



PA 26-144—sHB 5460

Public Safety and Security Committee

Appropriations Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING STATE-WIDE FIRE PROTECTION

SUMMARY: This act expands existing, and creates new, fire protection programs and requirements, including by:

1. requiring (a) entities responsible for fire protection services within one or more geographic areas of a municipality to register annually with that municipality beginning by July 1, 2027, and (b) municipalities to enter this information in the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) (§ 1);
2. requiring municipalities to establish local fire protection plans beginning by July 1, 2027, and review them every five years starting on July 1, 2032 (§ 1);
3. requiring the state fire administrator to review and rate these plans at least once every five years after the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control (commission) develops review standards (§ 1);
4. requiring the commission to recommend minimum standards for firefighter safety and emergency response protocols (§ 2);
5. allowing the commission to (a) require municipalities to submit local fire protection plans and related revisions to the state fire administrator; (b) establish, in coordination with the state fire administrator, a standard protocol for reviewing these plans; (c) require fire protection entities to submit operational data; and (d) specify how these submissions are to be done (§ 2);
6. generally requiring all municipalities to exercise their authority to provide fire protection if fire protection services in a municipality are discontinued or disrupted (§ 3);
7. establishing a Connecticut Fire program to be overseen by the state fire administrator to create a framework for the state to assist municipalities and fire authorities (§ 4);
8. establishing a Connecticut Fire grant program to incentivize regionalized services and resource sharing (§ 5);
9. establishing a working group to develop the Connecticut Fire program (§ 6);
10. establishing volunteer, unpaid regional fire coordinators to act as liaisons between the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection's (DESPP) Division of Fire Services Administration and local fire departments to (a) facilitate the Connecticut Fire Program and (b) coordinate fire protection resources in Connecticut (§ 7);
11. requiring DESPP, in coordination with the state comptroller, to establish

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and maintain a system to collect computer-aided dispatch data from municipalities to aggregate and monitor information on emergency service requests managed by fire departments and emergency medical service providers (§ 8);

12. modifying the contents of, and expanding the entities required to submit, quarterly reports concerning certain emergency service requests (§ 9);
13. requiring the comptroller to study, in coordination with DESPP, and report on the feasibility of centralizing all public benefits available to firefighters within one state agency (§ 10);
14. requiring, by July 1, 2027, DESPP's Division of Fire Services Administration to establish, maintain, and annually update as necessary, a registry identifying the fire chief of each municipality and fire district in Connecticut (§ 11);
15. requiring, by July 1, 2027, the comptroller, in coordination with DESPP, to establish and maintain a registry of all of Connecticut's career and volunteer firefighters to verify their training, credentials, and benefit eligibility (§ 12); and
16. expanding which officials may use certain steady and flashing colored lights on vehicles (§ 13).

The act also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026, except the provisions concerning emergency dispatch reports are effective July 1, 2026, and provisions on the (1) Connecticut Fire program, (2) creation of regional fire coordinators, (3) feasibility study on the consolidation of first responder health benefits, and (4) registries of fire chiefs and firefighters are effective upon passage.

§ 1 — FIRE PROTECTION REGISTRATION

The act requires, starting by July 1, 2027, each fire protection entity responsible for providing fire protection services within one or more geographical areas of a municipality to register annually with that municipality. Under the act, an “entity” is any person; business entity; state or local government agency, political subdivision, or authority; or religious, social, or union organization. “Fire protection” is preventing and suppressing fires, investigating their origin and cause, responding to hazardous materials incidents, and technical rescues. The registration must at least include the (1) demographic information of the geographic area served by that entity and (2) name and contact information for it. The entity must amend its registration to report any material change within 30 days after the entity knows, or should know, of the change.

The act requires each municipality to (1) enter the information it receives from these entities with NERIS and (2) maintain the data and review it at least yearly. “NERIS” is the national data system developed or designated by the United States Fire Administration, or its successor system, to collect, report, and analyze fire and emergency incident data.

§ 1 — MUNICIPAL LOCAL FIRE PROTECTION PLAN

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The act requires all municipalities, by July 1, 2027, to establish a local fire protection plan and submit it to the municipality's (1) chief elected officer, (2) legislative body, and (3) emergency management director. The municipality may submit the plan to the state fire administrator, but it must do so if the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control requires it. In that case, the plan must be submitted in a way set by the commission.

