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House passes homeschool bill

Would require annual registration

By Ken Dixon and
Natasha Sokoloff
STAFF WRITER

HARTFORD — Homeschooling families would have to annually register their children with the state Department of Education, under legislation that the Democrat-dominated House of Representatives approved just before midnight Thursday night and sent it to the Senate for further action.

The bill passed 96-53 vote after nearly six hours of debate

that was mostly filled by Republican criticism against the proposal. Four Democrats from the 102-49 majority voted against the bill.

If approved and signed into law, Connecticut would join four other states in preventing children from participating in homeschooling if a parent or guardian were involved in an active investigation by the state Department of Children and Families (DCF), or if someone in the home over 18 was listed on a DCF register of neglect or

abuse.

Rep. Jennifer Leeper, D-Fairfield, co-chairwoman of the legislative Education Committee, who introduced the legislation, said that the goal of the bill is to prevent further tragedies, such as a young man in Waterbury who was allegedly kept prisoner in his own home for decades.

"They're reasonable steps to protect children," Leeper said.

"I see this as a big mandate on the schools," said Rep. Lezlye Zupkus of Prospect, a ranking Republican on the Education Committee. "I don't see how this is going to keep all of our
Homeschool continues on A6



Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

Susan Hamilton, interim commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, speaks on March 3 at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford during a public hearing on homeschooling legislation.



Alexander Soule/Hearst Connecticut Media

A Main Street colonial dating back to 1803 in Meriden, which Zillow listed as slated to go on the market at nearly \$530,000, after renovations, more than twice what it sold for previously. Zillow is projecting home values nationally to rise only slightly in 2026, citing continuing high mortgage rates and overall inflation.

Conn. home values projected to outpace U.S.

By Alexander Soule
STAFF WRITER

Connecticut home values are projected to continue to outpace many parts of the country in Zillow's latest analysis, as hundreds of real estate listings continue to hit Connecticut cities and towns daily after a slow start to the 2026 spring market.

Zillow is projecting a 0.3% rise in home values nationally by December 2026, with sale prices expected to be held in check by a larger selection for

buyers coupled with stubbornly high mortgage rates and overall inflation.

The average rate for a 30-year mortgage dropped to 6.23% according to Freddie Mac estimates released Thursday, the lowest level it has tracked in the last three spring real estate markets.

"This improvement, coupled with a pickup in purchase applications and refinance activity, as well as an increase in monthly pending home sales, underscores signs of improving momentum in the

market," said Sam Khater, chief economist of Freddie Mac, in a statement accompanying the report.

Connecticut remains an outlier for home values in the national context, particularly New London County where Zillow is forecasting a 3.3% jump in home values by December. That ranks just inside the top 35 nationally of some 900 metropolitan regions tracked by Zillow, and second biggest in New England just a tick behind Keene, New Hampshire.

Greater Hartford landed inside the top 60 metro areas nationally with a projected 3% increase in home values, with real estate markets there having been routinely ranked among the hottest in the United States the past few years based on buyer demand for limited numbers of listings.

New Haven landed in the top 10% of metro areas that are forecast for the biggest jumps in values, with Zillow predicting a 2.7% increase there. The Torrington region and

Homes continues on A4

Voting proposals advance

Include mail-in voting expansion, law enforcement near poll limits

By Paul Hughes
STAFF WRITER

HARTFORD — Democrats in the state House of Representatives approved proposed restrictions on federal immigration enforcement near polling places in Connecticut on the second try Thursday.

The House had spent seven hours debating the legislation when Democratic majority leaders paused the floor debate late Wednesday night amid partisan wrangling that had threatened to prolong the deliberations into early hours of Thursday and possibly beyond.

In seven minutes Thursday afternoon, the House unanimously approved a compromise amendment and then voted 101-49 along party lines to approve
Voting continues on A4

Insurers violating mental health care law: state

By Cris Villalonga-Vivoni
STAFF WRITER

Major health insurance carriers in Connecticut continue to violate the state's mental health parity law nearly seven years after its initial passage, adding to ongoing access gaps, according to a new report from the Department of Insurance.

"I think it's shocking and frankly disgusting that all five of the companies in Connecticut violated this law," said Comp-
Mental health continues on A6

Bridgeport Islanders fans sad to see team leave after 25 years

By Kevin Roberts
STAFF WRITER

BRIDGEPORT — Talk to Bridgeport Islanders fans and you'll hear stories not just about minor league hockey.

You'll also hear about families, friends and lives spent around a team that has been a part of the fabric of the Park City for the past quarter century. That all came to an end Thursday night when No. 4 Bridgeport lost 5-2 to the No. 5 Hershey Bears in the second game of a best-of-three AHL Calder Cup first-round series at the Giant Center in Hershey,

Pa.

The Islanders, who are relocating to Hamilton, Ontario, finished their final season in Bridgeport 34-32-3 after being swept 2-0 by the Bears.

"I grew up going to the New Haven Coliseum, seeing the Nighthawks play," said Melissa Ortiz, 47, of West Haven. "My dad (Al Longobricco) was an off-ice official there since the early 70s. This is his 51st season as an off-ice official. He's done the 25 years here (in Bridgeport), so I grew up in a hockey arena, so I don't know anything different, so it's really sad that they're not going to be here any-

more."

Al Longobricco, now in his 80s, was a goal judge in section 100 of Bridgeport's Total Mortgage Arena during his tenure.

"He's the one that turns on the light," Ortiz said with pride, referring to when a team scores a goal.

Ortiz and her daughter Isabelle, 13, the youngest of three, attended the first game of the series Tuesday night. It turned out to be the last home contest for Bridgeport and for Melissa Ortiz, who attended every game the franchise played.

Bridgeport began as the
Islanders continues on A4



Arnold Gold/Hearst Connecticut Media

From left, Christy Lauber, her daughter, Eleanor, 1, and husband, Bill, of Hamden, watch the Bridgeport Islanders face off against the Hershey Bears in the Calder Cup playoffs at the Total Mortgage Arena in Bridgeport on Tuesday.

Advice/puzzles.....B7
Business.....A8
Classified.....B9

Comics.....B8
Obituaries.....A4
Opinion.....A9

Public notices.....B9
Sports.....B1-4
Television.....B6



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Weather: Partly sunny and cool, afternoon showers..
High: 54. Low: 37. **Page A10**