



**Testimony Re: H-8091 Licensing of Youth Camps**  
**House Judiciary**  
**April 16, 2026**

**Leanne Barrett, Director of Early Childhood Policy & Strategy**

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports passage of Rep. Caldwell's bill, H-8091**, which establishes January 1, 2027, as the start date for summer camp licensing in Rhode Island.

Summer camps, afterschool programs, and extracurricular programs are widely used services in Rhode Island, particularly for children of working parents. In Rhode Island, 77% of children ages six to 17 have all parents in the workforce and many need a safe, high-quality learning environment during the hours, days, and weeks when their parents are at work and school is not in session.

**In 2024, Rhode Island enacted legislation to develop a summer camp licensing system but implementation has been delayed due to policy challenges related to reporting and investigating child abuse and neglect at camps.** The package of three bills related to summer camp licensing, DCYF investigations of child abuse and neglect at camps, and this bill requested by the Department of Human Services address these challenges so that summer camp licensing can be implemented in 2027.

Having a clear system for licensing summer day camps will help families find safe and high-quality options for their children. Licensing camps will help families who qualify for the Child Care Assistance Program to use the subsidy to help pay for the cost of camp.

Licensing camps will help the state communicate with and support summer camp programs by offering information about trainings, funding opportunities, and providing resources to help during emergencies.

It will be important to ensure DCYF has sufficient staffing and systems to investigate reports of child abuse and neglect and that DHS has sufficient staffing, data systems, and resources to successfully license and monitor the health and safety of camps, including responding to health and safety complaints from staff and parents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for the work you do to ensure that children have safe and enriching places to learn both in and out of school.