

Public Safety and Security Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5046 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT SUPPORTING FIREFIGHTER AND POLICE OFFICER RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION.

Vote Date: 3/17/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/3/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Safety and Security Committee on Behalf of the Governor

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill intends to address significant staffing shortages found across the state of Connecticut within the police officer and firefighting profession. This bill works to incentivize those who would otherwise find themselves unable to pursue a career in this profession by breaking down barriers created by monetary restraints, incentivizing members of these professions to continue to pursue this career, and actively working to continue to address this issue by studying the issues and identify potential root causes for why recruitment and retention of public safety personnel continues to drop across the state.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The JFS language in this bill reflects various changes made during the committee process. Sections 1 & 2 are amended to waive mandatory fees related to tuition at a Connecticut State Community College for members of the Connecticut Army and Air National Guard. It also adds provisions to grant tuition waivers to EMS personnel and includes fire departments operated by federally recognized Indian tribes. Section 3 is amended similarly to Sections 1 & 2, waiving tuition related fees for Connecticut Army and Air National Guard members who are actively pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree. Section 3 also removes provisions that would exempt police and firefighters from tuition waivers at the University of Connecticut. In the JFS language, Section 4 is amended and includes EMS personnel in a new program to be developed and administered by the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to provide eligible first responders with mortgage assistance. Section 5 is amended in the JFS language to make certain volunteer firefighters eligible for a \$1,000 income tax credit. Section 6 of this bill, in the JFS language, establishes a task force to be created for the purposes of studying issues related to recruitment and retention of public safety personnel in Connecticut.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Governor Ned Lamont](#), shares support saying that police officers and firefighters are the “backbone” of public safety in communities. The Governor believes that the first incentive in the bill to waive tuition is beneficial. He also supports the second incentive which creates a mortgage assistance program which will help public safety professionals. He believes that police officers and firefighters should have the ability to afford homes in the communities they serve.

[Sean Scanlon, State Comptroller](#), testifies in support of the bill, saying that this issue of recruitment and retention is something he sees often in his office. He encourages extending the bill to emergency medical technicians and paramedics as well. He shares work done by his office that showed a decline in firefighters and says this bill will help to slow this decline.

[Connecticut Administrative Services](#), states their support for the bill as it aims to help with recruitment and retention of firefighters. They share that this is a good investment, as the fire service is a diverse profession and by strengthening firefighter recruitment and retention, it also makes the whole fire service stronger.

[Ronnell Higgins, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection](#), Commissioner Higgins thanks leadership for raising this bill. He shares that the bill provides tuition waivers for Connecticut State Colleges and University systems. He says this is an important incentive as the cost of higher education grows. He further supports the establishment of a mortgage assistance program through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to help first responders purchase homes in communities they serve. He says that these incentives indicate a clear commitment to those who keep Connecticut safe.

[Francis Evon, Office of the Adjutant General](#), General Evon submits testimony in support of the bill but makes recommendations to include a language change that would more clearly include mandatory student fees in the waiver to eliminate them for Soldiers and Airmen. He shares data related to the fees in his testimony.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Christopher Albani, Executive Vice President, Connecticut Police & Fire Union](#), writes that this bill is the right next step, that the committee needs to be clear about the scope of issues. He says the bill will allow for immediate relief and is “one of many steps” that need to be taken to address gaps between states vs. municipal coverage. He urges for the Committee to pass the bill, but further states that there should be amendments to extend similar provisions to the state workforce.

[Gregory Allard, President, CT Ambulance Association](#), shares his appreciation for the committee's recognition of Connecticut's public safety workforce and the strain that it is under. The CT Ambulance Association highlights the recruitment and retention challenges that they are facing and how it affects the community's safety. He says that excluding the EMS from recruiting and retention initiative creates an imbalance in the public safety system. He urges the committee to include EMS personnel in any recruitment and retention programs, benefits, or incentives in this act.

