

Public Safety and Security Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5453 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY REGARDING STATE-WIDE ESSENTIAL
WORKER AND FIRST RESPONDER JOB CLASSIFICATIONS.

Vote Date: 3/17/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/12/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Safety and Security Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill was raised to require the Commissioner of Administrative Services to conduct a State-wide study to better determine whether a job classification should be established for "essential workers" and "first responders". The bill also includes a report on the results of the study to be published. If a job classification is determined, the bill intends to establish what effect the classification would have on the jobs, including employee benefits or the application requirements to such jobs. The bill also aims to determine if telecommunicators are included in this classification.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Michelle Gilman, Commissioner, DAS:](#) Commissioner Gilman is opposed to the bill. She states that the bill would require the DAS, DESPP, and DOL to study whether jobs should be classified as "essential worker" or "first responder." One of her concerns is that the bill would work against the flexibility of Governor Malloy's Executive Order No. 65, which gave state agencies the ability to determine which state employee job functions are essential or nonessential during emergencies. She also explains that the DAS develops job classifications, she believes that essential vs. nonessential status is not itself a job class. Commissioner Gilman also believes that a statewide job class titled "essential worker" or "first responder" would not align with the established classification structure and could create more confusion.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Gregory Allard, President, Connecticut Ambulance Association: Mr. Allard is in support of the bill. He appreciates the intent of conducting a statewide study to better define essential worker and first responder classifications. He states that the term "essential worker" is used often but never properly defined. He requests that the Emergency Medical Services be given a part of the study process because EMS first responders are often the first healthcare professionals to arrive at a scene. He adds this will ensure the realities of emergency medical response are properly considered in the study.

Mark Austin, Past President, NSPE: Mr. Austin is in support of the bill. He states that across Connecticut dedicated professionals work under challenging conditions to allow the public to stay home. He adds that Fire and Police Departments count on plow professionals, for example, to clear the roads so they can get to people in need. He says that the lack of clarity for the definition of "first responder" and "essential worker" causes confusion regarding eligibility for benefits.

Kyle Champney, Telecommunicator, Fairfield County Regional: Mr. Champney is in support of the bill. He states that as a safety telecommunicator, he is first-first responders the public interacts with during an emergency. He explains that he is trained to do more than the phone, he is also trained to address the threat, keep the caller safe, and give information to the caller. He adds that during his career he has spoken to suicidal people, victims of domestic violence, have walked family members through life saving measures, and helped deliver babies. He states that 26 states have classified public safety telecommunications as first responders, he hopes Connecticut will do the same.

Christopher Gardner, LCDR: Mr. Gardner is in support of the bill. He says that throughout his experience as a U.S. Coast Guard veteran and Physician Associate, he has worked alongside 911 dispatchers to which he believes they play critical roles within the broader first responder infrastructure. He explains that 911 operators are increasingly recognized as being susceptible to mental health conditions, like PTSD, due to their repeated exposure to traumatic events over the phone. He states that he also believes that public works employees should be considered a part of the first responder system. He explains that they play a critical role in ensuring that conditions during storms, natural disasters, and other hazardous events are safe for the public and emergency services.

Sally Katz Katz, Director of Physical Services, Wethersfield Physical Services: Ms. Katz is in support of the bill. She states to have Public Works personnel recognized shows the state is supportive of the work they do. She adds that in many cases Public Works personnel are the "first-first responders" as they are needed to clear the way for Police, Fire and Ambulance services.

Jerry Lukowski, Director of Public Works, Watertown: Mr. Lukowski is in support of the bill. He describes Public Work employees as the silent arm of public safety. He states that they are often the first on scene and the last to leave the scenes of disaster. He states that during the winter they must clear the roads. He adds that they also work during flooding conditions to improve conditions.

