

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-310 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE
Title: DEVELOPMENT.

Vote Date: 3/16/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would empower the Executive Director of the Technical Education and Career System to establish a pilot program for the creation of one or more courses to train students to become certified wastewater treatment facility operators. This legislation seeks to remedy the number of water and wastewater treatment facility operators there will be in the future, as many current operators are approaching retirement age.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language removes Section 1 of the raised bill which would have established a study on the feasibility of expanding vocational education programs to students in grades K-8. Section 2 of the raised bill is now Section 1

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[SRO, Paul Cicarella, State Senator](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation pointing out that water and wastewater treatment operators play a critical role in protecting public health, maintaining environmental standards, and ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations. He shared that the field is experiencing a workforce shortage with many operators approaching retirement age, making it necessary to build a pipeline of trained

professionals now to meet future demand. He stated that this pilot program would create a direct pathway for students in the Technical High School System to enter a stable, high-demand career. He expressed that by working collaboratively with water utilities and relevant state agencies, the program can ensure that coursework aligns with certification requirements and real-world workforce needs. He noted that expanding vocational opportunities in essential infrastructure fields strengthens our workforce and provides students with meaningful, well-paying career options that do not require a traditional four-year degree.

[East Granby Public Schools, Suzanne Palmieri, Superintendent](#) submitted testimony sharing that a study would help ensure that students enter high school prepared to fully benefit from opportunities. She shared that few students have opportunities to engage in activities with their hands and some educators observe gaps not only in technical skills, but in foundational capacities. Superintendent Palmieri noted that early exposure is not about directing students toward specific careers, but rather about a broad exploration that builds confidence, curiosity, and readiness while keeping all future pathways open. She emphasized that this study would allow policymakers and educators to examine how experiences may be provided in developmentally appropriate ways and with equitable access for students in all communities, including smaller districts.

[East Hartford Public Schools, Laurie Abo, Supervisor of Secondary Science](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that programs like the Connecticut High School Science and Humanities Symposium are vital, as they create accessibility to families and schools by removing cost barriers from research, equipment, and scheduling. She emphasized that participation is not dependent on a family's income or access to expensive private enrichment services but is available to students regardless of their background. She noted that through the program she's witnessed an incredible level of confidence and academic persistence in students. She stated that beyond research, students gained invaluable exposure by touring labs at UConn Health and networking with medical students, staff, and STEM professionals. Laurie expressed that this legislation would strengthen educational pathways and support long-term economic and community stability across the state. She emphasized it is imperative students interested in STEM continue to have access to life-changing opportunities.

[DomusWorks Program, Marley Ayo, Participant](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that at DomusWorks, he was not judged for previously being incarcerated, but was welcome for who he was and who he wanted to become. He stated that the program helped him build workforce skills like promptness, professional communication, teamwork, and preparation for long-term employment. He emphasized those skills mean everything to someone trying to rebuild their life. He pointed out that at DomusWorks, he feels supported and comforted. He expressed that safety is powerful, as it allows an individual to focus on building their future instead of worrying about the past. He emphasized this legislation is about giving people the opportunity to contribute to their communities and the economy instead of leaving them behind. Marley emphasized that when programs like DomusWorks are funded and supported, that is not only investing in individuals, but also in safer communities, stronger families, and a more productive Connecticut.

[Veolia, Scott Beeney, Workforce Development Leader](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting that investing in technical education is not only forward-thinking, but also essential from an employer's perspective. He stated that his industry is experiencing a

significant percentage of their licensed workforce approaching retirement, and not producing enough new operators to replace them. He pointed out that Veolia works or has worked with many technical high schools throughout the state that include paid internships in plant operations, where student work alongside licensed operators inside active treatment facilities. He emphasized that students at Grasso Technical High School in Groton follow a path of classroom exposure, paid operational internship, and immediate licensure, which he notes is exactly what a modern workforce pipeline should look like. He said that hiring someone who understands treatment processes, lab testing, and compliance requirements shortens onboarding, improves retention, is efficient and cost-effective, and protects public health. He stated that by formalizing and expanding water and wastewater operator programs and coursework in the Connecticut Technical High School System, the state can strengthen its environmental and public health systems while helping students access stable, well-paying careers.

[Mercedes Blye, Mother](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that she is a parent of 2 students at Read School in Bridgeport. She shared that the school lacks funding and necessary resources. She emphasized that more is needed, and teachers deserve the funding to be able to educate properly.

