



2026 Acts Affecting Higher Education

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Notice to Readers

This report provides summaries of new laws (public acts) significantly affecting higher education enacted during the 2026 regular legislative session. OLR's other Acts Affecting reports, including Acts Affecting Children and Acts Affecting Education, are, or will soon be, available on [OLR's website](#).

Each summary indicates the public act (PA) number. Not all provisions of the acts are included. The report does not include vetoed acts unless the veto was overridden. Complete summaries of public acts are, or will soon be, available on [OLR's website](#).

Readers are encouraged to obtain the full text of acts that interest them from the [General Assembly's website](#) or the Connecticut State Library.

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Artificial Intelligence

Connecticut AI Academy

A new law requires the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) to establish a “Connecticut AI Academy” to offer online courses on artificial intelligence (AI). It must do this by December 31, 2026, on behalf of Charter Oak State College and in consultation with the Department of Labor, the State Board of Education, workforce investment boards, employers, and in-state higher education institutions. The academy must, among other things, curate and offer online courses on AI and its responsible use; prepare students for careers in fields involving AI; and offer courses and resources related to AI ([PA 26-15](#), § 17, effective July 1, 2026).

Program to Bolster AI Cooperation

A new law requires the Office of Higher Education (OHE) to develop and implement a program to bolster AI cooperation by convening certain events and meetings and implementing programs, among other things. To do so, OHE must, within existing appropriations, engage an alliance representing the majority of Connecticut’s public and private higher education institutions to coordinate research, workforce development, and industry partnerships across academic institutions ([PA 26-15](#), § 31, effective July 1, 2026).

Technology Talent and Innovation Fund Advisory Committee

This session, the legislature repurposed the “Technology Talent Advisory Committee” and renamed it the “Technology Talent and Innovation Fund Advisory Committee.” In its repurposing, the new law requires the committee to partner with Connecticut public and private higher education institutions and other training providers to develop programs in the AI field ([PA 26-15](#), §§ 24 & 25, effective July 1, 2026).

Early College

Dual and Concurrent Enrollment Course Coordinator and Fee Waiver Reimbursement Expansion

A new law requires the state Department of Education to appoint a dual and concurrent enrollment course coordinator by January 1, 2027, to track establishment of these courses and student outcomes, such as completion rates and grades, by school district. The law also allows higher education institutions to apply for reimbursement for fee waivers given to high-need students in advanced classes or programs (previously, only school boards could apply for these reimbursements) ([PA 26-18](#), effective July 1, 2026).

Health Care

Deploying Behavioral Health Professionals After Mass Shootings

A new law requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) commissioner to coordinate with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services commissioner, in addition to the Department of Public Health (DPH) commissioner as under existing law, when deploying grief counselors and mental health professionals to provide mental health services to mass shooting victims' family members and other people with a close association to them. By law, these deployments must be made to (1) local community outreach groups in and around the impacted geographic location and (2) any school or higher education institution where a mass shooting victim or perpetrator was enrolled ([PA 26-38](#), § 3, effective upon passage).

Infirmaries Operated by Educational Facilities

A new law allows an infirmary operated by an educational institution to provide care to dependent family members of students, faculty, and employees when these family members are enrolled in the institution's health plan. Previously, these facilities provided evaluation and treatment for routine health problems and, in some cases, short-term overnight accommodations (for example, when someone is recovering from surgery or requires observation) only for students, faculty, and employees ([PA 26-13](#), § 1, effective October 1, 2026).

State Immunization Standards

In response to recent changes in federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention vaccine standards, the legislature enacted a law requiring DPH to establish immunization standards of care for all Connecticut residents, instead of only children and adolescents. In developing these standards, DPH may consider recommended vaccine schedules from several medical professional organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Academy of Family Physicians.

Among other things, the new law expressly provides that the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act does not apply to school (including higher education) and child care facility immunization requirements ([PA 26-3](#), various effective dates).

