



# Senate

General Assembly

**File No. 535**

January Session, 2025

Substitute Senate Bill No. 1243

*Senate, April 7, 2025*

The Committee on Transportation reported through SEN. COHEN of the 12th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

## **AN ACT CONCERNING BUS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2025*) (a) As used in this section,  
2 "veteran" has the same meaning as provided in subsection (a) of section  
3 27-103 of the general statutes and "fare inspection duties" has the same  
4 meaning as provided in section 13b-2 of the general statutes.

5 (b) Any veteran shall be exempt from payment of the lawful charge  
6 for state-owned or controlled bus public transportation service,  
7 provided such veteran presents to an employee of the Department of  
8 Transportation or a third-party contractor with fare inspection duties or  
9 the driver of such bus, as applicable, a motor vehicle operator's license  
10 or identity card indicating such person's status as a veteran issued in  
11 accordance with the provisions of subsection (e) of section 14-36h of the  
12 general statutes.

13 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2025*) (a) Not later than August 1, 2025,

14 the Commissioner of Transportation shall establish a program to allow  
15 students who are enrolled in grades nine to twelve, inclusive, of a public  
16 school under the jurisdiction of a participating local or regional board of  
17 education to use state-owned or controlled bus public transportation  
18 service without cost or at a reduced cost, in accordance with the contract  
19 negotiated under subsection (b) of this section. A participating local or  
20 regional board of education may obtain passes for the use of such bus  
21 public transportation service under such program and distribute or sell  
22 such passes to its students. The commissioner shall publish information  
23 regarding such program and an application process for such program  
24 on the Department of Transportation's Internet web site in a manner that  
25 the commissioner determines will maximize awareness and  
26 participation by the greatest number of local or regional boards of  
27 education.

28 (b) Upon receipt of an application from a local or regional board of  
29 education to participate in the program, the commissioner may  
30 negotiate the terms and conditions and enter into a contract with such  
31 local or regional board of education. Such terms and conditions shall  
32 include, but need not be limited to, (1) the amount of compensation or  
33 reimbursement required from the local or regional board of education,  
34 and (2) any limitations on the times a student may use state-owned or  
35 controlled bus public transportation service. The compensation or  
36 reimbursement negotiated in the contract shall be in an amount as the  
37 commissioner deems necessary or advisable, provided the amount is  
38 sufficient to ensure that bus public transportation service expenditures  
39 incurred by the department do not increase as a result of the program  
40 and to cover any administrative costs incurred by the department in the  
41 operation of the program. A contract under the program shall be valid  
42 upon the approval of the Office of Policy and Management for a term of  
43 not more than two years, except the first contract with a local or regional  
44 board of education shall not exceed twelve months. Prior to any renewal  
45 of a contract with a local or regional board of education under the  
46 program, the commissioner shall consider prior pass utilization  
47 information and any bus public transportation service expenditure  
48 increases incurred by the department for the purpose of reevaluating

49 the amount of compensation or reimbursement required from such local  
50 or regional board of education.

51 (c) Not later than August 1, 2026, and annually thereafter, the  
52 Commissioner of Transportation shall submit a report to the Secretary  
53 of the Office of Policy and Management on the financial data and pass  
54 utilization for each contract under the program.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	July 1, 2025	New section
Sec. 2	July 1, 2025	New section

**Statement of Legislative Commissioners:**

In Section 1(b), "the provisions of" was inserted before "subsection (e) of section 14-36h" for consistency with standard drafting conventions; and in Section 2(a), in the first sentence, "in accordance with the contract negotiated under subsection (b) of this section" was inserted for clarity and the third sentence was redrafted for clarity.

**TRA**      *Joint Favorable Subst.*

*The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.*

## **OFA Fiscal Note**

### **State Impact:**

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 26 \$	FY 27 \$
Department of Transportation	TF - Cost	See Below	See Below

Note: TF=Transportation Fund

### **Municipal Impact:**

Municipalities	Effect	FY 26 \$	FY 27 \$
Local and Regional School Districts	Potential Cost	Potential	Potential

## **Explanation**

**Section 1** exempts veterans from fares on state-owned or controlled buses. There are an estimated 152,000 veterans in Connecticut; however, there are estimated to be approximately 15,000 veterans who have a license or ID card indicating they are a veteran, which is a requirement for fare-free bus service under the bill.

The number and frequency of veterans who currently ride the bus is unknown, therefore a range of potential costs will be used. If veterans license/ID holders ride the bus at the same rate as the overall adult population in Connecticut, then the annual cost to the STF would be approximately \$182,000 annually. If this population uses the bus twice as much as the adult population, then the cost would be approximately \$364,000 annually.

**Section 2** requires the Department of Transportation (DOT) to establish a discount program for public transportation bus passes for high school students. This section stipulates that any agreements

between DOT and school districts for bus passes do not result in increased costs for DOT. There is a potential cost to districts that choose to enter into agreements with DOT for discounted or free (to students) bus passes. The impact to districts will depend on the terms of any agreement with DOT and the number of passes sold or distributed to students.

***The Out Years***

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation and the terms of any agreement.

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**OLR Bill Analysis****sSB 1243*****AN ACT CONCERNING BUS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.*****SUMMARY**

This bill requires the Department of Transportation (DOT), by August 1, 2025, to create a program allowing certain public school students in grades 9-12 to ride state-owned or -controlled public buses for free or at a reduced cost. Separately, it allows veterans to ride these buses at no cost.

Under the student program, local or regional boards of education ("school boards") may apply to DOT for bus passes and distribute or sell them to their students. The bill allows the department to negotiate program terms and conditions with each applicant, which must include (1) the amount of compensation or reimbursement required from the school board and (2) any limitations on the times of day students may ride the buses. DOT may enter into program contracts with school boards, which must have certain terms and be approved by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) (see below).

The bill requires DOT to publish information on the program and application process on its website in a way that maximizes awareness of and participation in the program. Starting by August 1, 2026, the department must annually report to OPM on the financial data and pass utilization for each program contract.

Regarding veterans, to qualify for free fare, the bill require that they present a Department of Motor Vehicles-issued driver's license or identity card with a veteran designation to the bus driver or employee responsible for fare inspection, as applicable. A "veteran" is anyone honorably discharged or released under honorable conditions, or

released with an other than honorable discharge based on a qualifying condition, from active service in the armed forces (i.e. the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Space Force, Air Force, and any of their reserve components, including the Connecticut National Guard when under federal service) (CGS § 27-103).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

## **STUDENT BUS PROGRAM CONTRACTS**

Under the bill, program contracts between DOT and participating school boards must meet certain requirements. Specifically, DOT's negotiated compensation or reimbursement from a school board must be in an amount the department deems necessary to ensure its bus public transportation service expenditures are not increased by the program (including any administrative program costs). Contracts are valid for up to two years after OPM approves them, however, a board's first contract cannot exceed one year.

Before renewing a program contract, the bill requires DOT to reevaluate compensation from the participating school board. In doing so, it must consider (1) prior bus pass utilization information and (2) any increases in public bus service expenditures.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Related Bill***

SB 1150 (File 252), reported favorably by the Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee, requires the Department of Motor Vehicles to waive the renewal fee for veterans with the veteran designation on their current driver's license or identity card.

HB 6728 (File 259), reported favorably by the Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee, exempts veterans from paying to ride state-owned or -controlled public buses on Veterans' Day.

## **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Transportation Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea     30     Nay   4     (03/19/2025)