

Testimony Re: H-8093
House Judiciary Committee
March 12, 2026
Alicia Little, Concerned Parent

Subject: Expanding the Definition of "Educational Program" for the purposes of abused and neglected children general law

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am writing to urge the passage of House Bill 8093. This legislation is not merely a technical amendment; it is a necessary safeguard for children who are currently falling through the cracks of Rhode Island's protection system. My son was one of those children, and as a result, my family is dedicated to supporting legislative remedies to prevent similar incidents.

The Incident: A Failure of Oversight In the summer of 2024, my 11-year-old son attended an overnight summer camp in Wakefield, Rhode Island. What should have been a formative experience turned into a nightmare of repeated physical and verbal assault by a same-age camper that persisted due to negligent supervision and poor oversight by the adults tasked with keeping our son safe. The counselors assigned to supervise were often napping or distracted by their phones. When my son reported issues with bullying to the staff, there was no follow-up, no intervention, and no safety plan.

The Systemic Gap We discovered the severity of the situation only after picking up our son. Upon contacting the camp, we received promises of an investigation that never materialized. More shockingly, after our subsequent report to the local police, we learned that our son's assault was not an isolated incident, suggesting it may be part of a pattern that the camp had failed to address.

When we reached out to the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), including correspondence with Director Ashley Deckert, we were devastated to learn a critical fact: Rhode Island had no state-level credentialing or oversight of overnight camps. Furthermore, DCYF did not investigate camps, even when negligent supervision results in direct harm to a child, and there was no requirement for camps to report incidents of child abuse or neglect to DCYF.

We further discovered that accreditation from the American Camp Association offers no real protection in this context. It acts as a rubber stamp because these organizations rely on state-level investigations to flag issues — investigations that simply do not happen in Rhode Island due to the current legal void.

Why H-8093 is Essential The 2016 law that H-8093 amends was designed to stop schools from handling these issues internally and hiding abuse from authorities. However, the definition of "educational program" was too narrow, leaving children in camps and youth groups unprotected.

When parents entrust the safety and oversight of their children to supervising adults at a day camp, overnight camp, extracurricular activity, or other children's enrichment program, the parents reasonably expect that those adults will look out for the children's best interests, and address any incidents of child abuse or neglect immediately. However, in the absence of a legislative requirement, it is clear that some institutions will try to handle these issues internally, putting all children in Rhode Island at risk.

We cannot undo the harm done to our son. However, we hope to ensure that no other parent receives the same devastating news we did.

We ask the committee to vote yes on H-8093 to close the gap and help stop further abuses of children in Rhode Island. Thank you for taking steps to keep children safe in the state of Rhode Island.