

Public Safety and Security Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5455 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT SPECIAL
Title: POLICE FORCES AND FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Vote Date: 3/17/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

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 in order to better address recruitment and retention issues that the University of Connecticut raised with the Public Safety and Security Committee. If passed, this bill would require the president of the University to establish a recruitment and retention program for all police and fire departments, including the UCONN Health Center in Farmington, to address staffing shortages and high resignation rates. It would also require the president to submit a report on the status of recruitment and retention on all campuses. This bill also addresses barriers to these departments by requiring the University to expand the criteria for members of these forces. By expanding criteria and adequately addressing a lack of recruitment and retention, this bill aims to increase the sustainability and longevity of those employed by the University of Connecticut and ensure that understaffing of safety personnel is kept to a minimum.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The JFS language in this bill amends Section 1 to require the president of the University of Connecticut to provide salary schedules to the Office of Labor Relations and to the collective bargaining unit that represents the university's police and fire departments. It also requires that the salaries of the University of Connecticut's police and fire departments be a mandatory subject of negotiation between the Office of Labor Relations and the collective bargaining unit.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Gene Labonte, Associate VP and Chief of Police testified in support of the bill's primary objectives. However, the chief expressed concerns regarding external competitiveness with other law enforcement agencies and its impact on recruitment and retention. He states that to improve its effectiveness and make implementation of any programming move as quickly and seamlessly as possible he suggests consideration of a few changes as follows:

- Lines 24-30: As drafted, new salary schedules would not be implemented until the next collective bargaining round (approx. 2029). An amendment is requested that includes UConn specific police classifications and compensation as a subject of bargaining during the next negotiation involving salary, including any wage reopener(s) or sooner upon mutual agreement.
- Line 25 of the bill indicates that the University of Connecticut would bargain directly with the union. In practice, the State Office of Labor Relations (OLR) conducts these negotiations. Clarification of OLR's role is recommended.
- The bill uses "special police forces" (plural). There is only one special police force and amending the language to the singular is recommended.
- There will be a cost to implement salary increases and offer educational benefits that are not currently budgeted. Resources necessary to implement the program are needed to be identified.

Mark Bouthillier, Patrol Captain, UConn Police Dept. and seven (7) additional police officers submitted testimony in support of the bill because it addresses the disparity in compensation between UConn public safety employees and employees in municipal and state agencies. This group states that the pay disparity contributes directly to retention challenges and notes that UConn police officers must work substantial overtime to achieve comparable salaries. They argue competitive pay and benefits would improve the ability to retain officers and rebuild staffing levels. They note that immediate implementation rather than waiting for the next contract cycle would be beneficial.

Adam Sabatella, Officer, UConn Police Department testified in support of the bill to address the pay disparity between public safety employees and employees in municipal and state agencies. Like officers across Connecticut, he notes that UConn police have the same physical demands, emotional strain, and responsibilities, such as long hours, complex situations, and the expectation to perform at a high level as other departments.

Rachael Levy, UConn Policy Sergeant & CT Police and Fire Union Steward, submitted testimony stating that this bill would help attract high quality candidates, reduce turnover, and allow current employees to pursue higher education.

Doug Lussier, Captain, and Matthew Zadrowski, Captain, UConn Police Department both submitted testimony supporting the bill, but requested to allow UConn to immediately implement the changes.

Daniel Thibault, Sergeant, CCSU Police Dept. and four (4) additional police officers submitted testimony in support of the bill for all the same reasons as previously stated by others that testified. However, they suggest that the bill be amended to include the police officers that work in the Connecticut State College and University System.

[Frank Vumbaca, EBoard Member IAFF Local S-15 State of CT Firefighters](#) submitted testimony supporting the bill and provided the following suggestions to address staffing shortages and operational risk:

- Implement bonus incentive for rank, specialized skills and years of service. This rewards experience, expertise and encourages personnel to pursue advanced training and helps retain employees who have institutional knowledge.
- Include NFPA 1710 staffing compliance in reporting.
- Hire an independent consulting firm to evaluate manpower needs for both police and fire departments which would provide an evidence-based assessment of staffing, deployment, and operational needs.
- Establish a joint committee of management and union officials to be responsible for implementing recommendations, setting measurable benchmarks, and establishing enforceable deadlines. This ensures accountability and transparency.

[Dan Starvish, President of IAFF Local S-15, State of CT Firefighters and Andrzej Kowalski, CT Police and Fire Union](#) both submitted testimony in favor because the number of employed public safety professionals needs to increase to achieve industry standard staffing levels. They note firefighters are currently mandated to work several extra shifts each bi-weekly pay period and additional mandates create an untenable work-life balance, low morale, and a constant state of mental stress similarly to police officers. They add that education incentives are an absolute necessity.

[Michael Adams, Legislative and Political Ass't, AFSCME Council 4](#) submitted testimony in support of this bill because he believes it's an important step toward addressing the requirement of developing recruitment and retention strategies and developing salary schedules that better align with municipal and state law enforcement and fire service agencies. He notes these public safety professionals provide essential services across multiple campuses and are responsible for protecting students, faculty, patients, and visitors in environments that require specialized training, rapid response, and coordination with local and state emergency responders.

He adds that UConn faces ongoing challenges recruiting and retaining qualified employees and that a significant contributing factor is pay disparity between UConn public safety employees and employees in municipal and state agencies. He argues that providing competitive compensation and creating incentives will help strengthen staffing levels and maintain the institutional knowledge necessary to provide effective public safety services in higher education and hospital environments.

Further, AFSCME urges the Committee to consider extending similar Freedom of Information protections to campus police officers that are currently in existence for many public safety professionals. AFSCME believes that extending these protections would help ensure that campus police officers receive the same safety considerations.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Nine Anonymously](#) submitted their opposition to the bill due to regulation expansion without real benefit.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

[Brian McCauley, Police Sgt., CT State Com College Police](#) writes requesting an amendment to include other departments within the CSCU system on the "recruitment and retention" program. He believes that all police officers that serve in the CSCU system should be treated the same and all should be involved with pay raises.

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

Date: 3/31/26