OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 408 (File 306, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING LIQUOR PERMITS, FIRE SAFETY AND PREVENTION INSPECTIONS, THE REGISTRATION OF CERTAIN INFORMATION AND JUICE BARS.

SUMMARY

This bill imposes new restrictions on juice bars and requirements on their associated cafe permittees, including (1) allowing towns, by ordinance, to prohibit the operation of juice bars within their borders or set the hours when they may operate and (2) authorizing towns and municipalities, by ordinance, to prohibit the sale of alcohol on any cafe permit premises while a juice bar is operating (§ 4).

Additionally, the bill requires the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) to notify liquor permittees with permits that allow for on-premises consumption of alcohol about the existing requirement that a local or deputy fire marshal, fire inspector, or other municipal fire code inspector or fire investigator must inspect all their premises operating under their permit at least once per calendar year. DCP must do so on all renewal notices to these permittees (§ 1).

The bill also requires the state fire marshal to create, within available appropriations, a two-year risk-based residential fire inspection pilot program and creates a working group to advise her on developing and implementing it (§§ 2 & 3).

Lastly, the bill makes technical and conforming changes.

*Senate Amendment "A" replaces the underlying bill, which had similar provisions on juice bars and liquor permit renewal applications as well as provisions reducing the frequency of required building inspections by local fire marshals and requiring certain municipalities to require particular residential property owners and landlords to report specified information to the municipality.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026, except the working group provision is effective upon passage and the pilot program provision is effective July 1, 2026.

§ 4 — JUICE BAR RESTRICTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

The bill makes several changes to the law regulating "juice bars," which are places where nonalcoholic beverages are served to minors (under age 21) on the premises of a cafe permit holder. Generally, existing law:

1. allows a cafe to operate a juice bar in a room or separate area where alcohol is not sold, consumed, dispensed, or present;

2. requires cafe permittees, between five and 30 days before a scheduled event, to send the chief law enforcement officer of the municipality where the cafe is located written notice by certified mail or email about when the cafe premises will have a juice bar during that event;

3. allows the chief local law enforcement officer to designate one or more officers to attend the scheduled event; and

4. prohibits cafe permit holders, and their agents and employees, who operate juice bars on the premises from serving alcohol to a customer without a conspicuous wristband issued by the permittee showing they have verified that the customer is of legal drinking age (at least age 21).

The bill requires cafe permittees, at all times when a part of the premises is being operated as a juice bar, to limit the number of patrons where the juice bar is being operated to no more than 10% of the total building occupant load established by the fire marshal under the Fire Safety Code. It also allows, at any time before or during a scheduled event, the chief law enforcement officer, or the officer's designee, to reject the event or order it to be stopped if either, in their sole discretion, determines that (1) there is insufficient police capacity to properly and safely monitor the event or enforce the law or (2) the event may, or has, become a danger to public safety.

Under existing law and the bill, violators of the above provisions are subject to a fine, up to one year imprisonment, or both. The maximum fines are (1) $2,500 for a first offense; (2) $5,000 for a second offense; and (3) $10,000 for a third or subsequent offense.

By law, DCP and its agents may conduct any inquiry, investigation, or hearing related to the juice bar laws (CGS § 30-8). The department may also revoke, suspend, or place conditions on any permit or provisional permit, or impose a fine of up to $1,000 per violation for cause as determined by a hearing (CGS § 30-55). The bill specifies that DCP may investigate any purported violation of the juice bar laws and, if it finds a violation, impose those existing penalties.

§ 3 — RISK-BASED RESIDENTIAL FIRE INSPECTION WORKING GROUP

The bill's working group has 12 members, consisting of the state fire marshal (or her designee) and the 11 others shown in the table below.

Table: Working Group Appointed Members

Appointing Authority	*Number of Appointments*	*Appointee Qualifications*
State fire marshal	Two	Representatives must be from a municipality participating in the risk-based residential fire inspection pilot program
Connecticut Fire Marshals Association	Four	One must represent a municipality participating in the risk-based residential fire inspection pilot program
Joint Council of Connecticut Fire Services Organizations	Two	None specified
Public Safety and Security Committee's chairpersons and ranking members	Two	Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee
Connecticut Conference of Municipalities	One	Representative of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities

All initial appointments must be made within 30 days after the bill's passage, except the state fire marshal's appointments must be appointed as soon as practical after she selects the pilot program's participating

municipalities. Any vacancy must be filled by the appointing authority. Members appointed by the Public Safety and Security Committee's leadership may make designees.

The Public Safety and Security Committee's chairpersons must select the working group's chairpersons from among the working group's members. The working group's chairpersons must schedule the group's first meeting, which must be held within 60 days after the bill's passage. The Public Safety and Security Committee's staff must serve as the same for the working group.

The bill establishes several duties and reporting requirements for the working group and requires it to end when it submits its final report or February 1, 2029, whichever is later.

Duties and Reporting

The bill requires the working group to advise the State Fire Marshal on:

1. the risk-based residential fire inspection pilot program's design and implementation;

2. the scheduling, documentation, and prioritization of fire inspections of residential buildings designed to be occupied by more than two families;

3. any data collection required by the pilot program and an assessment of participating municipalities' capacity to report the data;

4. the pilot program's progress and any data quality issues; and

5. any modifications to the pilot program's reporting requirements.