The plan must at least:

1. generally state how fire protection services are provided in the municipality;
2. disclose the municipality's subdivisions or districts responsible for fire protection services throughout all geographic areas of the municipality (a subdivision or district is an entity or municipal subdivision responsible for fire protection services under statute, charter, or ordinance);
3. name each fire protection entity responsible for the municipality's primary response for fire protection services;
4. describe any written agreements or contracts between the municipality and the entities that provide fire protection services to it;
5. identify the specific municipal geographic boundaries that each entity providing fire protection services covers;
6. name each person, including the fire chief, responsible for each fire protection services entity in the municipality;
7. describe the municipality's fire protection performance standards, including response times, minimum fireground (the physical area where firefighters work to control and put out a fire) staffing levels, and apparatus requirements;
8. describe the process for collecting and tracking personnel and response data, including any software used; and
9. describe the municipality's mutual aid agreements.

State Fire Administrator and Municipal Review

Under the act, if the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control establishes a standardized protocol, the state fire administrator must review and assign a rating to each local fire development plan submitted to the administrator at least every five years, under protocols the commission may develop (see below). The administrator (1) may require municipalities with an unsatisfactory plan rating to submit a performance improvement plan within 90 days after being assigned that rating and (2) must help municipalities develop it.

Beginning July 1, 2032, and every five years after, each municipality must review and revise, as needed, its local fire protection plan and may report any substantial changes to the state fire administrator.

§ 2 — COMMISSION ON FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL

By law, the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control must perform several duties relating to fire protection in the state, including recommending minimum education and physical condition standards for firefighter candidates, setting

training and education program standards, and conducting training programs. The act additionally requires the commission to recommend minimum standards for firefighter safety and emergency response protocols, including (a) operational safety strategies for fire suppression operations, hazardous materials mitigation, and technical rescue operations and (b) ways to ensure the health and wellness of fire service personnel.

The act allows the commission to:

1. require municipalities to submit local fire protection plans and any revisions to the state fire administrator;
2. establish, in coordination with the state fire administrator, a standardized (a) protocol the administrator will use to review and rate local fire protection plans at least once every five years, and (b) classification system the administrator may use to evaluate and grade the operational performance of the fire protection services provided by each municipality or fire district, considering nationally recognized standards (for example, standards developed by the National Fire Protection Association and the Center for Public Safety Excellence); and
3. require fire protection entities in the state to submit operational data and set the form and manner of those submissions.

As with other commission responsibilities under existing law, the act allows the commission to recommend, and the DESPP commissioner to adopt, necessary regulations. If the commission requires operational data submissions, the DESPP commissioner must forward the requirement to the state fire administrator for adoption.

§ 3 — MUNICIPAL FIRE PROTECTION

By law, municipalities have the authority to provide fire protection services, including organizing, maintaining, and regulating people providing fire protection; providing the necessary fire apparatus; and doing other things to protect the municipality from fire.

The act requires, if fire protection services are discontinued or interrupted (for example, the dissolution or the end of operations of a fire department, district, or company), municipalities to take actions necessary to ensure that fire protection services within the municipality continue uninterrupted, except as otherwise provided by special act or their charter. These actions may include establishing or operating a municipal fire department, entering contracts or agreements for fire protection services, designating a temporary or permanent provider, or participating in a mutual aid or regional fire service arrangement.

§§ 4-6 — CONNECTICUT FIRE

Program Establishment (§ 4)

The act creates the Connecticut Fire program within DESPP's Division of Fire Services Administration, which is overseen by the state fire administrator.

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Under the act, the program must establish a framework for the state to give administrative and operational assistance to municipalities or fire authorities that want assistance. The program must at least include provisions for resident firefighters to staff and augment volunteer fire departments and fire districts with paid personnel, while preserving their local autonomy and command structures.

Once the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control approves the framework (see below), the state fire administrator may, in the budget request for the subsequent fiscal year, include the cost of implementing that framework. When funds are appropriated for it, the administrator must implement the framework. The program may use facilities and equipment of the Connecticut Fire Academy, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's Forestry Division, and the regional fire schools.

Connecticut Fire Grant Program (§ 5)

The act requires, when the Connecticut Fire program is implemented by the state fire administrator, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary to administer a Connecticut Fire grant program to give participating municipalities grants to incentivize (1) the regionalization of fire protection services and (2) sharing fire protection resources. Municipalities may apply in a way set by the secretary.

The act requires the secretary, by the start of the next fiscal year after awarding the first grant under the program, to annually report to the Public Safety and Security Committee on the program, including (1) information on grants paid by the program and (2) an evaluation of the program's success and the fire protection services funded by it.

