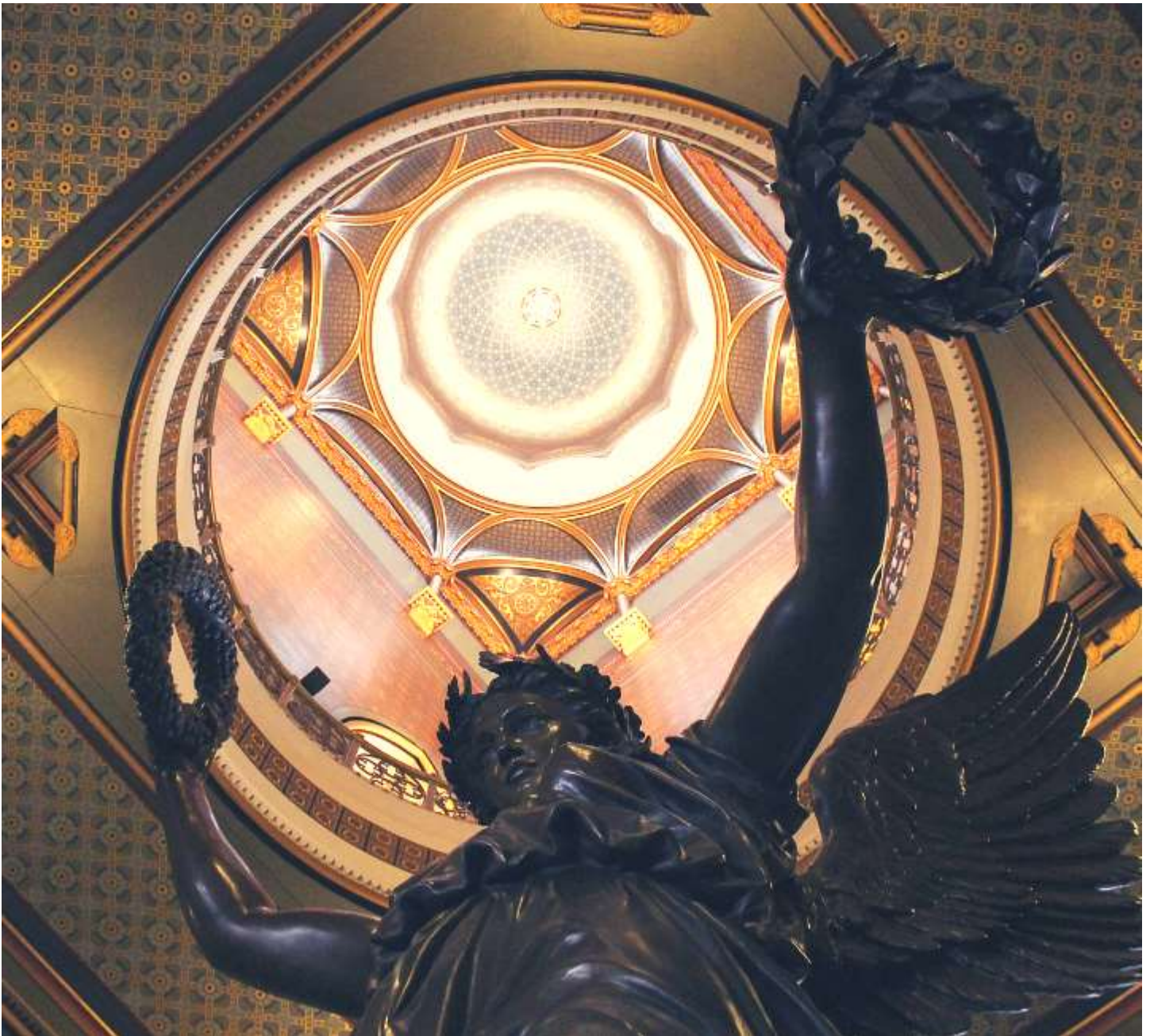


MAJOR ISSUES

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

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Connecticut General Assembly
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Notice to Readers