[Micheal Bartas, Member, National Guard Association of Connecticut\(NGACT\)](#), shares that he understands the need for retention and recruitment for firefighters and police officers. He writes to the committee emphasizing the importance of waiving mandatory public college and university fees for members of the Connecticut National Guard, saying it poses a financial burden. He highlights that waiving these fees will help to strengthen recruitment by enhancing Connecticut's Guard education

benefits, improve retention by easing financial pressures, support workforce development by enabling Guardsmen to complete degrees and professional certifications, and demonstrate Connecticut's tangible commitment to those who serve.

[Colin Bassett, Chief, Trumbull EMS](#), says that the town is committed to creating a responsible EMS system. He shared the challenges of recruitment and retention between EMTs and Paramedics. He highlights the immediate impacts of recruitment and retention declines in the community: it increases overtime cost, increases staffing compression, causes reliance on mutual aid and strains the system during peak demand periods. He urges the Committee to consider adding amendments to include EMS providers under the bill.

[Mohegan Tribe](#), shares their strong support of the bill, but requests clarifying amendments. They request that the tribal fire departments and tribal police be added to the language. They say by making these provisions it promotes equity and allows for the strengthening of regional public safety. They believe it also can help further recruitment and retention goals and is respectful of the tribal partnership.

[Patrick Ciardullo, CEO & Chief of Services for New Britain Emergency Medical Services](#), states that EMS should not be left out of legislation. He understands the cost concerns of adding EMS to the bill but says that cost cannot be a reason to exclude EMS from the bill. He highlights the work done by EMS throughout the state of Connecticut and says that EMS is not an optional service and should not be treated as such. He addresses that recruitment and retention is an issue for EMS too.

[Ben McGorty, State Representative](#), says that Police Agencies and Fire Departments need to keep trained employees longer, and not lose them to other jobs, career changes or burnout. He notes that retention is one of the biggest issues in the public safety workforce. He requests that the bill be amended to include EMS personnel. He highlights that the same retention issues are faced in EMS as Fire and Police.

[Xavier Colon, CT National Guard](#), shares support for the bill and the help that it provides for Police/Fire. He asks for language to be added to include tuition waivers for members of the National Guard.

[Elizabeth Connolly](#), shares her experience working as an EMT, she highlights the importance of EMS to the state of CT. She shares her frustration with the current bill, as it does not include EMS. She urges the committee to add language to the bill that includes EMS.

[Micheal Curtin](#), asks for language to be added to waive the current tuition fee for National Guard members. He says that it is an "invaluable resource". He further highlights the financial burden that this tuition fee costs and urges the Committee to get rid of this fee.

[Florencio Cotto, President, Police Officers Association of Connecticut \(POACT\)](#), highlights the importance of this bill and his support, but also addresses that this cannot be the end of the discussion. He says further work, such as, creating a financially sustainable future for the next generation, strengthening the competitiveness of pensions, and implementing modernized incentives. He shares that failure to invest now will lead to higher cost later. He urges the committee to make the decision whether Connecticut will be the state to fall behind or lead in public safety.

[Augusto DaSilva, Emergency Medical Technician](#), shares his support of the goals of this bill but urges the committee to recognize EMS personnel as essential first responders and include them in the language of the bill. He says that by including EMS it will; support Connecticut's emergency response system, strengthen the recruitment and retention of EMS personnel, and ensure equality among first responders.

[Vin DeMaio, Chief, Town of Clinton](#), urges the committee to act now, saying that there must be work done in order to attract and retain individuals. He says this bill provides incentives to help with competing with more "lucrative private sectors", but it also signals a sign of support to the first responders of Connecticut.

[Andrew Dezjot, Emanuele Lici, Philip Orzech, Nolan Wyse, & Kristen Vargas](#) of the Ct National Guard: The following above submitted testimony stating that the tuition waiver is important to both the Soldiers and Airmen of the CRNG and a useful recruitment tool. They ask that an amendment be made that clarifies the mandatory fees in the tuition waivers, as mentioned by the Governor.