Connecticut Fire Working Group (§ 6)

The act requires the comptroller to establish a working group to develop the administrative, operational, fiscal, and personnel framework for the Connecticut Fire Program. Under the act, the working group must at least consist of three members of the Joint Council of Connecticut Fire Service Organizations, appointed by the council, and the following individuals or their designees:

1. the comptroller,
2. the OPM secretary,
3. the DESPP commissioner,
4. the state fire administrator,
5. the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control chairperson and vice-chairperson,
6. the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities executive director, and
7. the Council of Small Towns executive director.

The comptroller must (1) schedule the first meeting, which must be held by August 3, 2026, and (2) select two co-chairpersons from among the members.

By September 1, 2027, the comptroller must submit the recommended framework for the Connecticut Fire Program developed by the working group to

the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control. By January 1, 2028, the commission must (1) review the recommended framework, (2) approve it with or without modifications, and (3) submit the approved framework to the state fire administrator.

The comptroller may end the working group when the commission approves the framework or on January 1, 2028, whichever is later.

§ 7 — REGIONAL FIRE COORDINATORS

The act establishes the voluntary, non-salaried position of a regional fire coordinator and requires each coordinator to serve as the primary liaison between DESPP's Division of Fire Services and the local fire departments within their region to (1) facilitate the Connecticut Fire program, and (2) coordinate their region's fire protection resources.

The act requires the state fire administrator to coordinate with DESPP's Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security to establish fire service regions that match the division's five emergency preparedness regions. The administrator must appoint a regional fire coordinator for each region and the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control must confirm each appointment. In regions with a recognized regional fire chiefs' organization, the organization may submit recommendations for coordinator candidates for their region to the state fire administrator.

The administrator may submit a plan to the DESPP commissioner on transitioning the regional fire coordinator positions to salaried positions. When the plan is approved, the commissioner may include those positions in his estimates of expenditures.

§§ 8 & 9 — COMPUTER-AIDED DISPATCH DATA SYSTEM

The act requires DESPP, in coordination with the state comptroller, to establish and maintain a system to collect computer-aided dispatch data. DESPP must do so within available appropriations provided for this purpose. DESPP must aggregate the data and monitor the information on emergency service requests managed by fire departments and emergency medical service providers.

Dispatch Data

Existing law requires public safety answering points to submit to the Division of State-Wide Emergency Telecommunications (DSET), quarterly, a report with certain information on all 9-1-1 calls for services received through the enhanced 9-1-1 service and the next generation 9-1-1 telecommunication system. The act requires:

1. regional emergency telecommunication centers to also file this report;
2. the report to include any other information requested by DSET to be included in the computer-aided data dispatch system;
3. the report's information to be produced using data generated from that

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system if the answering point or regional emergency telecommunications center uses the system; and

4. DSET, quarterly, to make the information available to the public and input it into the system.

By law and extended to regional emergency telecommunication centers under the act, the information may be submitted in any written or electronic form the entity chooses and DESPP approves. The commissioner must take into consideration the needs of the public safety answering point or regional emergency telecommunication center in approving the written or electronic form.

The act also removes the requirement that DSET post the information on its website.

§ 10 — FIRST RESPONDER HEALTH AND BENEFIT FEASIBILITY STUDY

The act requires the comptroller, in coordination with DESPP, to study the feasibility of centralizing within one state agency access to all public benefits for firefighters, including claims for the firefighters cancer relief account and the Fallen Hero Fund, and injury, disability, and workers' compensation claims. This access must at least include the state agency (1) making eligibility determinations, (2) receiving applications, and (3) disseminating information about those benefits. By July 1, 2027, the comptroller must report the study results to the Public Safety and Security Committee.

§§ 11 & 12 — FIRE FIGHTER AND CHIEF REGISTRIES

The act requires, by July 1, 2027, (1) DESPP's Division of Fire Services Administration to establish and maintain a registry identifying each municipal and fire district fire chief in Connecticut, and (2) the comptroller, in coordination with DESPP, to establish and maintain a registry of all of Connecticut's career and volunteer firefighters to verify their training, credentials, and benefit eligibility.

§ 13 — STEADY AND FLASHING COLORED LIGHTS ON VEHICLES

The law generally requires a permit to use colored or flashing lights on motor vehicles or equipment. The act allows certain fire and emergency medical service personnel and certain constables during traffic operations who are authorized to use flashing blue or red lights to also use steady lights in those colors.

It also eliminates a provision that only police officers and Department of Motor Vehicles inspectors operating a state or local police vehicle may use steady red, blue, or red and blue lights, visible from the vehicle's front. By law, unauthorized use of colored or flashing lights is an infraction (see [Table on Penalties](#)).

The act also specifies that the "directors of emergency management" that may receive a permit to use red flashing or steady lights includes DESPP's Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (1) deputy commissioner and (2) regional coordinators.