

Appropriations Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-401 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING A BRIDGE PROGRAM TO ALLOW ACCESS TO FOOD,
Title: HOUSING AND HEALTH CARE BENEFITS.

Vote Date: 4/1/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/12/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Appropriations Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill is intended to address gaps in the social safety net by requiring the Department of Social Services, in coordination with other agencies, to develop a plan for a “bridge program” that supports vulnerable individuals during periods when they lose or transition off public benefits. These disruptions can lead to loss of healthcare, food insecurity, housing instability, and difficulty maintaining employment. By proposing a coordinated program that includes medical, nutrition, housing, and employment assistance, the bill aims to ensure continuity of care and prevent individuals from falling into crisis. The planning and reporting requirement also allows the legislature to evaluate solutions and next steps without immediate fiscal impact.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

None.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Danté Bartolomeo, Commissioner, Department of Labor: Commissioner Bartolomeo provided informational testimony on SB 401, highlighting that existing workforce programs already serve many vulnerable populations and questioned whether additional employment services under the bill would be necessary. She raises concerns about potential duplication of federally funded programs, lack of clarity around implementation requirements, and warns that any expansion could create significant costs and administrative challenges for the agency.

Andrea Barton Reeves, Commissioner, Department of Social Services: Commissioner Reeves provided informational testimony on SB 401, acknowledging the importance of supporting vulnerable populations but noting that DSS already administers a wide range of programs that provide similar medical, nutrition, housing, and employment assistance. She raises concerns about potential duplication of existing services, lack of clarity around how the proposed bridge program would operate, and emphasizes the need to carefully evaluate coordination, administrative impact, and costs before implementation.

Christian Duborg, Food and Nutrition Analyst, The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity: Duborg testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that anticipated federal cuts and eligibility changes to nutrition programs like SNAP could significantly increase food insecurity for vulnerable populations. He argues that a state-level bridge program is necessary to ensure continued access to food and other essential supports, helping to stabilize individuals and families during periods of benefit disruption.

Joshua Wojcik, Acting Secretary, Office of Policy and Management: Acting Secretary Wojcik testified in opposition to the bill, raises concerns regarding the hundreds of millions of dollars in potential added cost to the state and the displacement of federal dollars, as individuals may seek coverage through the state funded program when eligible for federal support. He notes that such a program is not included in the Governor's budget but welcomes the opportunity to work with the committee to study the feasibility/implications of a narrow scoped program for disabled individuals categorically exempt from the work requirements.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Rochelle Palache, State Director, 32BJ SEIU; Corey Geisma, Executive Director, SEIU State Council; Travis Woodward, President CSEA SEIU Local 2001; Rob Baril, President, District 1199 New England; Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO: The above individuals testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that low-wage workers often experience instability when gaps in essential benefits like healthcare, food, and housing occur, making it difficult to maintain economic security. She argues that a coordinated bridge program would help protect workers and their families by ensuring continued access to critical supports during these transitions.

Daniel Fitzmaurice, Director of Advocacy, United Way of Connecticut: Fitzmaurice testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that many residents face significant hardship when federal benefit changes or eligibility shifts disrupt access to basic needs like healthcare, food, and housing. He argues that a coordinated bridge program would help ensure continuity of support and promote long-term stability for vulnerable individuals and families across the state.

Ruchi Sheth, M.A., Research & Policy Associate and Carmen Clarkin, M.P.H., Special Assistant for Strategic Initiatives, Connecticut Voices for Children: Sheth and Clarkin testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that recent and anticipated cuts or changes to federal benefits (such as SNAP) can have significant ripple effects on children and families, increasing economic instability. She argues that a state-level bridge program is necessary to mitigate these impacts and ensure families maintain access to essential supports like food, housing, and healthcare during periods of disruption.

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA): CHA testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that gaps in access to food, housing, and healthcare can negatively impact patient health outcomes and increase reliance on hospitals for preventable care. They argue that a coordinated bridge program would help stabilize vulnerable individuals, improve continuity of care, and reduce avoidable strain on the healthcare system.

Melanie Aguilar, Master of Social Work student, UConn; Amina Chowdhury, Master of Social Work student; Dhvani Anand, Raisa Hossain, Suzie Ponnaganti, Members, University of Connecticut Health Policy Advocacy Coalition:

The above testified in support of SB 401, highlighting that vulnerable individuals often face harmful gaps in essential services like healthcare, food, and housing when benefits are disrupted. She emphasizes that a coordinated bridge program would help provide stability and ensure continuity of support during these transition periods.