[Micheal Duncan, Alderman, Shelton CT](#) shares that this bill allows for the reduction of housing barriers and educational debt and allows for first responders to focus on their service to the community. He says this bill ensures first responders can live where they serve, continue their education, and build a strong foundation, both personally and financially, for their families.

[Rose Farrell](#), shares her support for the bill for personal reasons and urges the committee to pass this legislation.

[Jacob Fazekas, Lieutenant, Naugatuck EMS](#), shares the current recruitment and retention challenges and the structural funding differences for EMS. He recommends that provisions be made to include EMS under the unified response models. He sees it as further partnership with fire and police. He further highlights the importance of EMS and how it provides frontline care in emergencies every day.

[L.J. Fusaro, President, Connecticut Police Chief Association](#), shares the current issues that police departments across Connecticut are facing. He reiterates the importance of tuition assistance, financial incentives and compensation. He points out the importance of these tools in order to recruit the next generation of police officers.

[Connecticut Council of Small Towns \(COST\)](#), shares their current struggles to hire and retain police officers and firefighters. They support the provisions in the bill and share that these incentives will help to encourage more people to pursue careers in these fields.

[Geraldyn Hoyt, President/ Chief, Southbury Ambulance Association](#), asks the Committee to add EMS personnel to the bill. He shares data to show the importance of providing financial support to not only police but EMS as well. He highlights struggles that EMS agencies are currently facing, such as, workforce shortages, rise in call volumes, increased hospital offload delays, and difficult reimbursement rates.

[David Jannetty, Program Chair, Post University](#) shares personal experience choosing his education during and following his time as a police officer at the Waterbury Police Department. He asks the Committee to amend the bill to include tuition assistance for privately owned and accredited colleges and universities in Connecticut.

[Danielle Johnson, President, Ansonia Medical Services](#) urges the committee to include EMS personnel in the bill including paid and volunteer. She says that this is an opportunity for Connecticut to lead by reckoning all three core emergency services in statute. She says that by including EMS personnel it would improve recruitment, increase retention, promote stability in the workforce, and establish EMS as equal to other public safety partners.

[Kyle Kelley, Chief, Naugatuck EMS](#), requested the committee include EMS in the bill. He shares the current issues that Naugatuck EMS faces. He says there has been an increase in EMS call volumes and difficulty to keep up with, as they have had continuous issues with retention and recruitment. He further reiterates that in order to strengthen public safety, the legislative framework should reflect operational demands.

[Miles LaFemina, Correction Officer, AFSCME Council 4](#) He points out that the bill excludes correction officers in the recruitment and retention section. He urges the committee to include correction officers as eligible public safety personnel, as they operate in dangerous and volatile environments. He says without action there is a risk posed of losing institutional knowledge with no one prepared to “pass the baton”.

[Zak Leavy, Deputy Director, AFSCME](#), discusses the difficulties for police and the current retention and recruitment. AFSCME shares support for section 4 which directly addresses the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to assist in buying homes for first responders in towns they serve. They appreciate the waiving of the tuition fees for officers who served for five years. While they support the bill, they ask for defined-benefit pension security and retiree health insurance to be addressed in future legislation.

[Joseph Lester, Paramedic](#), discusses his frustration not seeing EMS included in the legislation. He shares his personal experience as a paramedic and stresses the importance of EMS services. He urges the committee to include EMS in the language.

[Dr. Mark Levine](#), shares support for the bill, but says that EMS personnel needs to be included in the bill.

[Micheal Loiz, Stratford EMS](#), requests that EMS be added to the bill, he cites rising medical calls, funding gaps, and staffing issues. He says that this inclusion will boost recruitment, retention, and increase overall public safety.

[Matthew Marks, Army Member-at-Large, National Guard Association of Connecticut](#), shares support for strengthening recruitment and retention. He points out that mandatory university fees remain an issue for service members. He says that by waiving these fees it will strengthen recruitment, improve overturn, and allow for Guardsmen to finish degrees and certifications, which he believes would overall benefit Connecticut.

