
OLR Bill Analysis

SB 421

AN ACT CONCERNING LAW ENFORCEMENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

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BACKGROUND

§§ 1 & 21 — LAW ENFORCEMENT PROFESSION PROMOTION CAMPAIGN

Requires DESPP to develop a statewide campaign promoting the law enforcement profession and appropriates \$500,000 for this purpose

This bill requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) commissioner, by January 1, 2025, to develop a

statewide campaign to promote the law enforcement profession that uses a variety of media, including social media. In developing the campaign, the commissioner may consult with the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association and any other entities he deems appropriate.

The bill appropriates \$500,000 from the General Fund for FY 25 to DESPP for the campaign.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 2 — POLICE CADET/EXPLORER PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Requires DESPP to (1) employ a full-time program coordinator to oversee police cadet and explorer programs and (2) allocate \$5,000 each fiscal year to every municipal police department that operates or plans to operate these programs

The bill requires DESPP to employ a full-time program coordinator to coordinate and oversee police cadet and explorer programs, implement state standards and a best practices guide for them, and encourage creating and expanding the programs throughout the state.

Starting with FY 25, the department must annually allocate \$5,000 to each municipal police department that operates, or plans to operate, a cadet or explorer program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 3 — POLICE BASIC TRAINING REIMBURSEMENT GRANTS

Requires DESPP to reimburse municipal police departments for the cost of police officer basic training through an annual grant program

The bill requires DESPP to create a grant program for reimbursing municipal police departments for the cost of police officer basic training. The department must (1) set the grant application process and forms and (2) post a description of the program that includes the eligibility criteria and application process. The posting must be in a conspicuous place on DESPP's website by October 1, 2024. Grants must be provided annually starting FY 25.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 4 — STUDY ON SUBSTITUTING COLLEGE COURSES FOR POLICE BASIC TRAINING

Requires POST to study whether college-level criminal justice courses can be substituted for its police basic training courses

The bill requires the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) to examine the criminal justice courses offered by colleges and universities in Connecticut and determine (1) if the courses equal those required as part of a police officer's minimum basic law enforcement training at the Connecticut Police Academy and (2) under what conditions a police trainee would not need to complete an academy course because he or she had already completed an equivalent college-level course. By January 1, 2025, POST must submit a report of its examination and determination to the Public Safety and Security Committee.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 5 — LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT NONCITIZENS AS POLICE OFFICERS

Prohibits denying someone certification or employment as a police officer only because he or she is a lawful permanent resident noncitizen

The bill prohibits POST from denying police officer certification and law enforcement units from denying someone employment as a police officer only because he or she is a lawful permanent resident noncitizen. (See BACKGROUND for the bill's definition of "law enforcement units" and "police officer.")

The bill also makes a technical change.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 6 — POLICE SALARY INCREASE GRANTS

Requires DESPP, starting FY 25, to provide annual grants to the top 10 most populous municipalities to increase their police officers' salaries

The bill requires DESPP to create a grant program for increasing police officer salaries in the top 10 most populous municipalities. Grants must be provided annually starting FY 25. The bill prohibits recipients from using the grant for any purpose other than increasing their police officers' salaries.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 7 — RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICE BONUSES

Requires DESPP and POST to create a report with recommendations on providing bonuses to new and existing police officers

By January 1, 2025, the bill requires DESPP and POST to jointly submit a report to the Public Safety and Security Committee with recommendations on providing bonuses to encourage individuals to begin and continue careers as police officers. Specifically, the report must include recommendations for a schedule of bonuses to be awarded to (1) new officers when they begin service and (2) existing officers based on years of service.

Under the bill, DESPP and POST may consult with municipal police chiefs and any other individuals or entities in developing their recommendations.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 8 — HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES PATHWAY

Requires the Board of Regents, UConn Board of Trustees, and POST to take specific actions towards helping police officers earn higher education degrees

By January 1, 2025, the bill requires the Board of Regents for Higher Education, UConn's Board of Trustees, and POST to jointly submit a report to the Public Safety and Security Committee that includes a career pathway and schedule that they must develop. The pathway must help police officers earn higher education degrees and include a schedule of credits that officers may receive at UConn (and all its campuses) and the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities for the training they received in order to be certified, and maintain their certification, as police officers.

The boards and POST must promote this pathway to encourage police officers to earn higher education degrees, and their report must describe their plans for promoting it.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§§ 9-11 — TUITION WAIVERS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND DEPENDENT CHILDREN

Provides tuition waivers for the state's public colleges and universities to police officers employed for at least two years and any dependent child of an officer employed for at least five years

The bill requires UConn, the Connecticut State University System, and the regional community-technical colleges to waive tuition for (1) a police officer who has at least two years of service as an officer in Connecticut and (2) any dependent child of a police officer who has at least five years of service as an officer in the state. The waivers apply to tuition fees for any undergraduate or graduate degree programs as applicable.

