

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6074

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STUDENT LOAN REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 3/13/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/20/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Rep. Corey P. Paris, 145th Dist.
Rep. Eleni Kavros DeGraw, 17th Dist.
Rep. Tammy Nuccio, 53rd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would expand the student loan reimbursement program to include volunteering as a firefighter, emergency medical personnel, or for a religious organization as acceptable qualification for student loan reimbursement. This bill would allow for a wider scope on what volunteering can be defined as, making it more accessible to people in need of student loan reimbursement.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language extends eligibility for the student loan reimbursement program to Stone Academy students who were enrolled in the practical nurse education program between November 1, 2021 and February 28, 2023. It also expands to all 501(C)(3) organizations, adds armed forces of the United States and unpaid work that was completed for a certificate or degree program as approved exemptions for the required volunteer hours. The substitute language requires the Office of Higher Education to establish a hardship waiver.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Office of Higher Education, Commissioner, Timothy D. Larson](#): Commissioner Larson opposes the bill due to the funding for the program not being included in the current version of the Governor's Budget. He states that the Office of Higher Education supports the intent of

specifying and expanding types of volunteer opportunities which would be accepted by the program if this bill were to pass.

[Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, Chancellor, Terrence Cheng](#): Chancellor Cheng states that the clarification and expansion that this bill would make on the student loan reimbursement program would incentivize public service and strengthen community relations through the volunteering.

[The Connecticut State Advisory Council for Special Education, Legislative Committee Chair, M. Jeffry Spahr, Esq.](#): Supports. Suggests that the volunteer hours be expanded to include students who are studying in mental health and education and let them utilize their required practicum hours. They stated that careers such as school psychology require many hours of volunteer hours and other internship requirements that they would like to see be allowed as volunteer hours in the student loan reimbursement program. They believe that this would provide tuition relief for local students and incentivize special education and mental health careers.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Association of Connecticut Ambulance Providers, President, Greg Allard](#): States that this bill acknowledges the contribution of volunteer firefighters and emergency medical service providers, which they state is an industry which has trouble with retention. They state if this bill were to pass that it could strengthen the emergency response system and thus strengthen the communities that they serve.

[Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments, Executive Director, Samuel S. Gold, ACIP](#): States that Connecticut has an issue with obtaining young volunteers to staff essential emergency services like firefighting and ambulance corps, and that this program could help gain those younger volunteers. Lastly, they ask "what are the tax implications of student loan reimbursement and should this reimbursement be made exempt from Connecticut taxes?".

[Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance \(The Alliance\), Public Policy and Advocacy Associate, Monika Nugent](#): Supports the intent of the bill with a suggestion to include an exemption from volunteer hours for non-profit workers. States that recruiting and retaining staff is challenging due to long hours which lead to high rates of burn out for staff. They state that the long hours are a reason non-profit staff are unable to volunteer themselves yet are working alongside others who volunteer for the student loan reimbursement. They believe that if non-profit staff were exempt from volunteer hours for student loan reimbursement, non-profit organizations might have an easier time with recruitment and retainment.

[Norwalk Federation of Teachers, President, Mary Yordon](#): Suggests that student teaching qualify as volunteer hours served for the student loan reimbursement program as student teachers are required to complete 350 unpaid hours.

[AFT Connecticut, Executive Vice President, John Brady](#): Suggests educators and healthcare workers be given an exemption for volunteer hours when considering the hours of unpaid student teaching and clinical hours that must be completed to become a teacher or

healthcare worker. States that adding this exemption to the bill could be a tool used to address the shortage in both education and healthcare.

[Michael Esposito](#): Suggests an exemption to the student loan reimbursement program for individuals who cannot complete volunteer hours due to a hardship. States that he had cancer which prevented him from volunteering but was qualified for the program in all other ways.

[Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Senior Public Policy Officer, Chris Senecal](#): States that the need for services have gone up for non-profit organizations while economic support has decreased. They state that people volunteering with non-profits, faith, government emergency services, and other community-based organizations could end up inspiring to stay in the line of work, creating a long-lasting impact on communities.

[Mario Volpe](#): Suggests to expand the student loan reimbursement program to include a hardship waiver for those with serious chronic illnesses or other conditions that would prevent them from completing their volunteer hours where they are otherwise qualified.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Megan Villanova

Date: 3/25/25