

Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-263 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING WATER SAFETY AND SWIM INSTRUCTION.

Vote Date: 3/3/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 2/24/2026

File No.:

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CO-SPONSORS OF THE BILL:

Sen. Anwar, 3rd District
Rep. Bumgardner, 41st District

SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Committee on Children

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to require the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to establish and administer an annual program to provide free-of-charge swimming lessons to children in families that are eligible for specific public assistance programs. Due to the differences in rates of swimming proficiency between socioeconomic classes, the Committee hopes that this legislation can increase access to swimming lessons and lower incidents of drowning.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

There is no substitute language.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Office of the Child Advocate, Acting Child Advocate, Christina Ghio: Ms. Ghio states that swimming is a critical life skill that many take for granted. National data suggests that half of all adolescent drownings aged 15 to 19 occurred in natural water settings. Many children, particularly children in low-income communities, do not have access to opportunities to learn to swim. This not only deprives them of enjoyment, but it also places them at risk. She stresses the importance of swimming lessons for children to ensure their safety.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Multiple leaders in YMCAs across the state voice their support for this bill. They stress the urgency of addressing drowning because it is the leading cause of accidental death among children ages 1 to 4, and the second leading cause of accidental death among children ages 5 to 14. They highlight the racial and socioeconomic disparities in children who lack basic swimming skills and argue that this bill would build on the work that YMCAs are doing to provide more children with lifesaving swimming education. They discussed how previous federal grants allowed them to expand these lessons in their communities and ensure child safety while also allowing people to enjoy the recreational benefits of swimming.

[Connecticut Alliance of YMCAs, Vice President of Government Relations John Cattelan](#)
[Central Connecticut Coast YMCA, President and CEO Timothy Bartlett](#)
[Central Connecticut Coast YMCA, District Operations Director Ryan Leworthy](#)
[Central Connecticut Coast YMCA, Executive Director Suzanne Richards](#)
[Wallingford Family YMCA, Executive Director Sean Doherty](#)
[Northern Middlesex YMCA, Program Director Leisa Pasquariello](#)

[Connecticut Children's Hospital, Injury Prevention Center, Executive Director Kevin Borrup](#): Mr. Borrup supports this bill and explains that keeping children safe in and around the water involves education, swimming lessons, fencing, and barriers. Swimming lessons are an effective strategy to reduce drowning risks, and thus the bill would help ensure children's safety.

[Connecticut Recreation & Parks Association, Executive Director Valeria Stolfi Collins](#): Ms. Collins states that swimming lessons are the most effective means of combating drowning. Her organization recommends that the legislature add additional language to enable the state to provide appropriations directly to municipalities to offer free lessons in their existing programs without having to outsource to a nonprofit. She explains that this would lead to greater efficiency and usage of the appropriated funds by eliminating grant administration fees, which would allow more funds to go towards swimming lessons. This program could be modeled after DEEP's Recreational Trail Grant Program. Specifically, they "...would also suggest the addition of the words 'municipality or' in line 15 of the bill prior to the word 'nonprofit' as many municipal park and recreation departments are experienced in offering these services and may be interested in partnering with the state to provide these services at state facilities or at their own facilities."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Mia Giglietti and Zachary Robinson Date: 3/10/2026