Every year, the Office of Legislative Research (OLR) identifies and provides brief descriptions of important issues the General Assembly may face in the upcoming session. This report does not represent staff suggestions or recommendations. The office identifies issues based on interim studies; research requests; non-confidential discussions with legislators, other legislative participants, and executive branch agencies; as well as our general subject matter knowledge. We also consult with the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) and the Legislative Commissioners' Office (LCO) when selecting issues. The report is organized according to the committee that has primary jurisdiction over an issue. Because more than one committee may consider aspects of the same issue, descriptions may overlap. Where appropriate, we provide links to OLR reports and other documents that contain additional information.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the regular 2020 legislative session was effectively suspended on March 12 until it was adjourned sine die on May 6. The pandemic is anticipated to continue well into 2021 and will likely necessitate a number of significant logistical changes to the legislative process (e.g., virtual committee meetings). At this time, it is unclear what impact, if any, these changes will have on the substance and volume of legislation. In light of the circumstances, we especially caution readers not to interpret this document as a potential session agenda. Rather, the topics we have identified, apart from those directly related to the pandemic, are those that we believe would be applicable under normal circumstances.

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Aging

Age Discrimination in the Workforce

Like many states, Connecticut is experiencing an aging workforce. Last session, the Aging Committee favorably reported legislation ([SB 85](#)) that prohibited age discrimination during the employment application process. Specifically, the bill generally made it a discriminatory employment practice for employers to request or require a prospective employee's age, birth date, or graduation date on an initial employment application. The legislature may again consider similar legislation during the 2021 session.

COVID-19 and Long-Term Care Facilities

In June 2020, the state contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to evaluate the response to COVID-19 in Connecticut's nursing homes and assisted living facilities in order to help prepare the state and the long-term care industry for a potential second wave of the virus. Mathematica issued a final report in September 2020.

In response to the report, the governor and legislative leaders recently established a bi-partisan Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group to propose legislative recommendations for the 2021 session. Among other things, these legislative proposals may address issues such as (1) the availability of personal protective equipment in long-term care facilities, (2) minimum nurse staffing requirements in facilities, and (3) how to support facilities with the cost of widespread resident and staff COVID-19 testing.

Read Related Reports:

- OLR Report [2020-R-0184](#), *COVID-19 Executive Orders Affecting Older Adults*
- Mathematica Policy Research [Final Report](#): "A Study of the COVID-19 Outbreak and Response in Connecticut Long-Term Care Facilities" (September 2020)

Appropriations

Current Fiscal Year

OFA is projecting a General Fund (GF) deficit of \$854.5 million for the current fiscal year (FY 21). This is primarily due to lower than budgeted revenues, projected at \$958.5 million, related to the pandemic and associated shutdowns of portions of the state economy. This revenue loss was partially offset by lower budget expenditures.

Upcoming Biennium

OFA is projecting deficits of \$2.1 billion in FY 22 and \$2.2 billion in FY 23. These are due to the lower revenue base due to the pandemic, as well as legislated changes in revenue policy. These changes include a Municipal Revenue Sharing Account diversion of \$355.8 million, a Special Transportation Fund diversion of \$179.5 million, and the loss of \$245.1 million in temporary revenue.

Budget Reserve Fund

The current balance in the Budget Reserve Fund (BRF) is \$3.0 billion, the maximum amount allowed by statute. Assuming the BRF fills the projected deficit in the current fiscal year, the Fund would enter the upcoming biennium with a balance of \$2.16 billion.

Read Related Report:

- OFA, [Fiscal Accountability Report](#), November 2020

Banking

Foreclosure Mitigation

By law, the state's foreclosure mediation program sunsets on July 1, 2023. Because of the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential for increased foreclosure activity, the Banking Committee may consider measures to extend the program or make it permanent. The committee may also consider creating new programs or expanding existing ones, such as the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority's Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program, to provide additional low interest financing options for financially-distressed homeowners.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0249](#), *Issue Brief: Foreclosure Mediation Program*
- [2020-R-0293](#), *Legislative Changes to the Foreclosure Mediation Program*

Infrastructure Banks

Infrastructure banks are state-run banks that use initial capital to lend funds for infrastructure projects. Then, like a revolving loan fund, they use the repayments to finance future projects. In 2019 and 2020, the Banking Committee considered proposals to establish an infrastructure bank to finance roads, bridges, ports, energy transmission and distribution, and telecommunication networks, among other improvements ([SB 70](#) (2019) and [SB 25](#) (2020)). The committee may revisit this issue in 2021.