By December 1, 2026, and then annually until December 1, 2028, the working group must submit to the state fire marshal its evaluation of and recommendations for implementing the pilot program, including an evaluation of the pilot program's effectiveness in improving statutory inspection compliance, reducing inspection backlog,

identifying and correcting high severity life safety hazards, improving firefighter operational safety through better hazard intelligence, reducing repeat violations, supporting consistent enforcement actions, and assessing fiscal and staffing impacts. This effectiveness evaluation must compare the fire inspection activity in each participating municipality before and after participating in the pilot program, and, where practicable, against similarly situated nonparticipating municipalities.

By December 1, 2026, the working group's report must:

1. designate the type of data required to establish a baseline of residential fire inspection activity in a municipality based on a two-year history or, when this data is unavailable, based on predictive data;

2. identify the gaps in the availability of this data for each participating municipality;

3. determine initial inspection volumes and timelines;

4. develop a plan for data collection and quality assurance during the pilot program;

5. develop a standardized scoring method for violations based on the severity of life-safety hazards, grading system for residential buildings based on fire prevention and construction features, pre-inspection checklist for owners of residential buildings, and standardized documentation system for fire inspection findings; and

6. recommend any adjustments to the program's implementation.

By December 1, 2027, the working group's report must:

1. determine any adjustment to inspection volumes and timelines;

2. aggregate violations by severity and changes from initial baseline data for each participating municipality;

3. identify any trends in voluntary hazard correction due to the pre-inspection checklist developed by the program;

4. assess the use of the data system designated by the program and the quality of the data; and

5. include an overview of the pilot program's results.

By December 1, 2028, the working group's report must include its recommendations for:

1. legislation required to continue or alter the inspection schedule developed during the pilot program for each participating municipality;

2. state-wide implementation, other expansion, modification, or termination of the pilot program; and

3. any statutory, regulatory, staffing, funding, or technological changes required for broader implementation of the pilot program.

§ 2 — RISK-BASED RESIDENTIAL FIRE INSPECTION PILOT PROGRAM

The bill requires the state fire marshal to create a two-year risk-based residential fire inspection pilot program to improve the scheduling, documentation, and prioritization of fire inspections of residential buildings designed to be occupied by more than two families. She must do so by January 1, 2027, in consultation with the administrative services commissioner and the above working group, and within available appropriations.

The bill requires the state fire marshal to select at least three municipalities from those that apply (but the bill does not set an application process), including two with populations of at least 100,000 and one with a population of at least 35,000 but under 100,000. In selecting participating municipalities, she must consult with the municipality's appointing authority for local fire marshals to determine its (1) volume and diversity of residential buildings designed to be

occupied by more than two families, (2) availability of local resources, and (3) capability to consistently implement the pilot program. If any participating municipality withdraws or is unable to meet the pilot program's requirements, the state fire marshal may select a comparable municipality as a replacement.

Under the bill, participating municipalities must:

1. implement a fire inspection schedule using a standardized scoring method that assigns scores for violations and classifies residential buildings based on fire prevention and construction features;

2. maintain timely fire inspections as required by other existing law, while allocating more fire inspection resources to high-risk residential buildings;

3. comply with the program's data collection and record-keeping requirements, including using a data system designated by the state fire marshal to record fire inspection data; and

4. review the current fire inspection revenue structure and staffing allocation.

For each participating municipality, the state fire marshal must:

1. specify a standardized scoring method that assigns scores to violations identified during fire inspections based on the severity of life-safety hazards related to the violations,

2. establish a grading system that classifies the subject residential buildings based on fire prevention and construction features and other risk indicators for prioritizing their annual fire inspections,

3. develop a pre-inspection checklist for building owners to encourage voluntary correction of potential hazards before a fire inspection, and

4. standardize the documentation (including photographs) of fire

inspection findings to support enforcement actions and compliance follow-up.

The bill also requires her to designate one or more data systems, including the National Emergency Response Information System, that is capable of:

1. collecting and exporting data related to, at a minimum, residential building classifications with risk-relevant construction and fire prevention features, dates and types of fire inspections, violations cited with assigned score, corrective action status, and fire inspections timelines under existing law;

2. generating residential building classifications based on data recorded into the system;

3. producing quarterly reports on fire inspection activities, including responses to complaints and outcomes of public reporting; and

4. establishing a baseline of residential fire inspection activity for each municipality based on a two-year history of data collection or, when the data is unavailable, based on predictive data the state fire marshal deems sufficient to establish a baseline.

Under the bill, the "National Emergency Response Information System" is the national data system developed or designated by the U.S. Fire Administration, or its successor system, for the collection, reporting, and analysis of fire and emergency incident data.

By February 1, 2027, and annually after until February 1, 2029, the state fire marshal must submit to the Public Safety and Security Committee a report on the pilot program, whether it should be made permanent, and if the working group's recommendations were integrated into the program.

The bill ends the pilot program on January 1, 2029.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 19 Nay 10 (03/17/2026)