[Marcel Miller, CT Army National Guard](#), shares his personal experience and supports the bill because it will help to alleviate financial burden for the State’s servicemembers.

[The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities \(CCM\)](#). They say this bill helps to preserve the public safety of Connecticut. They support the tuition assistance, as well as the development of a mortgage assistance program. They say moving forward that there should be consideration surrounding financial incentives. They look forward to more opportunities to help streamline training and certification processes to eliminate barriers.

[Connecticut Housing Finance Authority \(CHFA\)](#), discusses support for section 4 of the bill. They share that they currently offer a police mortgage program to assist with retention and recruitment. They are prepared to create a similar program for firefighters, in order to decrease volunteer decline and create stronger levels of staffing. They urge the committee to pass this legislation.

[Northwest Hills Council of Governments, \(NHCOG\)](#) strongly supports the proposed bill but further states that the bill should include EMS personnel. They continue to say that the offer from CHFA for the mortgage assistance is beneficial to public safety personnel when it comes to affording living costs in their community.

[Joint Council of Connecticut Fire Service Organizations \(Joint Council\)](#), say they strongly support the bill. They say that as the Committee takes next steps in relation to the bill to consider the following: making sure that the wording covers all firefighter and police in the State, consider adding EMS, consider reducing the five-year service completion requirement, consider adding one other benefit for

responders who possess an education and do not own a home, and consider logistical implications for program management.

[Norman Whitehurst, Chief- Plymouth Volunteer Ambulance](#), Plymouth Ambulance volunteers support this bill's goal is to improve recruitment and retention of first responders. They ask that it be amended to include emergency medical services (EMS). They believe EMS should be included because they respond to emergencies alongside policemen and firemen and face recruitment issues, especially in smaller towns. They note many Connecticut communities depend on volunteer EMT and EMR, excluding them undermines the volunteer model that keeps towns safe.

[Katie Zarzycka, President- National Guard Association of CT \(NGACT\)](#), NGACT supports this bill but requests the tuition fee waiver be applied to members of the Connecticut National Guard as well. Many of the servicemembers serve the state as police, fire, and EMT's. National Guardsmen still must pay a mandatory tuition fee and represent a real financial burden. Waiving fees would strengthen recruitment, improve retention, support workforce development, and demonstrate Connecticut's commitment to those who serve. Guardsmen routinely leave their families, careers, and classrooms to serve when called. Ensuring they can return to their education without added financial penalty is both fair and prudent public policy.

[Robert Phillips, Northwest Hills Council of Government \(NHCOC\)](#), urges the Committee to pass this bill, as it supports the small and volunteer departments, which are currently facing recruitment and retention issues.

[Frank Vumbaca, E-Board Member- IAFF Local S-15](#), supports this bill because it takes meaningful steps to address recruitment and retention challenges. However, he provides suggestions for how this bill could be strengthened:

- Expand eligibility to include dependents of active firefighters and police officers.
- Include emergency dispatchers linked to police and fire departments.
- Establish a state grant-funded sign-on bonus program with a structured five-year payout.

[Jack Rodican, Paramedic Supervisor, Stratford](#), shares his experience as a paramedic. He believes that EMS struggles with a structural funding challenge, he highlights the difference between EMS and fire & police and that there is a lack of funding stability with EMS. He urges the committee to add language to include EMS.

[Craig Rosenberg, Chief, Monroe Volunteer Emergency Medical Services](#), requested that EMS be added to the bill's language. He highlights the funding structural issues that EMS currently faces and how this bill can strengthen the public health ecosystem. He highlights the investment that this bill has on the health and safety of Connecticut residents.

[Kevin Saunders, President, Connecticut Police & Fire Union](#), requests for the support of this bill. He highlights that the bill should contain State Police Officers and State Firefighters. He further urges the committee to support this legislation to improve recruitment and retention.