Children

Child Care Provider Assistance

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) recently created short-term [CTCARES](#) programs to help child care providers remain open during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CTCARES programs help providers (1) remain open despite families leaving and (2) cover the costs associated with obtaining additional cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment. According to OEC, child care providers were already struggling prior to the pandemic due to tight operating budgets, and the state is at risk of losing approximately 45,000 child care spots. [CARE 4 KIDS](#), the state's child care subsidy program, also made changes to their program to assist providers and families due to challenges raised by the pandemic.

During the 2021 session, the legislature may explore ways to continue to provide support to both child care providers and families that need child care services.

Read OLR Report:

- [2020-R-0111](#), *COVID-19 Executive Orders Affecting Education and Child Care*

Commerce

COVID-19 Business Assistance

The COVID-19 pandemic sent Connecticut's economic activity into uncharted territory. In response, the Department of Economic and Community Development established two programs in 2020 that collectively provided approximately \$92 million in loans and grants to state businesses. In 2021, the legislature may consider proposals to provide additional assistance to Connecticut businesses affected by the pandemic.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0282](#), *Issue Brief: Pandemic-Related Business Assistance*

- [2020-R-0177](#), *Paycheck Protection Program Assistance to Connecticut Businesses*

Education

Teacher Certification Flexibility

This past summer the State Board of Education (SBE) passed resolutions to adopt teacher certification flexibilities for the 2020-21 school year. These flexibilities aimed to help public school districts meet the challenge of teacher shortages created by COVID-19-related quarantines, medical accommodations, and retirements.

The legislature may consider whether to continue or expand these flexibilities as the pandemic continues if teacher and substitute teacher shortages persist. Currently, SBE has authorized the state's education department to offer emergency generalist certification endorsements that allow the holder to teach across subject areas in grades kindergarten through 12. Additionally, the board has waived the cut score for educator preparation provider (EPP) program participants on the required edTPA teacher candidate assessment for the 2020-21 school year.

For More Information Read:

- [SBE resolution on emergency endorsements](#) (August 11, 2020)
- [SBE resolution on edTPA cut scores](#) (August 11, 2020)

Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention

In recent years, the legislature has considered ways to attract and retain more teachers from racial and ethnic minority groups in order to make the state's public teaching corps more closely represent the diversity of the state's student body. Nearly 10% of the state's teachers are minorities, while approximately 48% of the students are non-white.

In 2020, the Education Committee considered [SB 390](#), which would have created minority teacher candidate residency programs in all Alliance Districts. The legislature may take up similar legislation again or consider additional measures, such as further expansion of higher education loan reimbursements for minority teachers (see [PA 19-117](#), §§ 262 & 263).

Read OLR Report:

- [2020-R-0209](#), *Minority Teacher Recruitment Legislation*

Energy and Technology

Electric Rates

In September, the legislature enacted a [new law](#) that requires the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority to begin implementing a performance-based regulatory framework for the electric distribution companies (EDCs, i.e., Eversource and United Illuminating) that will ultimately make their electric rates hinge on their performance on certain metrics and standards (e.g., reliability, emergency response, customer satisfaction). This year the legislature may explore additional measures related to electric rates, including provisions related to decoupling rates from volumetric usage and equity in renewable energy policies.

Related Reading:

- OLR Public Act Summary for [PA 20-5](#) (Sept. Sp. Sess.)
- OLR Report [2020-R-0344](#), *Public Policy Components of Electric Bills*

Utility Storm Response

After Tropical Storm Isaias caused widespread power outages in the state this past summer, the legislature enacted [PA 20-5](#) (Sept. Sp. Sess.). Among other things, the act generally requires EDCs to (1) provide account credits to residential customers when service outages last for more than 96 hours and (2) compensate residential customers who lose food and medication due to those outages. This session, the legislature may look to further enhance utility storm response requirements, particularly regarding the utilities' communication and coordination with local officials and emergency response personnel.

Related Reading:

- OLR Report [2020-R-0268](#), *Issue Brief: Utility Storm Response*
- OLR Public Act Summary for [PA 20-5](#) (Sept. Sp. Sess.)

