



BETHANY PARKS AND RECREATION

**SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT NEEDED TO ENSURE CHILD SAFETY IN
MUNICIPAL AND OTHER LICENSE EXEMPT CHILD CARE SETTINGS
AND YOUTH CAMPS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 17, 2026

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE**

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In June 2024, Anthony Mastrangelo was arrested and charged with multiple felony charges including Sexual Contact with a Victim under the age of 13, Sexual Assault in the First Degree, and Risk of Injury to a Minor. As of the date of this report, these matters remain pending. Mr. Mastrangelo had previously been employed by Bethany Parks and Recreation, in an after school program, and by Bethany Public Schools. It was alleged that Mr. Mastrangelo sexually abused multiple children while they attended a camp run by the town's Park and Recreation Department. OCA began an investigation shortly after learning of Mr. Mastrangelo's arrest.

The town subsequently engaged the Honorable Robert L. Holzberg (Retired) and the law firm of Pullman & Comley, LLC to "conduct a thorough review of the Town's and its First Selectman's response to the allegation that five female children had been sexually abused by Parks & Recreation employee, Anthony Mastrangelo" and provide recommendations for the town's recreation and child care programs. That [report](#) (hereinafter referred to as the "Pullman Report") was issued on May 15, 2025.¹ It includes a detailed discussion of the sequence of events, detailed description of the operations of Bethany Parks and Recreation, findings regarding the failures of town officials, and recommendations for the town. OCA encourages readers to review the Pullman Report in conjunction with this one, as OCA's report includes limited facts relevant to the findings and recommendations herein.

The purpose of OCA's investigation was to understand what occurred, identify any gaps in state systems designed to protect children, and make recommendations for system improvement. As noted in the Pullman Report, there was a lengthy delay between completion of the first forensic evaluation and the arrest of Mr. Mastrangelo.² The delay in arrest and prosecution is a matter of ongoing investigation by OCA. If warranted based on OCA's findings, OCA will issue a separate report regarding that issue. This report focuses on the state structures in place to ensure that individuals who pose a known safety risk to children are not employed in child care settings and youth camps.

The programs operated by Bethany Parks and Recreation, as municipal child care settings and/or youth camps, were, and continue to be, exempt from licensing requirements that generally apply to child care settings and youth camps. Bethany Parks and Recreation lacked policies to require background checks for any employees and OCA has seen no evidence to suggest that any employees received background checks. The failure to obtain background checks, while egregious from the perspective of child safety, was not a violation of the law because Bethany Parks and Recreation, like all municipal child care settings and youth camps, was exempt from licensing and thus exempt from such legal requirements.

License exempt local and municipal child care settings and youth camps exist throughout the state. Similarly, children attend other license exempt child care settings throughout the state, including those operated by nationally chartered boys' and girls' clubs and five specifically identified entities. While some license exempt child care settings or camps may conduct background checks

¹ Holzberg, R., May 15, 2025, [A Report on the Investigation into the Town of Bethany's Response to the Alleged Sexual Abuse of Minors Enrolled in the Parks and Recreation Summer and After-School Programs](#).

² Pullman Report, p. 22, Appendices F and P.

as a matter of prudent practice, no law requires them to do so and it must be presumed that Bethany does not stand alone in its failure to employ prudent practices.

OCA's investigation identified significant gaps related to the license exempt child care settings and youth camps, including:

1. Unless they are mandated reporters for other reasons, such as a license they hold (i.e. registered nurse), individuals employed in license exempt child care settings are not mandated reporters. All youth camp directors, assistant directors and staff aged 21 or older are currently mandated reporters.
2. While licensed childcare settings and camps are required to conduct comprehensive background checks of employees, entities that are exempt from licensure are not. As a result, after school camps and day/summer camps operated by municipal agencies are not required to background check their employees.
3. Municipal agencies are not the only child care entities exempt from licensure, and thus exempt from the background check requirements applicable to licensed child care settings. Child care settings not required to conduct background checks also include those operated by nationally chartered boys' and girls' clubs, five entities specifically exempt by statute, those in retail establishments, and others.
4. DCF is required to notify certain employers when an employee is being investigated regarding allegations that he or she abused or neglected a child. Because the term is not defined in statute, there is a lack of clarity in the law in relation to individuals who are employed in "a public or private institution or facility caring for children." As a result, certain employers may not receive notice when an employee working with children has been accused of, or substantiated regarding, child abuse or neglect.

Such gaps leave children at risk of harm and must be remedied. OCA recommends:

1. State law should be amended to require that all individuals employed in child care settings as defined by Connecticut General Statutes §19a-77, regardless of any exemption from licensure, be mandated reporters.
2. State law should be amended to require that all child care settings as defined by Connecticut General Statutes §19a-77, regardless of any exemption from licensure, and all youth camps, ensure that all employees receive mandated reporter training.
3. State law should be amended to require that individuals working in municipal child care settings and youth camps, and other child caring entities currently exempt from licensure, undergo comprehensive background checks, with the exception of informal family arrangements, those administered by religious organizations, and those administered by or through the federal government, as described in sections (b)(4), (b)(8), and (b)(14) of Connecticut General Statutes §19a-77.
4. State law should be amended to define the term "public or private institution or facility that provides care for children" to ensure that DCF can notify entities that are otherwise exempt from licensure of (a) reports of abuse or neglect regarding an employee and (b) results of investigations.
5. Because these entities are not currently licensed, OEC has no mechanism in place to determine the number of impacted entities. The proposed changes should be stacked such that all impacted entities will be required to register with OEC in year one and

comprehensive background checks and other requirements will go into effect in year two. This would allow OEC and any other impacted state agencies to determine any impact of requiring background checks and to develop systems for these entities, which would remain license exempt but required to conduct background checks. It would also give the entities time to plan for the changes that will be required of them.

Adopting these changes would provide parents utilizing license exempt entities with some assurance that individuals who pose a known safety risk to children are not employed in such settings and that employees of such entities are trained mandated reporters.