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**OLR Bill Analysis****sHB 5455*****AN ACT CONCERNING QUALIFIED FOREST FIRE FIGHTERS.*****SUMMARY**

This bill designates the state forest fire warden as the sole authority who may add assistants to the state forest fire control personnel for extinguishing a forest fire in the state. Under current law, state forest fire control personnel and state forest fire warden-appointed patrol personnel may summon assistance.

The bill specifically allows for qualified, temporary emergency workers to be added to the state forest fire control personnel and eliminates the option of summoning any resident of certain ages to assist with extinguishing forest fires. It also eliminates provisions that allow such personnel to requisition private property for fire-fighting purposes.

The bill makes several conforming changes relating to summoned residents, including removing (1) state workers' compensation benefits for those who assist and (2) fines for those who refuse or neglect to assist or to allow use of their property. It also extends the same workers' compensation benefits to the temporary emergency workers and requires the Department of Administrative Services to assist the state forest fire warden in developing appropriate classifications for these workers.

The bill also makes other technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2019

**ASSISTANTS FOR FIGHTING FOREST FIRES**

Current law authorizes state forest fire control personnel and state forest fire warden-appointed patrol personnel to (1) summon any resident aged 18 to 50 years to assist in extinguishing forest fires and

(2) requisition equipment, motor vehicles, and other property for the same purpose. Summoned persons must be fined up to \$200 if they are physically able but (1) refuse or neglect to assist or to allow use of their property or (2) willfully interfere with or hinder certain persons of authority. The bill eliminates all of these provisions.

Under the bill, if the state forest fire warden determines that additional assistants are required to extinguish a forest fire in the state, he or she may add “temporary emergency workers” who meet specified training and qualification requirements to the state forest fire control personnel. These workers must specifically be trained and qualified under the National Incident Management System: Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide published by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***State Forest Fire Warden***

By law, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection commissioner is the state forest fire warden (CGS § 23-33). The warden’s powers include, among other things, the authority to enter into agreements with federal agencies, cities, boroughs, fire districts, and forest protective associations to prevent and control forest fires. The warden may also employ volunteer fire companies for assisting in fighting forest fires and establish compensation rates for equipment usage, fire-fighting materials and supplies, and volunteer company firefighter and laborer time (CGS § 23-36).

## **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 24 Nay 0 (03/19/2019)