Thomas Modzelewski, Director/WPCA, Town of Ellington: Mr. Modzelewski is in support of the bill. He describes an instance in which an individual was injured while operating a gas-powered chop saw; his injuries would have been life threatening if not for his fellow Public Works employees who acted quickly to save his life. He states that Public Works employees work to clear the roads and work alongside police, fire, and EMS to ensure conditions are safe. He explains that these employees also maintain the safety of roads, bridges, drainage systems, traffic control devices, and municipal facilities. During weather conditions he explains that they continue to work to ensure the safety of the public. Finally, he adds that they often work to hide the scenes to help emergency services.

Mike Pace, President Local 1303 278, AFSCME Council 4 Local 1303 278: Mr. Pace is in support of the bill. He states that Public Work employees work to protect residents even during events such as hurricanes and other severe weather. He adds that during the winter weather they are the ones

clearing the roads. He states that Public Work employees are already doing work that should be classified as essential and it is important that Connecticut recognizes it.

Paul Rizzo, Resident of Connecticut: Mr. Rizzo is in support of the bill which he believes is an important step toward supporting dedicated professionals who maintain our roads, highways and communities. He states that the CTDOT and public work employees play an indispensable role in ensuring the safety of Connecticut infrastructure, and this is often done under challenging conditions. He explains, however, that the lack of consistent statewide definitions for "first responder" and "essential worker" creates confusion regarding eligibility for benefit, he states that this bill should fix that.

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA): The CHA is in support of the bill. They believe that Connecticut hospitals provide high class care, support jobs and the economy, and serve communities. They state that the bill is a study regarding statewide job classifications for "essential worker" and "first responder". They explain that depending on how these terms are defined, healthcare professionals who work at hospitals and in pre-hospital settings could be included.

Carl Chisem, President, Connecticut Employees Union Independent: Mr. Chisem is in support of the bill which he believes is an important step toward recognizing the vital work that members of his organization do. He explains Governor Malloy's Executive Order No. 65, which allowed state agencies the authority to determine which jobs are classified as essential or nonessential during emergencies, however, he states this has created a lack of consistency.

John Lawlor, Director of Public Works, Town of Killingworth: Mr. Lawlor is in support of the bill because he believes that it is a vital step in recognizing and supporting the dedicated professionals who maintain our communities. He explains that public work employees are often there supporting police, fire, and EMS, however they are not classified as essential. He states that towns across Connecticut depend on public works employees to ensure their safety. He states that across the country there have been several attempts to clear up confusion regarding the definition of essential workers. He states that in 2010 Mississippi passed a bill to recognize public work professionals as first responders, and in 2022 New Hampshire's Governor signed a law which recognized public work employees as first responders.

Christopher Mello, Director Public Works, Town of Killingworth: Mr. Mello supports the bill for reasons unstated.

Matthew Reed, Town Administrator, Town of Ellington: Mr. Reed is in support of the bill. He states that in his 30 years of public safety service he has worked alongside many individuals who respond to emergencies and protect the public in ways that often go unrecognized. He explains that public work employees are often the first to respond to critical incidents that affect public safety and infrastructure. He adds that the risk, urgency, and responsibility associated with their work is comparable to that of first responders. He also points out that the COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated how essential these employees are.

Stephen Sopelak, Director of Public Works, Town of Rocky Hill: Mr. Sopelak is in support of the bill. He states that in Rocky Hill public works staff play an important role in ensuring the safety and functionality of their infrastructure, even during challenging conditions. He explains that the lack of consistency regarding the definition of "first responder" and "essential worker" creates confusion regarding the eligibility for benefits. He adds this bill will attempt to solve this issue.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Mike Muszynski, CMM](#): Mr. Muszynski states that while he understands the intent of the bill, he asks the committee to consider restructuring the composition of the working group. He claims the consequences of modifying these definitions will have an impact on work requirements, benefit eligibility and more. For these reasons Mr. Muszynski is in opposition of the bill.

[Anonymous 31, Anonymous 32, Anonymous 33, Anonymous 34, Anonymous 35, Anonymous 36, Anonymous 37, Anonymous 38, Anonymous 42](#): Opposes the bill because they believe it has no benefits.

Reported by: Emma Rybacki, Clerk
Jacqueline Olsen, Assist. Clerk

Date: 3/26/26