

Public Safety and Security Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1318

AN ACT ASSESSING A CERTAIN FEE FOR DEPOSIT INTO THE

Title: FIREFIGHTERS CANCER RELIEF ACCOUNT.

Vote Date: 3/18/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Finance, Revenue and Bonding

PH Date: 2/18/2025

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. William Heffernan, 115th Dist.](#)

[Rep. Michael D. Quinn, 82nd Dist.](#)

[Rep. Kenneth Gucker, 138th Dist.](#)

REASONS FOR BILL:

The Cancer relief fund was created in 2016, its purpose is to cover wages and other expenses for firefighters who contracted cancer.

SB 1318 seeks to put a fee of five cents per month charge on phone lines throughout the state. This monthly fee will help to create consistent funds in the firefighter's cancer relief account.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Peter Brown, President, Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of Connecticut](#)

Brown notes that occupational cancer has become an epidemic for fire fighters as it accounts for nearly 75% of line of duty deaths per annum. Furthermore, fire fighters face an elevated cancer risk. A law went into effect in 2023 that provided fire fighters with reimbursement should they be diagnosed and treated for cancer. Brown finds that the funding for this program is limited at present and may result in the program becoming a liability for

municipalities. Thus, the implementation of a surcharge on every phone line will help solve this issue.

Jeffrey Tomchik, Director of Legislative and Political Affairs, Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of Connecticut

While the legislature has done well in recognizing the needs of fire fighters and the risks they are exposed to, the Cancer Relief Fund lacks sustained funding. The proposed bill uses a pre-existing revenue source to provide sustainable funding for the program and would build upon existing funds. Overall, this legislation would fulfill a moral commitment to fire fighters and will help aid prevention and research efforts.

John Carew, Legislative Consultant, Connecticut State Firefighters Association

Carew notes that fire fighters are disproportionately affected by cancer and carcinogens such as PFAs. They also note that the legislature created the Fire Fighters Cancer Relief Account with the intention of funding it. If funds were to run out, the needs of fire fighters with cancer would go unmet. The surcharge on telecommunications is small and would help provide relief to those who put their lives on the line to protect Connecticut residents.

Carl Fortuna, First Selectman, Old Saybrook

Fortuna is testifying on behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM). Fortuna notes that the law maintains that if funds for the relief account run out, municipalities cannot be forced to continue to distribute benefits. The proposed legislation makes sure needs are met consistently by enacting a surcharge that would generate annual revenue of approximately \$3 million.

Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO

Hawthorne notes that it is our moral duty as members of society to support those who put their lives at risk to maintain public safety such as fire fighters. By providing financial relief, the legislature would be recognizing the risks faced by fire fighters. This bill would reaffirm Connecticut's commitment to care for those who risk their lives for public safety.

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman, Ridgefield

Marconi is testifying on behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM). They note that while a surcharge on the E-911 system is illegal, a surcharge on the underlying bill is not, and would create sustainable funding for the Fire Fighters Cancer Relief Account. Furthermore, CCM and fire fighters have had consistent dialogue on how to make the program more efficient and taxpayer friendly.

Mike Muszynski, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM)

In 2023, CCM worked with stakeholders to establish the current program. This program essentially provides workers compensation to fire fighters outside of the traditional workers compensation format. Benefits would be initially paid by a given municipality and then the municipalities would be reimbursed by the state. A sustainable funding stream is necessary to maintain service, and the proposed legislation will implement such a stream.

Steve Stephanou, Town of Manchester, Town Manager

The testifier is concerned that in the absence of a steady funding stream for the relief fund municipalities will be forced to choose between their staff or their residents in that they will either have to stop providing support that was provided for in the fund or tax residents.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jake Lestock, CTIA

Lestock and CTIA oppose the proposed legislation on the grounds that there is no connection between the provision of wireless services and the programs that would be funded by the surcharge on wireless services. While Connecticut wireless consumers currently pay a mandatory fee for Public Safety Answer Points, this fee has a link between the fee and service provided. The proposed legislation would not have said linkage. A general fund allocation to the account would be more equitable than a per-line surcharge that does not vary based on type of wireless plan.

Anna Lucey, External Affairs Vice President, New England Connectivity and Telecommunications Association.

The testifier finds the surcharge on phone lines to be analogous to the public benefit charge on electric bills in the state in that it would essentially tax consumers in a way that lacks considerable oversight. Lucey is concerned that the imposition of an additional fee will cause concern among consumers who will feel like they are being unfairly charged.

Reported by: Jack Stein

Date: 3/28/25