
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5046

AN ACT SUPPORTING FIRST RESPONDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

SUMMARY

This bill makes various changes to encourage first responder recruitment and retention. Primarily, the bill:

1. offers certain first responders tuition waivers for attending the Connecticut State Community College (CT State) and Connecticut State University System (CSUS) (§§ 1 & 2);
2. waives mandatory fees for any active National Guard member's enrollment at the UConn, CT State, or CSUS (§§ 1-3);
3. requires the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CFHA) to develop and administer a mortgage assistance program for first responders (§ 4);
4. creates a tax credit for eligible volunteer firefighters (§ 5); and
5. establishes a task force to study public safety personnel recruitment and retention issues (§ 6).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except that the (1) provisions on the first responder mortgage assistance program take effect October 1, 2026; (2) tax credit provision is effective January 1, 2027, and each tax year on and after then; and (3) task force provision is effective upon passage.

§§ 1-3 — TUITION AND FEE WAIVERS

Tuition Waivers for Certain First Responders

The bill requires the Board of Regents for Higher Education to waive CT State and CSUS tuition for:

1. any police officer (see BACKGROUND) who has been employed

- as such in Connecticut for at least five years;
2. any uniformed member of a paid or volunteer fire department, including fire departments operated by a federally recognized Connecticut Indian tribe, who, as documented by the chief of the department, has served as a firefighter in Connecticut for at least five years;
 3. any emergency medical responder, emergency medical technician, advanced emergency medical technician, emergency medical services instructor, or paramedic, who has been employed in that role in Connecticut for at least five years by a municipality or nonprofit organization, as documented by their chief administrator; and
 4. students attending the state fire school who are enrolled in a program offered together with a university that accredits courses in the program.

For CSUS, only tuition fees for undergraduate and graduate programs are waived.

Connecticut Army or Air National Guard Fee Waiver

The bill also waives all mandatory fees for a national guard member's enrollment at CT State, CSUS, or UConn. To be eligible, the national guard member must be (1) certified by the adjutant general or his designee as a member in good standing and (2) enrolled or accepted in one of those institutions on a full-time or part-time basis in an undergraduate degree-granting program (or graduate program, for CSUS and UConn). By law, national guard members' tuition and payment of extension fees are already waived.

§ 4 — FIRST RESPONDER MORTGAGE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The bill requires CHFA to develop and administer a mortgage assistance program for certain Connecticut first responders who are buying a home as their principal residence in the community where they serve. In doing so, CHFA (1) must use down payment assistance or any other appropriate housing subsidies and (2) may allow the mortgagee

to realize a reasonable portion of the property's equity gain when it is sold. Under the bill, the program must cover:

1. police officers;
2. uniformed members of a paid or volunteer fire department;
3. certified emergency medical responders, emergency medical technicians, and advanced emergency medical technicians;
4. certified emergency medical services instructors that teach courses required to become an emergency medical technician; and
5. licensed paramedics.

§ 5 — VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER TAX CREDIT

Beginning for taxable years starting January 1, 2027, the bill allows eligible volunteer firefighters to claim an income tax credit of \$1,000, except against the withholding tax. Any taxpayer claiming the credit must give the Department of Revenue Services (DRS) supporting documentation as the DRS commissioner requires.

An “eligible volunteer firefighter” is someone who is actively serving as a volunteer firefighter for a fire department in Connecticut and has served for at least fifteen consecutive years, as documented by the fire department's chief.

§ 6 — RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TASK FORCE

The bill establishes a task force to study recruitment and retention issues for public safety personnel. The study must examine the feasibility and fiscal impact of the state providing:

1. tuition waivers, mortgage assistance, and tax credits to correction officers and judicial marshals;
2. tuition waivers to police officers' dependent children, uniformed members of paid or volunteer fire departments, emergency medical responders, emergency medical technicians, advanced

- emergency medical technicians, emergency medical services instructors, and paramedics;
3. tuition waivers for undergraduate and graduate degree programs at UConn to police officers, uniformed members of paid or volunteer fire departments, emergency medical responders, emergency medical technicians, advanced emergency medical technicians, emergency medical services instructors, and paramedics; and
 4. tuition vouchers for public safety personnel to any accredited higher education institution in Connecticut.

Under the bill, the task force consists of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) and Education commissioners, or their designees, and eight members appointed by the legislative leaders (two each by the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore and one each by the House and Senate majority and minority leaders). One of the speaker's appointees must have expertise in public safety and the other in higher education. The appointees may be legislators.

All initial appointments must be made within 30 days after the bill passes, and any vacancies must be filled by the appropriate appointing authority.

The speaker and the president pro tempore must select the task force's chairpersons from its members, who must schedule and hold the first meeting of the task force within 60 days after the bill passes.

The Public Safety and Security Committee's administrative staff must serve in that capacity for the task force. The task force must submit its findings and recommendations to the Public Safety and Security Committee by January 1, 2027. The task force ends on January 1, 2027, or when it submits its report, whichever is later.

BACKGROUND

Definition of Police Officers

By law, police officers are sworn members of an organized local police department or of the Division of State Police within DESPP, appointed constables who perform criminal law enforcement duties, special appointed policemen, or any member of a law enforcement unit who performs police duties (CGS § 7-294a).

Related Bill

sHB 5003, §§ 16-19, reported favorably by the Labor and Public Employees Committee, has substantially similar provisions concerning first responder tuition waivers and a first responder mortgage assistance program.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 29 Nay 0 (03/17/2026)