Environment

Solid Waste Management

Solid waste management is a perennial issue before the legislature. During the 2020 session, the Environment Committee held public hearings on more than 10 bills related to solid waste. The bills included provisions on such things as restricting the use of certain products (e.g., helium balloons, polystyrene products, plastic straws), revising the state's beverage container redemption law ("bottle bill"), using extended producer responsibility (EPR) for additional product types (e.g., gas

canisters and smoke detectors), expanding the state’s organic materials law, recommending product recycled content requirements, and using multi-stream recycling. It is likely the legislature will consider similar concepts during the 2021 session.

This year, the quasi-public Material Innovations and Recycling Authority (MIRA) announced that it intends to close its Hartford trash-to-energy plant by July 1, 2022, and operate as a transfer station for the waste it receives. MIRA serves more than 50 Connecticut towns with most having contracts through 2027.

Further, the state’s Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is working with a [coalition](#) of more than 70 municipalities to find preferred ways to reduce and manage waste, especially in the following four areas of interest: EPR, food scraps and organics, recycling, and unit-based pricing (“pay-as-you-throw”). A report from the coalition’s work is expected in January.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0229](#), *Food Waste Diversion Law*
- [2020-R-0134](#), *Issue Brief: Extended Producer Responsibility*
- [2019-R-0223](#), *Issue Brief: Connecticut’s Bottle Bill*
- [2019-R-0087](#), *Food Waste Policies*
- [2018-R-0254](#), *Banning Plastic Straws*

Transportation and Climate Initiative

In December 2020, Governor Lamont signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) agreeing to work with other jurisdictions to cap and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. This [Transportation and Climate Initiative Program](#) (TCI-P) will (1) have a declining cap on carbon dioxide pollution from gasoline and on-road diesel fuel and (2) require fuel suppliers to buy auctioned allowances to cover the fuel’s fossil fuel-based emissions. Proceeds from the auction must be reinvested in clean transportation and infrastructure. Connecticut will be taking steps to implement TCI-P by (1) developing and finalizing a Model Rule with the other signatory jurisdictions (currently Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia) that includes certain [design elements](#) and (2) establishing its individual program, which may involve legislative action this session.

Read OLR Report:

- [2019-R-0324](#), *Transportation and Climate Initiative*

Finance, Revenue and Bonding

Municipal Fiscal Stress

Municipal budgets have been strained due to the pandemic's economic impact. The combination of increased costs for pandemic-related expenses, property tax revenue delays and losses, and a desire to ease financial burdens on taxpayers who may be struggling financially has put a significant strain on municipalities' ability to meet their residents' needs. This will likely bring renewed calls for (1) increasing state aid to municipalities or redirecting aid to municipalities based on their fiscal capacity and (2) addressing the fiscal disparities across municipalities.

Revenue Losses in the Next Biennium

OFA analysts expect the economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic to significantly impact the state budget for years to come, resulting in a projected \$4.3 billion deficit for the next biennium. Consequently, the legislature is likely to consider proposals to replace some of the revenue lost during the pandemic recession. This could include proposals to:

1. postpone or reverse tax policy changes scheduled to take effect in FY 21 (listed on p. 16 of OFA's [Fiscal Accountability Report](#)),
2. roll back or eliminate sales tax exemptions or expand the sales tax base to new services, and
3. create new revenue streams from any number of policy changes that the legislature has explored in recent years (e.g., recreational cannabis, sports betting, or internet lottery).

Statutory Debt Cap

The significant drop in state revenues due to the pandemic recession will mean that the legislature will be facing a debt limit problem in FY 22. State law limits the total amount of General Fund-supported state debt the General Assembly can authorize to 1.6 times the estimated net General Fund tax receipts for the fiscal year of the authorization. Based on the November consensus revenue estimates, this means that the legislature will have approximately \$200 million of space under the debt limit for new authorizations for FY 22. (By comparison, the legislature approved nearly \$1.5 billion in new authorizations for FY 21.)

To avoid exceeding the cap and to allow the legislature to approve bonding for new projects, the legislature may seek to (1) reduce or cancel existing authorizations for projects that have not moved forward or (2) increase tax revenue to create more room for borrowing (see "Revenue Losses in the Next Biennium," above).

Read Related Reports:

- OLR Report [2020-R-0291](#), *Issue Brief: Budget Reserve Fund*
- OFA, [Fiscal Accountability Report](#), November 2020
- Office of Policy and Management, [Fiscal Accountability Report](#), FYs 2021-24
- OFA, [Connecticut Tax Expenditure Report](#), February 2020

General Law

Consumer Data Privacy

The legislature may again investigate the concerns and challenges involved in safeguarding consumers' personal information online. The pandemic may have heightened interest in such efforts, in light of the shift to remote learning and telehealth services, which often require consumers to use platforms over which they have limited control. This session, the legislature may look for ways to give consumers more control over their personal data, with the rights to access, modify, delete, or opt-out of the sale of their personal information, among other things.

Occupational Licensing

Last year, the [National Occupational Licensing Learning Consortium](#) developed an action plan to remove unnecessary barriers to labor market entry and improve license portability and reciprocity across states for certain occupations. Given this, the legislature may consider proposals to streamline the state's occupational licensing processes during the 2021 session.

For some occupations, such as home improvement contractors, Connecticut requires professionals to register with the state but does not require them to obtain a license (e.g., there are no experience or education requirements). This session, legislators may discuss ways to reduce the impact of unscrupulous registrants on Connecticut's consumers, while also accounting for the wide range of work they perform. Proposals addressing home improvement contractors may include modifications to the Home Improvement Guaranty Fund. This fund reimburses consumers who have obtained a judgment but are unable to collect from the registered home improvement contractor.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0324](#), *Home Improvement and New Home Builder Guaranty Fund Statistics*
- [2019-R-0130](#), *Residential Contractor Registration*
- [2019-R-0258](#), *Contractor Guaranty Funds in Other States*

- [2019-R-0233](#), *New Home Construction Contractor Requirements*

Government Administration and Elections

Constitutional Restrictions on Voting

Due to concerns about COVID-19, 2020 was the first year that all of the state's eligible voters were allowed to vote by absentee ballot. A record 1.86 million Connecticut residents voted in the November 3 election, with more than 659,000 absentee ballots counted. This year, the legislature may consider a referred constitutional amendment, initially passed in [2019](#), to authorize the legislature to provide by law for in-person, early voting before an election or referendum. To effectuate this, the resolution proposes to eliminate the requirement that election officials receive and declare votes on the day of an election for state officers and state legislators. If the resolution passes in the 2021 session, it will appear on the 2022 general election ballot. If voters approve the amendment in the general election it will become part of the state constitution.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2018-R-0278](#), *Early Voting*
- [2020-R-0319](#), *Issue Brief: Absentee Voting in the 2020 Election*

Higher Education and Employment Advancement

College Enrollment and Affordability

According to the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#), college and university enrollment declined in fall 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among first-year students and at community colleges. Additionally, fewer Connecticut high school seniors have submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) this fall to be eligible for financial aid in the following academic year.

In light of this, in the upcoming session the legislature may address affordability barriers to enrollment. Issues such as continued state funding of the [Plan to Advance Connecticut](#) (PACT) (Connecticut's free community college program for eligible students) and state-led initiatives to encourage FAFSA completion may receive consideration.

Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses

In May 2020, the U.S. Department of Education released new [federal regulations](#) governing campus sexual assault under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX" prohibits sex discrimination at federally funded institutions). Among other things, the new regulations redefine

the conduct that constitutes sexual harassment and create more prescriptive requirements higher education institutions must follow during the investigation and grievance processes. Colleges and universities had to comply with these changes beginning in August 2020.

This year, the legislature may reconsider legislation similar to [SB 19](#) from the 2020 session. For example, it may consider (1) requiring higher education institutions to collect data on campus climate related to sexual assault through anonymous climate surveys, (2) requiring institutions to recommend best practices based on survey results, or (3) generally prohibiting a student or employee who reports or discloses an alleged incident from being disciplined for violating an institution's drug and alcohol policy if the report was made in good faith.

Housing

COVID-19-Related Evictions, Foreclosures, and Homelessness

COVID-19 has brought several housing-related issues to the forefront. Both in the state and across the country, an increased number of renter households and homeowners are facing the possibility of eviction and foreclosure. This session, the legislature may consider proposals aimed at assisting renters and homeowners impacted by the pandemic, as well as preventing and addressing homelessness.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0219](#), *Foreclosure Notification Requirements Applicable to Connecticut Landlords*
- [2020-R-0314](#), *Issue Brief: COVID-19 Housing Assistance*

Right to Housing

In 2020, the Housing Committee favorably reported [sSB 105](#), "An Act Establishing a Right to Housing." In 2021, the committee may once again consider legislation making it a state goal to implement policies that provide every resident with a right to affordable, decent, safe, and stable housing by requiring state agencies and political subdivisions to consider this right when adopting or revising related policies, regulations, or grant criteria.

Human Services

Food Insecurity and Public Assistance

Economic hardship, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in an increase in food insecurity around the state and nation. Food pantries, food distribution centers, and state programs have had to adapt to an increase in demand for food to meet household needs. Since March, the

Department of Social Services (DSS) has made adjustments to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including increasing benefits, in accordance with federal law. The legislature may consider other proposals related to hunger or economic hardship more generally. Or, given budget constraints, the focus may be simply keeping programs at their current levels.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0106](#), *Changes to SNAP Benefits due to the COVID-19 Pandemic*
- [2020-R-0329](#), *Food Insecurity in Connecticut*
- [2020-R-0294](#), *Issue Brief: Public Assistance Programs and COVID-19*

Insurance and Real Estate

Health Insurance Reform

Over the past few years, the Insurance and Real Estate Committee has considered several major health insurance reforms, including a “public option” health insurance program, a health reinsurance program, and programs to reduce the cost of prescription drugs by leveraging state purchasing power or importing them from Canada. Due in part to a shortened session, consideration of these proposals was postponed last session. We again expect the committee to consider similar proposals in 2021.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0271](#), *Issue Brief: Connecticut Health Insurance Reform Proposals*
- [2018-R-0218](#), *Issue Brief: State Health Reinsurance Programs*
- [2018-R-0170](#), *Issue Brief: Importing Prescription Drugs*

Judiciary

Criminal Records Erasure (“Clean Slate”)

In the 2021 legislative session, the legislature may again explore proposals to automatically erase, after a certain period, criminal records for convictions of certain misdemeanors and decriminalized offenses. In 2019, the legislature considered legislation that would have created a process for (1) record erasures for certain misdemeanor criminal convictions after three years and (2) in cases involving decriminalized offenses, the immediate physical destruction of police, court, and prosecutors’ records ([sSB 691](#)). (Under existing law, a person convicted of a crime that was subsequently decriminalized may petition the court to have the associated records erased and the

court must direct all police, prosecutor, and court records related to the case physically destroyed ([CGS § 54-142d](#).)

Gun Seizure from Individuals Posing Imminent Harm

Existing law allows any two police officers (or a state’s attorney), under limited circumstances, to get warrants and seize guns from anyone the officers or attorney have probable cause to believe poses an imminent risk of injuring himself or herself or someone else ([CGS § 29-38c](#)). This session, the legislature may consider proposals to expand the list of individuals who may seek such warrants, such as family or household members or medical professionals. Other proposals may include requiring individuals to prove they are no longer an imminent risk in order to receive their seized guns back, rather than at the end of the court order, which can be up to one year under current law.

Read OLR Report:

- [2020-R-0025](#), *Summary of State Gun Laws*

Recreational Cannabis

Fifteen states have legalized the possession of specified quantities of cannabis (marijuana) for recreational use by adults age 21 and older, generally regulating it in a manner similar to alcohol. In 2019, legislative committees in Connecticut favorably reported bills that would have similarly legalized and regulated cannabis for adult recreational use. For example, the Judiciary Committee voted out a bill ([sSB 1085](#)) that would have allowed (1) individuals age 21 or older to possess up to 1.5 ounces of cannabis under specified conditions and (2) anyone convicted for possessing up to that amount to file a court petition to erase the related police, court, and prosecutorial records. This session, the legislature will likely consider similar proposals.

