



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

**Texas Department of State
Health Services**

Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act / Youth CAMPER Act Implementation

Presentation to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee

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Overview

- Youth Camp Licensure Statistics
- DSHS Actions: Emergency Plan Review, Inspection Phase, and Results
- Lessons Learned: Successes and Challenges
- Next Steps
- Considerations for the 90th Legislative Session

Approved Youth Camp Licenses

as of June 26, 2026

2025: 378 camps

Renewal: 375

Initial: 3

Residential: 195

Day: 183

2026: 299 camps

Renewal: 270

Initial: 29

Residential: 168

Day: 131

Youth Camp Licenses

as of June 26, 2026

- **2026 Application statistics:**

- ▶ 307 applied

- ◊ 299 approved

- ◊ 7 pending application/renewal approval

- ◊ 4 voluntarily withdrawn applications

- ◊ 1 denial

- ▶ 107 camps licensed in 2025 declined to apply for 2026

- ▶ 36 new camps applied (did not have a license in 2025)

- ◊ Includes changes in physical location, changes of ownership, etc.

DSHS Actions to Implement New Legislation

Adopting rules

Creating application guides

Engaging stakeholders

Hiring FTEs

Training inspectors

Contracting National EMR

Creating IT solutions

Providing technical assistance

Reviewing applications

Approving emergency plans

Pre-licensing inspections

Operational inspections

DSHS Actions: Emergency Plan Review

- DSHS contracted National EMR to provide expertise in training DSHS staff regarding emergency plans and conducting initial review of emergency plans while DSHS emergency planner FTEs were hired and trained.
- DSHS provided secure IT solution, process flows, and constant communication to National EMR staff.
- Emergency Plan review utilized 31 criteria (with additional sub-elements).
- Examples of DSHS-National EMR collaboration include:
 - ▶ Creation of a standardized review process and [review checklists](#);
 - ▶ Collaboration to handle additional reviews when initial submitted plans did not meet statutory requirements; and
 - ▶ Frequent check-ins to discuss best practices, issues needing escalation, review timeframes, etc.

DSHS Actions: Emergency Plan Review

- All plans required more than one review.
- National EMR handled initial review of all plans using agreed upon inspection review criteria with DSHS handling all communications to camps regarding deficiencies.
- As DSHS hired and trained emergency planners, DSHS took on secondary and additional reviews to help camps operationalize their plans.
- DSHS is now equipped to complete full emergency plan review process.

Emergency Plan Review Observations

- Submitted plans varied in length and complexity – longer plans did not equate to more effective plans.
- Common areas of deficiencies included:

Assigned Roles / Responsibilities	Lost Camper Plans
Camper Training	Monitoring Safety Alerts
Emergency Plan Distributions	Site-specific Evacuation
Evacuation Process Details	Transportation Details
Fiber Internet	Warning / PA Systems
Floodplain / Floodway	

DSHS Actions: Inspection Phase

- DSHS is conducting a minimum of two inspections at each camp:
 - ▶ Pre-licensing inspection: Emergency plan-focused inspection to verify required plan prior to campers being on site.
 - ▶ Inspection during camp sessions: Verification of remaining items while camps are operational and campers are on-site.
- Pre-licensing inspections typically only took place once a camp's written emergency plan was sufficient.
 - ▶ Pre-licensing inspections began the week of March 27th.
- Inspections can take as long as 4 days depending on type of inspection, the physical size of the camp, and type of activities offered.

DSHS Actions: Results

- DSHS hired staff, including inspectors and emergency plan reviewers, to help implement HB 1/SB 1.
- DSHS licensing, operations, IT, inspection, and enforcement staff regularly worked nights, weekends, and holidays to facilitate timely inspection and licensure activities for the 2026 camp season.
- DSHS inspected and licensed all qualified applicants that applied on time to have them operational by the start of camp season and/or the camp's intended start date, including working throughout the Memorial Day weekend.
- DSHS last received an application on June 11th and continues to work expeditiously to review and approve licenses for qualified applicants.
- Camps with pending applications/inspections have later start dates and/or applied well after the March 31 application deadline.

