

Public Safety and Security Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-421
AN ACT CONCERNING LAW ENFORCEMENT RECRUITMENT AND
Title: RETENTION.
Vote Date: 3/19/2024
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 3/12/2024
File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Fred Gee, 126th Dist.
Sen. Martin M. Looney, 11th Dist.
Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.
Sen. Herron Gaston, 23rd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

To attract and retain police officers to combat the recent decline in interest in the procession.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Ronnell Higgins, Commissioner, Department of Emergency Service & Public Protection: Supports this bill and states that the increase of state and municipal police officers that this bill will help provide will keep our roads and communities safe. They are already employing some of the tactics in the bill and will be able to expand on them with the financial commitment the bill brings.

Nandini Natarajan, Chief Executive Officer-Executive Director, CT Housing Finance Authority: States that section 14 of the bill, which would require CHFA to “enhance assistance available to police officers who seek to purchase” a home in the community they serve in, is an unnecessary section of the bill as CHFA already offers a Police Homeownership Program and is concerned that adding another version of this would make the homebuying process more complicated rather than actually providing a meaningful benefit.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Martin Looney, President Pro Tempore, Senate Democrats: Supports this bill stating that while there are “a number of innovative ideas” to retain officers and encourage new ones, the educational components of the bill are especially noteworthy. He notes that a better educated police force is better for the community and will lead to career advancement for the officers. He also recommends using educational advancement as a recruiting tool as well suggesting that a person close to earning a degree but short a few credits could be granted those credits after completing the training required to be a police officer, thus making them a certified police officer and a college graduate on the same day.

Vin DeMaio, Police Chief, Town of Clinton: Supports this bill stating that “events in other parts of the country have negatively impacted” the image the public has of police officers and has caused the number of candidates to be police officers to drop. This bill will help “change the current narrative and attract a diverse group of new officers”

Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO: Supports this bill stating that increasing officer salaries to the top 10 most populous municipalities could lead to higher pay across the state, making the law enforcement profession a more lucrative career choice. The bill also proposes studying a Deferred Retirement Option Plan and improvements in healthcare as well as allowing officers to work part-time or full-time and still receive their pensions.

Robert Smedley, Director, Northeast Regional Law Enforcement Educational Association (NERLEEA): Supports this bill, specifically sections 1-3. The Board of NERLEEA is especially excited about recruitment through Police Explorer and Cadet programs.

Florencio Cotto, President, Police Officers Association of CT: Supports this bill stating that it addresses the issues Connecticut is having in retention and recruitment. The schedule of bonuses upon entering service and based on years of service will incentivize individuals to pursue and maintain their law enforcement careers.

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST): Supports this bill and states that we must “do more as a state and a society to recognize and appreciate the services that our police officers...provide to our communities.” She especially appreciates the incentives of tuition assistance and mortgage assistance.

Andrzej Kowalski, Police Officer, CPFU and UCONN PD: Supports the bill and states the ways UCONN PD is working with the community to be “the most progressive police department in the state” such as using less force, having community outreach dogs, and referring students to the Community Standards department. He goes on to say that the education incentive in this bill will help produce officers who use less force, are more tolerant with citizens because they were exposed to diversity at college, receive fewer citizen complaints, and have better written and communication skills. While we cannot require a college degree to become an officer, this incentive program will produce more college educated officers.

Michael Muszynski, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities: Supports this bill and states that local officials want to be doing “everything necessary to support and retain police officers” and this bill, in particular the tuition and housing assistance will assist with that.

Kevin Saunders, President, CT Police and Fire Union: Supports this bill and states that there is a nationwide recruitment and retention issue for law enforcement. The educational incentives and the fact that they extend to dependent children will assist in attracting quality candidates.

Brian Anderson, Legislative Director - AFSCME Council 4: Testified via correspondence in support of specific sections of this bill. They are as follows; Section 6, 7, 13, 14.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Hillary Desideraggio

Date: 3/19/2024