Under existing law, the schools must waive tuition for certain other categories of students (e.g., surviving children of people who died while serving in active duty in the armed forces).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 12 — LOAN REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM FOR POLICE OFFICERS

Requires OHE to create an annual grant program to give up to \$5,000 a year, for up to 10 years, to police officers who have been employed for at least 10 years to reimburse their federal or state educational loans

The bill requires the Office of Higher Education (OHE), in collaboration with DESPP, to create a loan reimbursement program for individuals employed as police officers in Connecticut for at least 10 years and who otherwise satisfy OHE's eligibility criteria.

Under the program, eligible officers may receive an annual grant to help reimburse their federal or state educational loan payments for up to 10 years. The grant may be for up to 10% of their loans, but no more than \$5,000 in any year, and only to reimburse loan payments made while the person is employed as a police officer.

Under the bill, the OHE executive director sets the program application process. The office may accept gifts, grants, and donations from any source, public or private, for the program. Grants must be awarded annually starting FY 25. The bill prohibits unexpended funds from lapsing at the end of a fiscal year and instead requires that they be available for the next fiscal year.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 13 — PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION

Exempts \$10,000 in property taxes for police officers residing in distressed municipalities

The bill exempts \$10,000 in property taxes on property belonging to, or held in trust for, a police officer who resides in a Connecticut distressed municipality. (See BACKGROUND for the bill’s definition of “distressed municipality.”)

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2024, and applicable to assessment years starting on or after that date.

§ 14 — CHFA ASSISTANCE FOR HOME PURCHASES

Requires enhanced assistance by the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to police officers seeking to buy a house in the communities they serve

The bill requires the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to enhance assistance available to police officers who seek to purchase a house as an officer’s principal residence in the community he or she serves. This assistance must prioritize first-time homebuyers and include mortgage or down payment assistance or any other appropriate housing subsidies. The terms of any mortgage assistance must allow the mortgagee to realize a reasonable portion of the equity gain when the mortgaged property is sold.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 15 — STUDIES ON DEFERRED RETIREMENT OPTION PLANS AND RETIREMENT MEDICAL BENEFITS

Requires the State Retirement Commission to study (1) deferred retirement option plans towards developing one for police officers and (2) existing retirement medical benefits provided to police officers and their spouses

The bill requires the State Retirement Commission to study:

1. deferred retirement option plans, and make recommendations for developing a state-administered plan open to any police officer in Connecticut; and
2. the types and levels of retirement medical benefits provided to police officers and their spouses in the state and make

recommendations on providing the benefits.

As part of its studies, the commission may consult with DESPP, municipal police departments, and any other entities it deems appropriate. The commission must report its findings and recommendations to the Public Safety and Security Committee by January 1, 2025.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 16 — STATE POLICE OFFICER RETIREES RETURNING TO SERVICE

Directs the governor to enter negotiations to amend the state police officers collective bargaining agreement to set conditions for retired officers to return to service

By October 1, 2024, the bill requires the governor to start negotiating with the state police officers union to seek amendments to their collective bargaining agreement that would set conditions under which a retired state police officer may return to service and (1) resume earning credit toward retirement benefits, in the same way as the retired officer earned credit before retirement, and (2) be eligible for earning his or her pre-retirement benefits.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 17 — MUNICIPAL POLICE OFFICER RETIREES RETURNING TO SERVICE

Generally, requires collective bargaining agreements between municipalities and municipal police officers to allow retired, POST-certified officers to return to part- or full-time employment

The bill requires each collective bargaining agreement entered into or amended on or after July 1, 2024, between a municipality and a union that represents the municipality's police officers to allow officers who retire and remain POST-certified to return to part- or full-time employment as a police officer with the municipality while collecting his or her pension, to the maximum extent allowed under state and federal law.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 18 — VOLUNTEER POLICE AUXILIARY TASK FORCE

Creates a nine-member task force to (1) study the volunteer police auxiliary force and (2) make recommendations for improving and maximizing the force

The bill creates a nine-member task force to study the volunteer police auxiliary force and recommend ways to improve its organization and maximize the services that auxiliary state police and municipal police officers may provide.

The task force members must be appointed within 30 days after the bill passes. The members and their appointees are as follows:

1. two appointments by the governor;
2. one appointment each by the top six legislative leaders; and
3. the DESPP commissioner, or his designee.

The bill allows legislative appointees to be General Assembly members. The House speaker and Senate president pro tempore must select the task force's chairpersons from the members. The chairpersons must schedule the first task force meeting, to be held within 60 days after the bill passes, and the Public Safety and Security Committee administrative staff must serve as the task force's administrative staff.