Sofia I. Morales, Yale School of Public Health: Morales testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that consistent access to food, housing, and healthcare is critical to overall public health and that disruptions in these supports can worsen health outcomes for vulnerable populations. She argues that a coordinated bridge program would help address these gaps and promote stability by ensuring continuity of essential services.

Alison Weir, Executive Director, The Connecticut Veterans Legal Center: Weir testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that gaps in federal benefits create significant holes in the safety net, leaving vulnerable populations including veterans without access to essential services. She argues that a state-funded bridge program is necessary to fill these gaps and ensure continuity of support for those at risk of losing critical benefits.

Mario Volpe, Policy & Advocacy Manager, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence: Volpe testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence often rely on public benefits for safety and stability, and gaps in those supports can place them at heightened risk. He argues that a coordinated bridge program would help ensure continued access to essential services like housing, healthcare, and food, which are critical to survivor safety and recovery.

Maryam Elahi, President and CEO, Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut and Greater Hartford Gives Foundation: Elahi and Greater Hartford Gives Foundation supports SB 401, emphasizing that anticipated federal benefit cuts and new eligibility requirements will leave many vulnerable residents at risk of losing access to essential services like food, housing, and healthcare. They argue that a coordinated, state-level bridge program is necessary to ensure continuity of support and protect thousands of residents from instability during these transitions.

Meg Hourigan, Co-Founder, Connecticut Food Sovereignty Collective; Kaitlyn Kimball, Director, Agriculture at CitySeed in New Haven; Norma Martinez-HoSang, Director, Connecticut For All Coalition; Kimberly Stoner, PhD, Director of Advocacy, Northeast Organic Farming Association; Jenna Van Donselaar, Program Manager, New Britain ROOTS:

The above testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that rising food insecurity and gaps in access to basic needs particularly due to changes in federal programs require a coordinated

state response. They argue that a bridge program would help ensure continued access to food and other essential supports, promoting stability and community well-being during periods of transition.

Kristen Noelle Miller Hatcher, Managing Attorney, Public Benefits Unit at Connecticut Legal Services and Ellen Andrews, PhD, CT Health Policy Project: Miller and Andrews testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that gaps in healthcare coverage particularly due to federal policy changes can leave low-income individuals without access to necessary care, resulting in serious harm. She argues that a coordinated bridge program would help ensure continuity of healthcare and other essential supports, protecting vulnerable residents during transitions in benefit eligibility.

Maggie Mitchell Salem, Executive Director, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services: Salem testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that immigrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable to sudden gaps in federal benefits, which can leave them without access to basic needs like food, housing, and healthcare. She argues that a coordinated state bridge program is critical to ensure stability and continuity of support for these populations during periods of policy changes or benefit disruptions.

Monika Nugent, Manager, Public Policy and Advocacy, The Alliance: Nugent testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that nonprofit organizations are already experiencing increased demand for services as federal benefits become more limited or harder to access. She argues that a coordinated state bridge program would help stabilize vulnerable populations and reduce strain on the nonprofit sector by ensuring continued access to essential supports during benefit gaps.

Sara Parker McKernan, Legislative/Policy Advocate, CT's Legal Services Programs; Sana Shah, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Connecticut Project Action Fund; Nicholas Russell, Attorney, Connecticut Legal Services; Constanza Segovia, Organizing Director, Connecticut For All Coalition; James Haslam, Managing Attorney, Connecticut Legal Services; Matthew Dillon, Attorney, Connecticut Legal Services; Rev. Mark Olsen, Emmanuel Lutheran Church:

The above testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that recent federal policy changes are creating significant gaps in access to essential benefits like healthcare, food, and housing for low-income residents. She argues that a state-funded bridge program is necessary to provide transitional support and ensure continuity of care during these disruptions.

Jean Mills Aranha, Elder Law Attorney, Connecticut Legal Services: Attorney Aranha supports SB 401, emphasizing that older adults and other vulnerable populations are particularly at risk of losing access to essential benefits like healthcare, food, and housing due to eligibility changes or administrative barriers. She argues that a coordinated bridge program would help ensure continuity of care and stabilize individuals during these transitions, preventing serious hardship.

Rhonda Evans, Executive Director, Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA): Evans testified in support of SB 401, emphasizing that community action agencies regularly serve individuals experiencing gaps in essential services such as food, housing, and

employment support, which can undermine long-term stability. She argues that a coordinated bridge program would strengthen the safety net by helping individuals maintain access to critical services and progress toward economic self-sufficiency during periods of transition.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Mackenzie Frenette

Date: 04/06/2026