Public Higher Education Institutions

Enhanced Workers' Compensation Benefits for Teachers Assaulted at Work

A new law allows certain teachers and related employees to receive enhanced workers' compensation benefits if they are unable to work as a result of a physical or negligent assault upon them while performing their work duties. More specifically, it qualifies them to receive a workers' compensation benefit that equals 100% of their gross (rather than net) average weekly earnings, with no cap on the benefit amount, plus their reasonable expenses for medical or other services needed due to the assault, and any lost wages due to an absence for a court appearance connected to the assault. These enhanced benefits are available to, among others, (1) members of BOR or the UConn Board of Trustees and (2) teachers and others employed by those boards ([PA 26-12](#), §§ 1 & 75, effective October 1, 2026).

Finish Line Scholar Program Modifications

Legislation this session modifies the Finish Line Scholars Program, which awards grants to students who (1) enrolled at Connecticut State Community College and received an award under the Mary Ann Handley (debt-free community college) program and (2) then enroll in a bachelor's program at a Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) institution or Charter Oak State College.

The legislation modifies the program's participation requirements by requiring that a student previously received an associate's degree during the fall 2025 semester, spring 2026 semester, or any following semester (prior law required a student to complete at least 60 credits at Connecticut State Community College through the Mary Ann Handley program). It also modifies the content and deadlines for various reports on the program.

The legislation specifies that eligibility for the Finish Line Scholars program requires not only participating in the Mary Ann Handley program but maintaining eligibility throughout program participation ([PA 26-68](#), § 470, as amended by [PA 26-76](#), § 56, effective July 1, 2026).

Foundation Reimbursements for State Employees

Foundations that support state agencies, such as the UConn Foundation, must pay their officers and employees and have written agreements for the foundation to reimburse the agency for expenses the agency incurs for the foundation's operations that it otherwise would not have incurred. New legislation specifies that the salaries, benefits, and expenses of a foundation's officers and employees must be paid by the foundation, unless the officers or employees are state employees paid by the state. The legislation also requires reimbursement agreements to include

whether reimbursement must include expenses, salaries, or benefits of state employees supporting the foundation ([PA 26-109](#), § 2, effective October 1, 2026, and applicable to any agreement entered into or renewed on or after that date).

Higher Education System Studies and Reports

A new law makes several changes to reporting requirements related to the public higher education system. It:

1. changes existing requirements and adds new ones for the BOR annual report on consolidating the community colleges into Connecticut State Community College;
2. by December 31, 2026, requires the CSCU chancellor to report to the legislature on a comparison of the number of certain CSCU administrative personnel as of June 30 in 2011, 2019, and 2026; and
3. adds the Government Oversight Committee to the list of legislative committees that must receive the Planning Commission for Higher Education's updated higher education strategic master plan and its annual progress reports ([PA 26-49](#), effective upon passage).

Internship Programs

A new law requires the UConn Board of Trustees and BOR to jointly identify the qualities and best practices of a high-quality internship program and create a syllabus for employers' online training by January 1, 2027. BOR must use the syllabus to offer asynchronous online training to employers through Charter Oak State College by July 1, 2027. The new law also requires reports to the legislature on employers completing the training, internship opportunities available to higher education students through their institution's career services offices, and state agency internship programs.

It also requires, by January 1, 2028, the Department of Revenue Services (DRS) to study the revenue impact of expanding an existing tax credit (the human capital investment tax credit) to cover intern compensation ([PA 26-12](#), §§ 57-61, effective July 1, 2026, except the provision on (1) the DRS study is effective October 1, 2026, and (2) offering and reporting on the online training program is effective January 1, 2027).

Police Training Center

A new law changes existing requirements for DESPP to establish a police training center to train and educate police officers in crime scene processing, the collection and analysis of forensic evidence, and criminal investigations. Instead of requiring the center to be at Central Connecticut State University under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the DESPP commissioner, the

new law allows the center to be at any CSCU institution under an MOU entered into by January 1, 2027 ([PA 26-45](#), § 19, effective July 1, 2026).

Reports on Advertising

New legislation requires, starting by January 1, 2027, and within available appropriations, the CSCU chancellor and UConn president to annually report to the Government Administration and Elections Committee a summary of the amount spent on advertising, names of certain advertising vendors, advertising methods, and advertising subject matter. Additionally, the new law allows the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) commissioner to accept voluntary assistance from in-state higher education institutions to assist state agencies in preparing similar reports ([PA 26-140](#), effective July 1, 2026).

Social Work and Law Enforcement Project

New legislation changes existing requirements for DESPP, in consultation with the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST), to establish a social work and law enforcement project at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). It extends by one year, to January 1, 2027, the deadline for DESPP to enter an MOU with SCSU for the project and requires the MOU to (1) be for at least \$850,000 and (2) address expanding and supporting the project. Another new law requires the commissioner, POST, and the SCSU president to jointly report annually to the legislature on the project and its cost, beginning by January 1, 2027 ([PA 26-68](#), § 484, effective July 1, 2026, and [PA 26-76](#), § 106, effective upon passage).

Sporting Event Tickets for Public Officials and State Employees

The Code of Ethics for Public Officials places limits on gifts that may be given to and received by public officials and state employees, but exempts certain items or circumstances from being considered a “gift.” A new law adds an exemption for admission to one intercollegiate sporting event in the state per calendar year if (1) hosted by a public higher education institution and (2) provided by the institution to an official or employee and up to one guest ([PA 26-66](#), § 4, effective October 1, 2026).

Scholarships and Grants

Aspiring Educator Scholarship

New legislation makes “aspiring educators,” rather than “diverse educators,” eligible for a teacher recruitment scholarship, which potentially broadens the pool of eligible candidates. Under prior law, the scholarship targeted “diverse” students, which are those whose race is other than white, or whose ethnicity is defined as Hispanic or Latino. Under the new law, an “aspiring educator” is

someone from a population subgroup that (1) is underrepresented in the teaching profession in Connecticut and (2) has been identified under state law as a teacher shortage area. The new legislation also broadens the eligibility criteria by expanding the pool to graduates of any high school in the state, rather than just high schools in alliance districts. The scholarships are up to \$10,000 a year for those enrolled in good standing in a teacher preparation program at any four-year institution of higher education ([PA 26-149](#), §§ 2 & 3, effective July 1, 2026).

Postsecondary Education Grant Program for Youth in DCF Care

By January 1, 2027, a new law requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to establish a program to give grants for postsecondary education (programs that lead to an academic degree, vocation certification, or trade) to youths who (1) were adopted through DCF's foster care program on or after January 1, 2005, before turning age 18 and (2) consent to remain in DCF care after turning age 18. Young people generally cannot participate in the program after they turn age 21. However, with DCF's permission, they may continue to participate until they turn age 24 or complete their postsecondary education program, whichever happens first.

Among other things, DCF must approve postsecondary education programs, set eligibility criteria, and report to the legislature and state Auditors of Public Accounts on the program. The auditors must do a performance audit of the program by July 1, 2028, and report its results to the legislature ([PA 26-26](#), §§ 9 & 10, effective July 1, 2026, except the audit provision is effective October 1, 2026).

Private Scholarship Financial Aid Reduction

This session, the legislature passed a law prohibiting certain public higher education institutions from reducing the amount of financial aid awarded to students who receive a Roberta B. Willis scholarship or federal Pell Grant because the student receives a private scholarship. The new law specifies when a student's aid may be reduced (such as when the total aid exceeds the cost of attendance) and requires, when financial aid is less than the cost of attendance, that higher education institutions first apply private scholarships to offset the student's unmet need ([PA 26-122](#), § 27, effective July 1, 2026).

Program to Support New Promise Programs

A new law requires OHE to establish a program to support the creation of new promise programs throughout the state. (These programs provide students with scholarships and associated services, such as mentoring, peer support, and internships.) The new initiative must prioritize programs serving students in alliance districts and have a goal of establishing eight new promise programs by January 1, 2031. OHE must (1) coordinate with municipalities and regional coalitions; (2) provide

new promise programs with start-up technical assistance, including on strategies related to funding, stakeholder engagement, program design, evaluation, and sustainability; and (3) hire a consultant with expertise in developing and operating promise programs ([PA 26-68](#), § 382, effective July 1, 2026).

Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Funding Contracts With Institutions

A new law permits OHE, with the Office of Policy and Management's approval, to enter contracts with Connecticut higher education institutions on and after January 1 annually to commit funds for Roberta B. Willis needs-based scholarships in the following fiscal year. By law, OHE annually allocates funds for these scholarships to participating higher education institutions in the state and OHE notifies them annually by (1) October 1 of the proportion of funds they will receive the next fiscal year and (2) November 1 of the estimated amount of funds allocated to them in the next fiscal year ([PA 26-68](#), § 380, effective July 1, 2026).

Student Loans

CHESLA Graduate Loan Program

A new law requires the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA) to create a Supplemental Graduate Loan Program to provide loans to eligible graduate students. It makes the program's loans available to students in or from the state who are enrolled in an eligible advanced academic or professional degree program, as determined by CHESLA, that is pursued after earning a bachelor's degree.

The new law (1) authorizes \$30 million in new general obligation bonds for FY 26 for the program and (2) increases, from \$300 million to \$750 million, the aggregate amount of outstanding CHESLA bonds that may be secured by special capital reserve funds ([PA 26-68](#), §§ 340, 341 & 344, effective upon passage).

DOC Nurse and Social Worker Student Loan Reimbursement Program

A new law creates a program to give student loan reimbursement grants, within available bond authorizations, to licensed nurses and clinical social workers who work for the Department of Correction (DOC) in positions requiring this licensure. OHE must administer the program. The maximum annual grants are \$5,000, and the cumulative total for any person is \$20,000 ([PA 26-40](#), § 6, effective upon passage).

Office of the Student Loan Ombudsman

A new law (1) transfers the Office of the Student Loan Ombudsman from the Department of Banking to OHE and (2) requires the ombudsman to report to the legislature on the office's 2025 and 2026 activities. Among other things, the ombudsman's office (1) helps student loan borrowers resolve complaints and understand their rights and responsibilities and (2) analyzes laws that affect borrowers and recommends changes to them ([PA 26-68](#), §§ 385 & 386, effective July 1, 2026).

Tuition and Fee Waivers

First Responder Recruitment and Retention

A new law provides financial assistance to eligible police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel (first responders). Among other things, the new law requires BOR to waive Connecticut State Community College and CSCU institution tuition for (1) first responders who certify their eligibility and are enrolled or accepted for admission and (2) students attending the state fire school who are enrolled in a program offered together with the respective college or university that accredits courses in the program. The new law caps the total number of these waivers at Connecticut State Community College and CSCU at 200 per school year, respectively.

The new law also waives all mandatory fees for eligible National Guard members enrolled at Connecticut State Community College, CSCU, or UConn under the existing tuition waiver program ([PA 26-12](#), §§ 65-71, various effective dates).

Public Safety Personnel Recruitment and Retention Task Force

New legislation establishes a task force to study recruitment and retention issues for public safety personnel. Among its duties, the task force must examine the feasibility and fiscal impact of providing:

1. tuition waivers for correction officers; judicial marshals; and dependent children of police officers, uniformed members of paid or volunteer fire departments, and EMS personnel;
2. tuition waivers for undergraduate and graduate degree programs at UConn for police officers, uniformed members of paid or volunteer fire departments, and EMS personnel; and
3. tuition vouchers for public safety personnel for any accredited higher education institution in Connecticut.

The task force must report its recommendations to the legislature by January 1, 2027 ([PA 26-12](#), § 73, effective upon passage).

