

# Public Safety and Security Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5455

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING QUALIFIED FOREST FIRE FIGHTERS.

**Vote Date:** 3/19/2019

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/14/2019

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Public Safety and Security Committee  
Rep. Buckbee, 67<sup>th</sup> District

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill seeks to allow qualified volunteer firefighters the ability to assist municipalities in the instance of a forest wildfire. This bill would eliminate the summoning of volunteers, and instead have qualified persons temporarily employed. The goal of this bill is to ensure that all resources are being utilized in the event of a wildfire.

### **\*\*\*Substitute Language**

The substitute language makes conforming changes to other statutes. \*\*\*

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Katie Dykes, Commissioner Designee, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**

In her testimony, Commissioner Dykes expressed that DEEP anticipates that there will be more wildfires in Connecticut. The commissioner stated that in the recent past, there have been several wildfires in close proximity to Connecticut. That being said, she highlighted that it is important that all resources that could support wildfire assistance be utilized. She stated that the men and women in the Connecticut Interstate Fire Crew are recognized nationwide, and assist other parts of the country with wildfires. Current statutes do not allow for these individuals to assist fighting wildfires.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Bill Buckbee, Representative, Connecticut General Assembly**

Representative Buckbee testified that this bill would provide Connecticut with additional help in the instance of a forest fire. He explained that having the properly trained forest firefighters is an integral part of public safety, and is important component to the well-being of the state. He stressed that protecting and preserving our environment is imperative, and this bill would help safeguard that.

### **Rachel Holmes, Member, Connecticut Interstate Fire Crew**

Rachel Holmes testified that she has had extensive history in working with wildfires. She expressed that the risk for wildfires is increasing, and human resources to fight and prevent these fires is diminishing. She provided wildfire statistics in her testimony, and stated that among Northeastern states, Connecticut is especially at risk for severe wildfires. She highlighted that the best training a forest firefighter can receive is getting hands on experience.

### **Michael Kronick, Deputy Chief, Westport Fire Department**

Michael Kronick expressed that although wildfires in Connecticut have not been a rampant problem, the possibility for one to happen exists. He stressed that the topography of Connecticut is predominately forested, and intertwined with urban areas. He stated that although the state is fortunate to not have dry weather, there are occasions where this can happen, and the state needs to be prepared. He explained that the Connecticut Interstate Fire Crew (CIFC) assists with wildfires in other parts of the country, and that if this legislation passes, the CIFC would be a crucial part to the protection of Connecticut.

### **Alan Olenick, Assistant Fire Chief, Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department**

In his testimony, Alan Olenick explained that if there were multiple wildfires throughout the state, the recourses that DEEP provides would become scarce, and that the Connecticut Interstate Fire Crew (CIFC) could be utilized. Alan noted the several times in which the CIFC has assisted with wildfires in the western part of the country. He stated the training process in which these men and women go through is extensive, and that the high standards they are held to is reflected through their work.

### **Ralph Scarpino, Retired Program Supervisor for The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**

Ralph Scarpino testified that the passage of this legislation is vital to safety and protection of Connecticut. He testified that by allowing the Connecticut Interstate Fire Crew (CIFC) to assist DEEP with wildfires would be a great attribution to public safety. He stated that nearly the whole state is within the Wildlife Urban Interference, which is what happens when forests and urban areas intertwine with each other. That being said, when a wildfire occurs in Connecticut, the results can be extremely damaging.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None was expressed for H.B. 5455

**Reported by: Nicoletta Blevins, Assistant Clerk 4/2/2019**