings and (2) any new abuse or neglect reports, whether the report was investigated, and the results of any investigation to the child's attorney and the guardian ad litem.

Section 7: Requires DCF to identify the sources of any information that is submitted to the juvenile court for a child welfare proceeding and the date the information was obtained.

Section 8: Technical change.

Section 9: Requires the chairs of the Committee on Children to establish a working group to review available data regarding the effectiveness of DCF in discharging its child protection responsibilities and develop a plan for sharing this information with the public on a regular basis. The DCF Commissioner, or designee, is a member of the working group, which must report its findings and recommendations to the legislature by January 1, 2025.

Section 10: Requires the chairs of the Committee on Children to establish a working group to review the delivery of legal services for children in child protection proceedings and provide recommendations for improving the quality of this representation. The DCF Commissioner, or designee, is a member of the task force, which must report its findings and recommendations to the legislature by November 1, 2024.

Sections 11 & 12: Extends the deadline for the Title IX compliance toolkit working group by one year, to January 1, 2025.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Public Act 24-139 - H.B. 5508 - AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (JJPOC)

Sections 1, 3 & 4: Requires the JJPOC to establish a gender responsiveness subcommittee by January 1, 2025, and to work with the Trafficking in Persons Council and the Transforming Children's Behavioral Health Policy and Planning Committee to perform a landscape analysis and gap assessment of gender responsive work in the state.

Section 2: Existing law requires the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division, in collaboration with DCF, other agencies, and JJPOC subcommittees, to develop a reentry success plan for youth being released from detention or incarceration. This extends the due date on the reentry success plan by one year, November 1, 2024.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage