
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5301 (as amended by House "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION.

SUMMARY

This bill makes various changes in the laws governing workforce development and postsecondary education. Principally, it does the following:

1. entitles veterans living in Connecticut to in-state college tuition rates regardless of their state of residence (§ 1);
2. reduces the membership of the task force studying the costs and benefits of establishing a postsecondary prison education office (§ 2);
3. establishes a 10-member task force to recommend proposed changes to the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program (§ 3);
4. establishes various requirements to assess and address student food insecurity at the state's public colleges and universities (§§ 4-7); and
5. requires the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) to jointly develop a plan to increase the number of child care facilities on or near each regional community technical college and state university campus (§ 8).

The bill also makes several technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2022, except the provisions about the two task forces are effective upon passage.

*House Amendment "A" replaces the underlying bill language

requiring BOR to study workforce development and postsecondary education issues in the state with the provisions summarized above.

§ 1 — IN-STATE TUITION RATES FOR VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE DEPENDENTS

By law, the state’s public colleges and universities must waive tuition (not including other charges, like room and board) exceeding federal veterans’ benefits via the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill for eligible veterans accepted at an approved institution and living in the state at the time of the acceptance. (The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill generally covers a percentage of in-state tuition costs at public institutions, based on the eligible veteran’s length of service, ranging from 50% of these costs for at least 90 days of service up to 100% of costs for at least 36 months of service.) This state tuition waiver benefit applies to (1) wartime veterans and (2) veterans who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable or for bad conduct and have a “qualifying condition” (i.e., a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, or who have disclosed a military sexual trauma experience) (CGS § 27-103).

The bill expands entitlement to in-state student tuition rates to veterans who live in Connecticut, regardless of their state of residence. This allows additional veterans to receive the state tuition waiver that covers the amount of tuition that exceeds their federal tuition benefits. For this the bill defines “veteran” as any person discharged or released, under conditions other than dishonorable, from at least 90 days of active service in the armed forces.

The bill also aligns state law with federal law by extending in-state student classification for tuition purposes only to (1) children and spouses of veterans who are entitled to educational assistance pursuant to the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship and live in Connecticut and (2) eligible dependents to whom Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits can be transferred (see BACKGROUND).

§ 2 — POST-SECONDARY PRISON EDUCATION TASK FORCE

The bill reduces, from 16 to 10, the membership of the task force to study the costs and benefits of establishing a Postsecondary Prison

Education Program Office. It does so by reducing each legislative appointment by one. By law, the task force must study at least nine topics, including space demands for prison education programming in correctional facilities; processes and standards for approving these programs, their curricula, and course materials; and other states' and counties' strategies for increasing the number of people who can access these programs using federal Pell grants (PA 21-132, § 2). Table 1 outlines the membership reduction for each appointing authority.

Table 1: Task Force Membership Reduction Under the Bill

<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Number of Appointees Under PA 21-132</i>	<i>Number of Appointees Under the Bill</i>
House speaker	Three	Two
Senate president pro tempore	Three	Two
House majority leader	Two	One
Senate majority leader	Two	One
House minority leader	Two	One
Senate minority leader	Two	One
N/A	Office of Policy and Management undersecretary for criminal justice or her designee	
N/A	Department of Correction commissioner or his designee	

By law and unchanged by the bill, appointed members may be legislators, and all initial appointments must be made within 30 days after the bill's effective date. The bill also extends the deadline by which the task force must report its findings to the Higher Education and Judiciary committees by one year, from January 1, 2022, to January 1, 2023. Correspondingly, under the bill the task force must terminate on the later of the date it submits the final report or January 1, 2023, rather than 2022 as under current law.

§ 3 — ROBERTA B. WILLIS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM TASK FORCE

The bill establishes a 10-member task force to recommend proposed changes to the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program, which provides merit- and need-based financial assistance to Connecticut undergraduate students attending a two- or four-year college or

university in the state.

Scope

Under the bill, the task force must propose changes in the program that, at a minimum, do the following:

1. provide need-based financial aid to Connecticut residents enrolled at public and independent higher education institutions that (a) promotes access and choice to postsecondary education and (b) focuses on the student;
2. ensure prospective and current students are notified of their initial eligibility for a grant based on their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) without additionally applying to the Office of Higher Education (OHE);
3. annually ensure participating public and independent higher education institutions are aware of the initial student eligibility criteria and corresponding grant award amount for the following academic year on or before December first prior to the grant year, and
4. consider the feasibility of including private occupational schools' participation in the grant program and estimate the cost of providing need and merit-based grants or need-based grants for the eligible costs of state residents attending those schools.

Membership

Under the bill, the task force must have the following ten members:

1. two each appointed by the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore;
2. one each appointed by the House and Senate majority leaders;
3. one each appointed by the House and Senate minority leaders;
4. the Chief Workforce Officer (CWO) or her designee; and

5. the OHE executive director or his designee.

The bill allows any members appointed by legislative leaders to be General Assembly members. Additionally, it requires all appointments to be made within 30 days of the bill's passage and any vacancy to be filled by the appointing authority.

Leadership, Staff, and Deadlines

The bill requires the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore to choose the task force chairpersons from among its members. These chairpersons must schedule the task force's first meeting to be held within 60 days of the bill's passage. The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee's administrative staff must serve as the task force staff.

Under the bill, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee by January 1, 2023. The task force terminates on this date or the date it submits the report, whichever is later.

§§ 4-7 — FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Food Insecurity Student Survey

The bill establishes various requirements to assess and address food insecurity for the state's public college and university students. It defines "food insecurity" or "food insecure" as the lack of financial resources needed to consistently access enough food for an active and healthy life. Specifically, it requires public colleges and universities to do the following:

1. starting by March 1, 2023, biennially administer a survey to enrolled students to collect data on student food insecurity and the causes and reasons for it;
2. starting by October 1, 2023, biennially evaluate their services and programs addressing the needs of food-insecure students and, based on the survey results, amend any existing services and programs or establish a new service or program to address these

needs;

3. starting by January 1, 2024, biennially report to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee on the (a) survey results; (b) food insecurity services and programs offered, including any changes made based on the survey results; and (c) number of students who used the services and programs in the preceding two years; and
4. notify students about eligibility requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Under the bill, the survey administered by each public college and university must include questions about a student's (1) demographic background, including age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, marital status, income, education, and employment; (2) specific barriers to food access; and (3) awareness or use of community or institutional resources to address food insecurity and barriers to accessing these resources. Under the bill, the services or programs that public colleges and universities establish or modify to address student food insecurity may include the following:

1. giving assistance and support for students to enroll in SNAP or any other state or federal nutrition assistance or financial aid program, including programs for families, if applicable;
2. providing low-cost food or meal plan options on campus;
3. allowing students additional meals through extra card swipes on meal plans;
4. providing financial assistance or other financial student aid;
5. establishing or expanding on-campus food pantries; and
6. starting a fruit and vegetable incentive program or making one available through an agreement with a local nonprofit or government agency.

Under the bill, a “fruit and vegetable incentive program” is a program that offers participants matching funds to purchase fruits and vegetables in any increment relative to their cost.

The bill requires each institution, when amending or establishing services and programs based on survey results, to set a goal of serving at least 10% of the students identified in the survey as being food insecure.

SNAP Eligibility for Public College and University Students

Beginning July 1, 2023, and annually afterwards, the bill requires BOR and BOT to consult with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to identify and maximize the number and type of their offered educational programs that would (1) increase a student’s employability and (2) qualify as an employment and training program under SNAP student eligibility requirements (see BACKGROUND). By January 1, 2024, BOR, BOT, and DSS must post and regularly update the list of these identified programs offered at each institution under the boards’ governance on their respective websites. The bill allows any of the state’s public colleges and universities to consult with DSS to identify these programs.

The bill requires each public higher education institution to annually notify students about SNAP by any means of communication, including electronic mail. This notice must include (1) program eligibility requirements, (2) the program application process, and (3) where to find assistance with application completion.

The bill requires DSS, when determining SNAP eligibility and to the extent allowed by federal law (7 C.F.R. § 273.5), to consider a state public college or university student to be participating in a state or federally financed work-study program as soon as the enrolled student is approved for the program as part of his or her financial aid package, regardless of whether the student has received his or her work-study program assignment yet. Under federal law, students are eligible to receive SNAP benefits if they are actively participating in a state- or federally-funded work-study program (see BACKGROUND).

§ 8 — CHILD CARE CENTERS NEAR REGIONAL COMMUNITY-TECHNICAL COLLEGE AND STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

The bill requires OEC and BOR to jointly develop a plan to increase the number of OEC-licensed child care centers or group childcare homes on or near each regional community technical college and state university campus. The plan must include the development, expansion, and maintenance of these facilities that (1) are utilized by an early childhood education program for instructional purposes or (2) provide evening and weekend child care services in accordance with college or university course schedules.

Under the bill, the plan’s goals are the following:

1. provide quality child care services for the staff, students, and surrounding community of each campus;
2. address the child care needs of nontraditional students; and
3. foster relationships between the colleges and universities and their surrounding communities.

The bill requires OEC and BOR, by January 1, 2023, to jointly submit the developed plan, including an estimated budget and implementation timeline for the development of additional child care facilities, to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement and Appropriations committees.

BACKGROUND

Isakson and Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020

The federal Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315) enhances or expands education benefits for veterans, service members, families, and survivors. Among other things, it expands (1) eligibility for the Fry Scholarship and (2) the transfer of entitlement (i.e., eligibility) for certain dependents under the post 9/11 G.I. Bill.

SNAP Student Eligibility

Students enrolled at least half-time at a higher education institution are generally ineligible for SNAP unless they qualify for an exemption. These exemptions include participating in a (1) state- or federally-financed work-study program during the regular school year or (2) SNAP employment and training program or other eligible program.

A student participating in a federally-financed work-study program is eligible for SNAP under the exemption if (1) he or she is approved for work-study at the time of application for SNAP benefits, (2) the work-study is approved for the school term, and (3) he or she anticipates actually working during that time. The exemption begins the month the school semester starts or the month the work-study is approved, whichever is later (7 C.F.R. § 273.5(b)(6)).

The federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 temporarily extends SNAP eligibility to students enrolled at least half-time at a higher education institution who either (1) are eligible to participate in a state- or federally-funded work-study program during the academic year or (2) have an expected family contribution of zero in the academic year and meet all other SNAP eligibility criteria. This benefit extension will remain in effect until 30 days after the COVID-19 public health emergency ends (P.L. 116-260, § 702(e)(1)(B)(i)).

Related Bills

sHB 5033 (File 23), reported favorably by the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, contains similar provisions on food-insecure students at public higher education institutions.

sHB 5035 (File 14), reported favorably by the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, contains similar provisions on in-state tuition for veterans and eligible dependents.

sHB 5115 (File 271), reported favorably by the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, contains identical provisions on the development of child care centers on or near regional community college and state university campuses.

sHB 5128 (File 24), reported favorably by the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, contains identical provisions on reducing the number of members on the Post-Secondary Prison Education Task Force.

sHB 5137 (File 227), reported favorably by the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, requires the CWO and the OHE executive director to study proposed changes to the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 18 Nay 5 (03/17/2022)