
OLR Bill Analysis

SB 421 (File 223, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING LAW ENFORCEMENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

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BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

This bill requires various entities to develop and implement certain plans or pilot programs, or study and report, on ways to recruit and retain police officers and related matters. It also prohibits denying someone certification or employment as a police officer only because he or she is a lawful resident permanent noncitizen.

*Senate Amendment "A" (1) eliminates from the underlying bill provisions on the police cadet/explorer program coordinator, basic training reimbursement grants, police salary increase grants, tuition waivers for police officers and dependent children, loan reimbursement program, property tax exemption, home purchase assistance, deferred retirement benefits study, returning police officer retirees, and drone pilot program; (2) modifies the promotion campaign in the underlying bill by making it a plan and turns the mental health pilot program into an investigation; and (3) adds the provision on the University of New Haven Pilot Program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except the provisions on a plan promoting the law enforcement profession (§ 1) and lawful permanent resident noncitizens as police officers (§ 3) are effective July 1, 2024.

§ 1 — LAW ENFORCEMENT PROFESSION PROMOTION PLAN

Requires DESPP, in consultation with certain entities, to develop, coordinate, and implement a plan to promote the law enforcement profession

The bill requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) commissioner, by January 1, 2025, to develop, coordinate, and implement a plan to promote the law enforcement profession. In doing so, the commissioner must consult with the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association, Connecticut higher education institutions, and any other entities he deems appropriate. The commissioner must implement the plan using a variety of media, including social media.

§ 2 — 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.

§ 2 — UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN PILOT PROGRAM

Requires POST to establish a pilot program by January 1, 2025, with the University of New Haven, to allow a person in basic training at the Connecticut Police Academy to take certain courses at the university before finishing at the academy

Under the bill, POST must establish a pilot program by January 1, 2025, with the University of New Haven, to allow a person attending the Connecticut Police Academy for basic training to complete the training by taking (1) courses related to legal issues at the university, and (2) the remaining courses at the academy. By January 1, 2026, POST must submit a report to the Public Safety and Security Committee with a description of the pilot program, an analysis of the program's impact on police recruitment and training procedures and resources, and recommendations on whether to terminate, continue, revise, or expand the program.

§ 3 — 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.

§ 4 — 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.

§ 5 — HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES PATHWAY

Requires the Board of Regents for Higher Education, 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.

§ 6 — 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.

§ 7 — DEVELOPING AND ENHANCING POLICE MENTAL HEALTH

Requires the DESPP commissioner to investigate ways to develop and enhance programs and initiatives that address police officers' mental health needs

The bill requires the DESPP commissioner to investigate ways to develop and enhance programs and initiatives that address police officers' mental health needs. The investigation must include:

1. an examination of peer-to-peer support programs,
2. programs that train officers to help themselves and fellow officers deal with mental health issues associated with their jobs,
3. programs that employ a psychologist or other mental health professionals within a unit to assist officers with their mental health needs,
4. employee assistance programs, and

5. any other programs and resources that may address a police officer's mental health needs.

In conducting this examination, DESPP must consult with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, POST, the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association, law enforcement units throughout the state, employee organizations that represent police officers, and any other entities the commissioner deems appropriate.

The DESPP commissioner must submit a report, by January 1, 2025, to the Public Safety and Security Committee that includes the investigation results; a list of programs, services, and resources identified as best practices that could be implemented by units across the state to address the officers' mental health needs; and any recommendations for legislation.

BACKGROUND

Police Officer and Law Enforcement Unit Definitions

By law, "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)).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 25 Nay 0 (03/19/2024)