The bill requires the task force to report its findings and recommendations to the Public Safety and Security Committee by January 1, 2025. The task force terminates on that date or when it submits the report, whichever is later.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 19 — DRONE PILOT PROGRAM

Provides drones to law enforcement units in FY 25 through a DESPP pilot program

For FY 25, the bill requires DESPP to develop a pilot program to give law enforcement units unmanned aerial vehicles (i.e., drones) to respond to service requests, assist units in assessing the dangers and needs at the scene of a request before a police officer arrives, and enhance police officer safety and the services that units provide to the public.

By October 1, 2024, the department must (1) develop the program's eligibility criteria, application forms, and deadlines; (2) post a description of the program on DESPP's website that includes the criteria, forms, and deadlines; and (3) notify units about the opportunity to apply for the program. In identifying units for participation, DESPP must give priority to those that would most benefit from the program, including those with reduced staffing levels.

By January 1, 2026, each participating unit must submit a report to DESPP describing the unit's use of its drones, their impact on its ability to provide services to the public, and any recommendations for the continuation or improvement of the pilot program.

DESPP must also report, by July 1, 2026, to the Public Safety and Security Committee on the program. The report must include (1) information on the units that applied, which ones were chosen to participate, and the reasons for choosing them; (2) a summary of the reports submitted by participating units; (3) an analysis of the pilot program's results; and (4) recommendations on the continuation or expansion of the pilot, funding needs, and any necessary legislation.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 20 — POLICE MENTAL HEALTH PILOT PROGRAM

Increases police officer mental health assistance for FY 25 through a DESPP pilot program, within available appropriations

For FY 25, the bill requires DESPP to administer, within available appropriations, a pilot program to enhance programs and initiatives addressing the mental health needs of police officers at one or more law enforcement units with more than 300 officers.

The program may include the development or enhancement of peer-to-peer support programs, programs that train officers to help themselves and fellow officers deal with mental health issues associated with their jobs, programs that employ a psychologist or other mental health professionals within the unit to help officers with their mental health needs, employee assistance programs, and any other programs and resources that may address officers' mental health needs.

By October 1, 2024, the department must (1) develop the program’s eligibility criteria, application forms, and deadlines; (2) post a description of the program on DESPP’s website that includes the criteria, forms, and deadlines; and (3) notify units with more than 300 officers about the opportunity to apply for the program.

By January 1, 2026, each participating unit must submit a report to DESPP describing the programs, services, and resources it provided through the pilot program, their impact on the mental health of its officers, and recommendations for the continuation or improvement of the programs, services, and resources.

DESPP must also report, by July 1, 2026, to the Public Safety and Security Committee on the program. The report must include (1) information on the number of units that applied and which ones were chosen to participate; (2) an analysis of the programs, services, and resources provided by units and their effectiveness in addressing officers’ mental health needs; (3) a list of programs, services, and resources identified as best practices that could be implemented by units across the state to address the mental health needs of officers; and (4) recommendations on the pilot program, funding for specific programs, services, and resources to address the mental health needs of police officers, and any necessary legislation.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

BACKGROUND

Police Officer and Law Enforcement Unit Definitions

By law and under sections 5, 7-13, 15 and 19-20 of the bill, “police officers” are sworn members of an organized local police department or the State Police; appointed constables who perform criminal law enforcement duties; special police officers appointed under law (e.g., public assistance fraud investigators); or any members of a law enforcement unit who perform police duties (CGS § 7-294a(9)). A “law enforcement unit” is any state or municipal agency or department (or tribal agency or department created and governed under a memorandum of agreement) whose primary functions include

enforcing criminal or traffic laws; preserving public order; protecting life and property; or preventing, detecting, or investigating crime (CGS § 7-294a(8)).

Distressed Municipality

The Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) annually ranks municipalities based on their relative economic and fiscal distress and designates the top 25 as “distressed municipalities” (CGS § 32-9p(b)). Most recently, in 2023, DECD designated the following municipalities as distressed: Ansonia, Bridgeport, Chaplin, Derby, East Hartford, East Haven, Griswold, Hartford, Lisbon, Mansfield, Meriden, Montville, New Britain, New London, Norwich, Plymouth, Putnam, Sprague, Sterling, Torrington, Voluntown, Waterbury, West Haven, Winchester, and Windham.

Related Bills

SB 231 (File 138), favorably reported by the Public Safety and Security Committee, requires DESPP to administer a grant program for law enforcement units and municipal and volunteer fire departments to buy drones. The department must do this within available appropriations, starting in FY 25 and each fiscal year after.

sSB 3, § 4, favorably reported by the General Law Committee, among other things, prohibits public entities (including police and fire departments) from operating drones assembled or manufactured by certain foreign entities (e.g., China and Russia) starting October 1, 2025.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 25 Nay 0 (03/19/2024)