Read OLR Report:

- [2020-R-0306](#), *Issue Brief: Recreational Marijuana*

Labor and Public Employees

Criminal Histories and Employment

[PA 19-142](#) established the [Council on the Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record](#) to develop legislative recommendations to reduce or eliminate discrimination based on a person’s criminal history. In 2020, the Labor and Public Employees Committee heard [HB 5389](#), which, in a variety of different contexts, would have made it a discriminatory practice to take certain actions against

someone because of his or her criminal history. The committee may revisit the issue this session, particularly regarding discriminatory employment practices.

Unemployment Compensation

With the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increasing unemployment, the state's unemployment compensation trust fund recently became insolvent. According to the [Department of Labor](#), as of December 16, 2020, the state had borrowed \$402 million from the Federal Unemployment Account in order to continue paying unemployment benefits. This session, the legislature may explore various ways to (1) enhance unemployment benefits for those who need them most and (2) limit the tax liability of employers related to the federal loans.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2019-R-0227](#), *OLR Backgrounder: State and Federal Unemployment Tax*
- [2020-R-0145](#), *Unemployment Systems in Connecticut and Nearby States*
- [2020-R-0276](#), *Issue Brief: Funding the Unemployment System*

Planning and Development

Housing Choice

In recent sessions, the legislature has looked for ways to increase the diversity of housing choice in Connecticut's towns, especially in towns with characteristics linked to educational, economic, and social success (e.g., quality schools and low unemployment). This session the legislature may look for ways to compel municipalities to adopt zoning regulations that provide opportunities for developing a variety of housing types, including multifamily housing that is accessible to lower-income individuals.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2017-R-0158](#), *Issue Brief: CGS § 8-30g, the Affordable Housing Land Use Appeals Procedure*
- [2020-R-0052](#), *Local Plans of Conservation and Development (Updated)*
- [2018-R-0115](#), *Municipal Affordable Housing Stock (2010-2017)*

Municipal Financial Stress and Taxpayer Burden

Municipalities across the state continue to face fiscal stress as their capacity to generate property tax revenue cannot keep pace with the rising cost of providing local services. At the same time,

rising property taxes are straining many property owners' finances. This session, the legislature may again consider proposals geared toward supplementing municipal revenue streams or providing tax relief to certain property owners, like those living on fixed incomes.

Read OLR Report:

- [2020-R-0017](#), *Property Tax Exemptions for Nonprofits*

Public Health

Pandemic Response and Preparedness

This legislative session begins almost 10 months after the governor declared public health and civil preparedness emergencies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The legislature will likely consider proposals from the Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group and others on the state's response to the pandemic and efforts to enhance preparation for future pandemics or similar emergencies. For example, these proposals may address (1) personal protective equipment (PPE) supply and distribution and (2) health care staffing and workforce needs.

School Immunization Requirements

All states require children to receive certain vaccinations before school admission and grant exemptions for medical reasons. Like most states, Connecticut provides a religious exemption that generally allows parents or guardians to opt out of vaccinating their children if they document that doing so would contradict their religious beliefs.

In 2020, the Public Health Committee favorably reported bills that would (1) eliminate the religious exemption from such immunization requirements, while grandfathering in children who already have a religious exemption under current law; (2) modify the form to obtain a medical exemption and establish an advisory committee to advise the public health commissioner on issues concerning medical exemptions; and (3) require insurance coverage for certain immunization consultations ([sHB 5044](#) and [HB 5043](#)). In 2021, the legislature may again consider similar legislation on this issue, as well as proposals to include COVID-19 vaccinations as part of school and child care facility requirements.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2019-R-0235](#), *Nonmedical Exemptions from Childhood Immunization Requirements*
- [2019-R-0241](#), *States Without Religious Exemptions to Childhood Immunization Requirements*

- [2019-R-0243](#), *Public Education Options for Students Who Opt Not to be Immunized*
- [2019-R-0245](#), *Connecticut's School Immunization Requirements*

Telehealth

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the governor issued several executive orders last spring to modify the practice of telehealth to ensure residents had continued access to care. During the July 2020 Special Session, the legislature enacted [PA 20-2](#), which temporarily codified several provisions of the governor's orders. Among other things, the new act (1) expanded the types of health professionals authorized to provide telehealth services, (2) expanded allowable service delivery methods, (3) established requirements for telehealth providers seeking payment from underinsured and uninsured patients, and (4) expanded requirements for insurance coverage of telehealth services.