UConn

Refundable Sales and Use Tax Credit for PeoplesBank Arena Facility Manager

New legislation creates a refundable sales and use tax credit of up to \$10 million (in total) under which, generally, the PeoplesBank Arena's facility management company may qualify if it contracts with UConn to host at least 20 UConn men's or women's intercollegiate basketball games or men's intercollegiate hockey games each academic year for a term that starts by July 1, 2027, and ends not earlier than September 1, 2045. Among other things, the new law requires the contract to include a provision on dividing net profit or loss between the facility management company and UConn ([PA 26-68](#), §§ 254 & 255, effective July 1, 2026).

UConn Health Neuromodulation Center

Last year, the legislature required UConn Health to establish a Center of Excellence for Neuromodulation Treatments and allowed UConn Health to collaborate with an in-state hospital to provide neuromodulation treatments at this center. This year, a new law limits the treatments to disabled veterans (in line with UConn Health's plans for the center, which is not yet open). It also specifically allows for neuromodulation research at this center ([PA 26-1](#), § 8, effective upon passage).

UConn Special Police Forces Recruitment and Retention

This session, the legislature passed a new law requiring the UConn president, by July 1, 2027, to establish a recruitment and retention program for the UConn special police forces and fire department to address staffing shortages and high resignation rates. As part of the program, the president must develop salary schedules for all sworn members of the university's special police forces and all members of the fire department, and an education benefit for those members ([PA 26-12](#), §§ 41-43, effective upon passage).

Miscellaneous

Code Official Career Pathway Working Group

A new law requires the state fire marshal to convene a working group within DAS to study the code official career pathway. The study must include an analysis of any statutory or regulatory changes needed to create a more accessible entry into the code official career pathway in Connecticut, as informed by national professional qualifications and best practices for professional development. By January 1, 2027, the working group must report its findings and recommendations to the legislature and the DAS commissioner ([PA 26-110](#), § 1, effective upon passage).

Gaming Advertising

A new law prohibits licensed gaming entities from advertising at athletic facilities on higher education institution campuses or on websites, social media, online services, or mobile apps of, or maintained by or on behalf of, these institutions. This does not apply to an announcement, sign, or display that is directed at a general audience ([PA 26-53](#), § 2, effective July 1, 2026).

Human Services Career Pipeline Program Changes

A new law eliminates a requirement for the chief workforce officer to establish a human services career pipeline program but extends the deadline for the officer to develop a plan for this type of pipeline program ([PA 26-85](#), § 1, effective July 1, 2026).

Law Enforcement Retention and Readiness Training

A new law passed this session requires DESPP, by January 1, 2028, and in consultation with POST, to coordinate with an independent institution of higher education located in West Haven to establish a one-day training program for police officers. The training must be available online and include expert instruction, de-escalation skills, and practical planning. Annually, beginning by January 1, 2029, the DESPP commissioner must report to the legislature on the program ([PA 26-128](#), § 1, effective October 1, 2026).

OWS Training Program Changes

A new law extends to January 1, 2027, the deadline for the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) to implement a program to support individuals pursuing training for a commercial driver's license (CDL). It also changes the types of training that can be added to this program.

The new law also eliminates the requirement for OWS to establish a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system pipeline training pilot program ([PA 26-85](#), §§ 2 & 3, effective July 1, 2026, except the CDL program changes are effective upon passage).

Peace Officer Civil Offense Custody Actions

This year, the legislature passed restrictions on detaining, arresting, or taking someone into custody based on a civil offense in certain locations, including at colleges and universities. To do so, the peace officer must be acting in an official capacity and have a judicial warrant for the individual. This restriction applies to college or university buildings, their grounds, and garages or parking lots that are used as part of their operation ([PA 26-14](#), § 7, effective October 1, 2026).

Police Officer and Firefighter Career Pipeline Program

New legislation requires the chief workforce officer to develop a plan to establish a police officer and firefighter career pipeline program that at least includes (1) a strategy to increase the number of state residents pursuing careers as police officers or firefighters and (2) estimated funding needed to support such a pipeline program. The chief workforce officer must submit a report on the plan to the legislature by January 1, 2027 ([PA 26-12](#), § 74, effective upon passage).

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