

Government Oversight Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6931

AN ACT CONCERNING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DUE TO AN EMPLOYER

Title: OTHER THAN THE STATE UNDER THE STATE CODE OF ETHICS.

Vote Date: 2/25/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/18/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Oversight Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill expands conflicts of interest in the state code of ethics to any non-state employer of an official, a state employee, their spouse or a business that is associated with any of the parties. The bill clarifies that in the case of an elected official, these conflicts only occur if the official has actual knowledge, (rather than reason to believe or to expect), that the non-state employer or business will derive a direct monetary gain or loss by reason of their official activities. In instances where these conflicts do occur, the official is required to excuse themselves from the matter prior to taking any type of action, or prepare a signed written statement explaining why, despite the conflict, they are still able to vote or participate fairly and objectively, and to submit a copy of this statement to the Office of State Ethics and enter a copy of the statement in the journal or minutes of the state agency to which the official has been elected.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Peter Lewandowski, State of CT Office of State Ethics, Executive Director:

Supports this bill as it aims to increase accountability among government officials and those around them by expanding code of ethics to apply to more than just state employees. Mr. Lewandowski seeks this change to correct what largely seems like an oversight. It is not uncommon for executive branch officials and employees to engage nonstate entities for private employment. The proposed amendment to the existing conflict of interest law will strengthen it by prohibiting state officials and employees from taking official action to benefit their nonstate employers and nonstate employers of their spouses.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Olivia Rinkes:

Supports the bill because it will strengthen transparency and protections against conflicts of interest. Feels this is necessary due to the digitalization of public records and that there is a data security aspect to this all. Ms. Rinkes feels this bill could also go further by including data privacy protections, preventing governmental misuse by reducing the ability of elected officials, state employees, and state departments to engage in decision making, policy making, and other actions, when they, their spouses or dependents, and employees or employers stand to gain or lose financially or poses another form of conflict of interest, and prevent these conflicts from influencing state actions and resource. She also urges legislators to pass this swiftly to prevent the influence of corporate cannabis interests on the Department of Consumer Protection which would negatively impact the medical cannabis industry by further reducing the accessibility of safe, quality cannabis products for individuals who depend on this program to access their medications.

Josiah Schlee, CT Cannawarriors, Medical Cannabis Advocate:

Supports this bill because of the implication it could have on the cannabis industry.

Christina Capitan, CT CannaWarriors, Co-Founder:

Supports this bill because it would prevent conflicts of interest in the cannabis regulatory process particularly within the Department of Consumer Protection's Medical Cannabis Program.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Francis Pickering, Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WESTCOG) Executive Director:

Mr. Pickering feels that the committee should consider expanding the scope of these bills to address emerging challenges, including, extending provisions to address relationships with federal officials including appointees and "special government employees". Mr. Pickering has several suggestions for concepts the committee could explore, including various conflict of interest and government ethics reforms, regulation of government technology and cybersecurity, enhanced data protections, election and campaign finance reforms, and crackdown on market manipulation and business abuses.

Reported by Griffin Olshan, Tom Atwood

Date: 3/6/2025