Lessons Learned: Successes

- DSHS required a March 31 annual application deadline, resulting in on-time submissions for most applicants.
- DSHS leveraged national external experts while developing internal capabilities.
 - ▶ DSHS will utilize National EMR collaboration to develop best practices and other observations for the Multidisciplinary Team.
- DSHS worked internally and with HHSC to develop IT workarounds for licensure system.
 - ▶ Long-term IT enhancements to support all DSHS licensing functions are in progress.
- DSHS strengthened stakeholder engagement to facilitate compliance with statutory changes.
 - ▶ DSHS continues to engage stakeholders to harness expertise and insight from entities assisting camps.

Lessons Learned: Challenges

- **New Requirements**

- ▶ Many day camps did not understand the new laws applied to them.
 - ◇ For example, day camps may have up to 2 nights of overnight stays per camp season per statute. If they have cabins used for this purpose, they are subject to the floodplain/floodway requirements.

- **Emergency Plans**

- ▶ It's unclear how many camps collaborated with local emergency management prior to submitting plans to DSHS.
 - ◇ Some plans may not reflect local response capabilities/limitations related to implementing submitted emergency plan.

Next Steps: Reviewing 2026 Camp Season

- **Multidisciplinary Team to meet starting in August / September 2026.**
 - ▶ Agency partners include: DSHS, Texas Division of Emergency Management, Texas Department of Insurance State Fire Marshal's Office, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Water Development Board; Texas A&M Forest Service; and the Department of Public Safety.
 - ▶ The team's focus is to develop proposed minimum standards for youth camps and present recommendations.
 - ▶ The team's findings may result in updates to DSHS rules, policy, or procedures.
- **Preparation for Multidisciplinary Team Process includes:**
 - ▶ After-action observations from National EMR;
 - ▶ Feedback from stakeholders assisting camps in submitting emergency plans and clearing deficiencies; and
 - ▶ DSHS statistics and observations from licensure, emergency plan review, and inspection processes.

Next Steps: Convening Youth Camp Advisory Committee

- The Youth Camp Advisory Committee membership was updated in rules adopted on February 2, 2026.
- Members will include:
 - ▶ One member from the general public;
 - ▶ One member from the general public with expertise in specialized program safety;
 - ▶ One parent of a child who was a camper in the past two years;
 - ▶ One day camp operator;
 - ▶ One camp operator with experience in wilderness or primitive activities;
 - ▶ One residential camp operator operating a youth camp that provides overnight accommodations for 500 or more campers per year;
 - ▶ One residential camp operator operating a youth camp that provides overnight accommodations for 499 or fewer campers per year;
 - ▶ One waterfront safety expert; and
 - ▶ One pediatric psychologist, psychiatrist, or child abuse expert.
- Member applications were due June 30, 2026, with the first meeting expected this fall.

Considerations for 90th Session

Emergency Plans

- ▶ Local emergency management-camp coordination
- ▶ Require camps to maintain access to radios and other methods to facilitate communication between counselors and staff.

DSHS Enforcement Authority

- ▶ Specifically authorize emergency closure, as well as civil and criminal penalties for non-compliance issues like operating without a license.
- ▶ Outline licensing consequences for specific circumstances, such as events resulting in camper or staff harm.
- ▶ Provide clear, required reporting pathways related to abuse, neglect, and abandonment claims.
- ▶ Review the definition of a youth camp.

Considerations for 90th Session

- **Regulated Entities**

- ▶ Clarify whether entities exempt from DSHS youth camp licensure are still subject to minimum requirements relating to 1) emergency plans, 2) required reporting of abuse, neglect, and abandonment, and 3) staff background checks.
- ▶ Consider requirements for individuals to obtain an operator license.

- **Redundant Internet Connection**

- ▶ Strike end-to-end fiber language but continue to require two independent forms of redundant broadband internet connection.



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Thank you

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