Because the new law is effective only through March 15, 2021, the legislature will likely consider proposals on this topic during the 2021 session. Such proposals may include (1) extending the act's sunset date past March 15, 2021, or (2) making some of the act's provisions permanent.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0138](#), *COVID-19 Executive Orders Concerning Telehealth*
- [2020-R-0226](#), *Recent Changes to Connecticut's Telehealth Law*

Public Safety and Security

Gaming Expansion

Before the 2020 session was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislature considered several proposals for expanding gaming in Connecticut. These included (1) legalizing and taxing wagers on sports, (2) authorizing the sale of lottery tickets for lottery draw games over the Internet, and (3) establishing online casino gaming (e.g., blackjack and poker). The legislature may consider similar proposals this session.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0035](#), *Comparison of Sports Wagering Tax Rates*
- [2018-R-0224](#), *Issue Brief: Sports Betting*
- [2018-R-0256](#), *Connecticut Casino Gaming Timeline*

Transportation

Pedestrian and Cyclist Safety

According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) and the [Governor's Highway Association](#), pedestrian deaths have been on the rise in the past few years. The legislature may revisit proposals aimed at protecting pedestrians and cyclists, including (1) requiring drivers to stop when pedestrians signal intent to cross at a crosswalk, (2) giving municipalities flexibility to lower speed limits in their jurisdictions, (3) authorizing the use of automated speed enforcement cameras, and (4) increasing distracted driving fines.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0232](#), *Speed Limits*
- [2017-R-0217](#), *Red Light and Speed Cameras*
- [2016-R-0179](#), *Crosswalk Laws in Connecticut and Nearby States*

Special Transportation Fund

Although legislative actions in the past few years had generally stabilized the Special Transportation Fund (STF) in the short term, the fallout of the pandemic has created more challenges for the fund. Reduced revenue from fuel taxes and other changes have caused an operating deficit for FY 21 and the next few fiscal years, and OFA [projects](#) that, without adjustments, the fund will be insolvent in FY 24.

Additionally, the fund continues to face a long-term challenge because the growth in STF-supported debt service outpaces the growth in revenue, which will hamper the state's ability to meet its considerable transportation infrastructure needs through the current transportation bonding program.

This session, the legislature will likely consider ways to close the deficit for FY 21 and the next biennium. It may also consider ways to increase the STF's revenue or reduce its expenditures to create more borrowing capacity to fund transportation projects in the long-term.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2021-R-0003](#), *Motor Fuel Taxes*
- [2019-R-0160](#), *Special Transportation Fund*
- [2018-R-0293](#), *Issue Brief: Special Transportation Fund*

Veterans' Affairs

Veterans' Aid and Benefits

This session, the legislature may continue to explore proposals that increase aid to, and benefits for, Connecticut veterans. These proposals may include (1) increasing property tax exemption amounts, (2) expanding those who qualify for veterans' benefits, and (3) exempting specific groups of veterans from certain fees.

Read OLR Reports:

- [2020-R-0244](#), *State Benefits for Veterans' Surviving Spouses*
- [2020-R-0205](#), *OLR Backgrounder: Veterans' Property Tax Exemptions*
- [2019-R-0166](#), *OLR Backgrounder: State Veterans' Benefits*

Connecticut State Guard

Just as it did in [2020](#), the legislature may consider a proposal to clarify when the Governor may raise a Connecticut State Guard and the scope of the duties the State Guard may perform. In doing so, the legislature may amend the existing statute to more closely align it with current practice and a 2017 Attorney General [opinion](#). Currently, [CGS § 27-9](#) states that the Governor may raise a state guard when the Connecticut National Guard (CTNG) is or will be called into federal service. (CTNG has been called into federal service since September 11, 2001.) Another provision, [CGS § 27-10](#), allows the Governor to call the State Guard into active duty whenever it is in the interest of the state and in such a manner as will best accomplish its mission.

Read OLR Report:

- [2020-R-0269](#), *OLR Issue Brief: State Veterans' Affairs and Military Agencies*