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Proposal would expand state authority over vaccine standards

By **Cris Villalonga-Vivoni**
STAFF WRITER

Gov. Ned Lamont has made it clear that one of his goals during the General Assembly's "short" session is to better protect the state from major federal changes — including when it comes to vaccines.

One of his proposals

seeks to strengthen the state Department of Public Health by requiring it to rely on evidence-based science and existing public health standards to guide immunization practices, notwithstanding federal recommendations.

As immunization rates slip nationwide, to some, standardizing care is a bold step forward to protect

vaccine access. In contrast, others worry the effort may stray from checks and balances by overriding legislative oversight.

Vaccines have made headlines over the past year due to an ongoing effort to align national recommendations with the vaccine skepticism long held by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Under Kennedy's leadership, HHS announced it would no longer recommend COVID-19 vaccines for healthy children and pregnant women, replaced the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, and abandoned the long-held position that vaccines

do not cause autism.

The latest move came in early January when the ACIP announced a new federal vaccine schedule that sharply narrows the national recommendations for children. Focused more on risk-based and shared decision-making, the new recommendation reduced the number of diseases covered for children from



Rebecca Blackwell/AP

Governor's Bill 5044 would expand the state Department of Public Health's ability to set immunization standards of care for adults, children and infants.

18 to 11, eliminating coverage for influenza, hepatitis A and B, meningococcal
Vaccines continues on A4



Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

The House of Representatives after it is gaveled into session Feb. 4 at the state Capitol in Hartford on the opening day of the legislature. Education leaders and advocates are calling for the state to increase its spending on schools.

WHITE HOUSE DINNER

Lamont among 18 governors to skip if some Dems excluded

By **Brianna Gurciullo**
STAFF WRITER

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont and 17 other Democratic governors announced Tuesday they would skip a dinner at the White House this year if reports about President Donald Trump withholding invites from some state leaders were true.

Their joint statement comes after Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, a Republican and chair of the National Governors Association's executive committee, said in a letter Monday to fellow governors that the White House planned to limit invitations to an upcoming annual meeting to Republicans. As a result, Stitt said the NGA would no longer facilitate the Feb. 20 meeting.

The New York Times reported that Trump planned to hold a dinner.
Dinner continues on A5

'Train wreck for public education'

State leaders warn Lamont budget leaves schools short

By **Natasha Sokoloff**
STAFF WRITER

The fight for more education funding in the state's 2026 General Assembly session has put a spotlight on the way that Connecticut funds K-12 education — and on the consequences of going another year without foundational change.

Gov. Ned Lamont's budget proposal largely maintains funding levels for K-12 education, but it is missing the substantial change to the state's main way of funding local school systems that



Natasha Sokoloff/Hearst Connecticut Media

New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker speaks at the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities news conference in the Legislative Office Building in Hartford on Tuesday. He is among the education leaders and advocates calling for the state to increase its spending on schools.

advocates say is long overdue.

Despite celebrating Lamont's proposals for free school breakfasts and other education initiatives, several local leaders and education advocates said the proposed fiscal year 2027 budget for public education ultimately puts further strain on Connecticut school districts and towns that could lead to staffing cuts, slashed school programming and higher property taxes.

"The governor's budget is a complete disappointment for public education," Meriden
Budget continues on A5

CROMWELL

Man linked to 100 video files showing child sex abuse, warrant says

By **Jesse Leavenworth**
STAFF WRITER

CROMWELL — Police traced 100 video files depicting child sexual abuse to a Cromwell man, whose housemate said she had no clue he was downloading such material, according to an arrest warrant.

Michael J. Bouchard, 29, is charged with first-degree possession of child pornography, importing child pornography and promoting a minor in an obscene performance.

The investigation started in January 2025, when Cromwell police re-
Bouchard continues on A4

From dance parties to DIY crafts to creative games, state celebrates Galentine's Day

By **Ciara Hooks**
STAFF WRITER

The very important wine, food, dancing, gift bags, games, uplifting and girl-talk make Galentine's Day a favorable event

for the single gals each year.

Mainly celebrated the day before Valentine's Day on Feb. 13, Galentine's Day which fuses the words "Valentine's Day" and "gal," centers around women and platonic friendships.

Some women both married and single choose Galentines over Valentines for a multitude of reasons, according to the Associated Press. For some it's about filling a Valentine's void or creating different kinds of

bonds. For others it's about partying with their closest gal pals or learning how to do something new.

Galentine's Day combat the idea that women can't support
Galentine's continues on A4

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Weather: Breezy with times of clouds and sun.
High: 37. Low: 5. **Page A10**

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