[William Schietinger, Chair, Connecticut EMS Advisory Board](#), offers a recommendation to include Emergency Medical Service personnel. He addresses the current funding challenges that EMS faces and how to strengthen these issues. He also shares the importance of EMS as integrated partners in Connecticut's public safety system. He calls for collaboration between fire, police, and EMS to create a stronger and safer Connecticut.

[Janet Silva, AMR, New Haven](#) asks for EMS to be added to the bill language. She shares personal experience and the tools that working in EMS takes on her. She expresses that she feels under-supported for the work the EMS provides for the community. She believes that including EMS in the bill would be a good start to support and encourage the hard-working members of EMS.

[Frank Vumbaca, E-Board Member, IAFF](#), shares that these are necessary steps needed to strengthen and stabilize the public safety workforce. He proposes to include emergency dispatchers linked to police and fire departments and establish a state grant fund sign-on bonus program with a five-year payout. He also suggests expanding eligibility to include dependents of active firefighters and police officers, not just those killed in the line of duty. He claims that these will all strengthen the bill.

[Jamie Ward](#), Supports the bill for reasons unstated.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Dr. John DeCarlo, The University of New Haven](#), offered testimony in opposition to the bill stating that the bill limits the benefit of free tuition to only public institutions. He also noted that this bill would actively incentivize those enrolled at private institutions, like the University of New Haven, to leave their programs to attend a public institution instead. He also testified that “limiting choice is not in the interest of the officers and firefighters, or the communities they serve.”

Recommended Change:

1. Consider a “portable benefit” voucher that anyone could use at any Connecticut institution.

[Robert Mara, Business Operation Manager, Aetna Ambulance Service](#), shares that leaving EMS out is going to lead to gaps in the broad public safety structure. He highlights the current issues that they face surrounding retention and recruitment and how it has a direct impact on the health and safety of the communities in Connecticut. He urges the committee to adapt this legislation.

[Jennifer Wildness, President- CT Conference of Independent Colleges \(CICC\)](#), CICC opposes this bill because they believe that limiting the tuition benefit exclusively at public universities could shift enrollment away from independent colleges. They express that Connecticut benefits from a diverse higher education system that includes both public and independent nonprofit institutions and that this policy risks destabilizing the whole system.

[DeVaughn, Ward, Correction Ombuds](#), says that these retention and recruitment challenges are not limited to police and fire departments but apply to correctional institutions across Connecticut. He urges the committee to add language that includes correctional offices. He further shares data from the Connecticut Department of Correction.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

[Thomas Darna, Lyme Ambulance](#), offered general comments to the bill but did offer commentary on how there is “no less a need for the EMS community.” He offered a recommendation amending to the bill to also include first responders.

[Lt. Jacob Fazekas, Naugatuck Ambulance, Inc.](#), wrote in testimony not directly opposing this bill but offering recommendations that would broaden the bill to also include Emergency Medical Services as well. He noted that while police and fire are dispatched to emergency calls, EMS services are a “primary and frequently deployed safety resource.” He also stated that while police and fire departments are facing recruitment and retention issues, this is also an issue being faced by Emergency Medical Services. He noted a lack of funding that he states also deters people from pursuing a career in EMS and that while police and fire are funded through general fund appropriations, EMS relies heavily on insurance reimbursements. He urged in his testimony that the committee amend this bill to also include EMS due to the cooperative partnership that emergency medical services provide together.

[Evan Geltman, Paramedic and Lead Paramedic FTO at Bristol Health EMS](#), offered general comments to the bill and offered recommendations to amend the bill to include members of EMS.

[Connecticut State Colleges & Universities](#), shares support for the broad goal of expanding access to tuition free higher education. However, they raise concerns that adding a tuition waiver without corresponding line-items could lead to strain on the operation and already existing budget costs. They provided in their testimony data corresponding to expansion of these tuition waivers.

Reported by: Emma Rybacki, Clerk
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