[New London Public Schools, Dale Clark, College Career Coordinator](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting one primary reason for nonattendance is that students who could not get into technical schools do not find anything in public schools that appeal to their post-secondary ambitions. Dale stated that New London Public Schools has valued the programming support Electric Boat has provided to their Elementary, Middle, and High School, with an average of 20 students being hired each year for the last 3 years. He shared that students being able to acquire financially secure careers straight out of high school helps eliminate poverty statistics, improves student attendance to participate, and reach many disconnected students who now find something of interest in school. Dale expressed that the goal is to increase Workforce Credentialing for students, but that would be impossible without more funding, and there is a potential of losing some credentialing classes because of cost increases. He emphasized that if schools are the gateway to college and careers, it is imperative to increase and expand funding to meet the expectations of those institutions.

[Jessica Cohen](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation expressing programs like the Connecticut High School Science and Humanities Symposium removed common barriers like cost, transportation, and scheduling. She stated that participation was not dependent on income or access to private enrichment, which made a meaningful difference. Jessica pointed out that she witnessed an increase in confidence, motivation, persistence, and more by her son. She noted that it created a supportive learning environment where students could grow and feel they belonged. Jessica emphasized that programs like this help families and students early before challenges become crises and strengthen educational pathways and support long-term economic and community stability throughout the state.

[Connecticut Area Health Education Center, Kathi Ellison, Volunteer Advisory Member](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that as a volunteer with the Connecticut High School Science and Humanities Symposium, she believes learning happens most beneficially in an environment that fosters creative problem-solving skills. She shared that she is always amazed to see the work of high school students through the symposium. She stated that the program is tailored to promote the skills students will need to

hone their abilities in furthering their educational opportunities and serve the future of the scientific community and society at large.

[Project Oceanology, John Ely Executive Director](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that in the most recent fiscal year, the Project had more than ten thousand students step aboard research vessels to participate in authentic vessel-based experiences on Long Island Sound. John noted that through the school year, students participate in paid internships working alongside aquarists and marine educators, gaining experience in animal care, water chemistry, exhibit maintenance, and laboratory operations. He stated in the summer, Project Oceanology offers paid internships for high schoolers and college students, providing hands-on leadership, lesson development experience, and direct mentorship from licensed captains and marine science professionals. He expressed workforce pathways begin with exposure and deepen through responsibility, which the Project's model allows students from multiple communities to access these experiences in a structured and professionally supervised environment.

[Connecticut Water Works Association, Elizabeth Gara, Executive Director](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing there is an unprecedented number of retirements in the industry and water and wastewater utilities are struggling to find qualified applicants, including water and wastewater system operators. She expressed that the CWWA supports provisions to broaden the legislation to include a pilot program to train water system operators. She stated these are high paying, rewarding positions that give individuals the opportunity to have a meaningful role in protecting the public health and safety of communities.

[Franklin Mora](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that he is a parent of a student who participated in Pili's Montessori Home daycare program and in the Sankofa Montessori early childhood development program. He shared that as a first generation American, raising bilingual, biracial, and bicultural children, programs like these were important to his family. He stated that at Sankofa, a program rooted in African and African American culture and empowerment, his child received exposure to an education that she would have had difficulty finding elsewhere as it combined cultural heritage with a Montessori approach to children. He pointed out that the program was accessible and supportive and removed barriers that would prevent families from participating. He expressed that he saw growth in his child's confidence, engagement, and sense of possibility, and that programs like this will help families and students succeed early and build strong futures.

[DomusWorks Program, Amir Passely, Participant](#) submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that when he came home from being incarcerated, he knew he wanted to work and do better but did not know where to begin. He shared that at DomusWorks, they treated him like a human being and provided him with real workplace skills like promptness, professional communication, how to dress appropriately, and professional conflict management. He shared that DomusWorks creates structure and an environment where he wanted to show up and be involved in something positive. He stated that Domus supports young people who are unemployed or underemployed, those who have dropped out and are pursuing work and those formerly incarcerated. He emphasized that this legislation provides an opportunity for the state to invest in workforce development programs that work and restore dignity, build skills, and connect young people to employment.

The following submitted general support for the bill:

[CT AHEC, Cecil Tengtenga, Associate Director](#)

[Anonymous](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

The following submitted general opposition to the bill:

[Anonymous](#)

[Anonymous](#)

[Anonymous](#)

GENERAL COMMENTS:

[Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut, John Flanders, President](#) submitted testimony noting there is strong support for any effort to ensure a student with a disability has informed support to develop skills that will enable them to meaningfully participate in life afterschool. He shared that if the Executive Director of the Technical Educations and Career System is looking at vocational training for kindergarten-8th Grade, it would make sense to also look at the labor force participation and unemployment of recent graduates with disabilities and to make recommendations to reduce the employment gap.

The following submitted general comments to the bill:

[Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut, Andrew Feinstein, Legislative Chair](#)

Reported by: Tyler Fisher

Date: 03/30/2026