Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5409 / Bill Status / Public Hearing Testimony
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING TROOPS-TO-TRADES INITIATIVES.
Vote Date: 3/10/2026
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/3/2026
File No.:

Disclaimer: *The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Christopher Poulos, 81st Dist.
Rep. Nicholas Menapace, 37th Dist.
Rep. Daniel Gaiewski, 40th Dist.
Rep. Bill Buckbee, 67th Dist.
Sen. Paul Cicarella, 34th Dist.
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.
Rep. Aundre Bumgardner, 41st Dist.
Rep. Kevin Brown, 56th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill introduces several initiatives to support veterans and members of the armed forces in the transition from military life to the civilian workforce. This includes the development of services including career counseling, an online resource portal, a state-based transition service to supplement the existing federal service, the creation of an annual job fair, and the development of further legislative recommendations for promoting employment in the state for veterans. These initiatives serve the purpose of improving the integration of veterans and members of the armed forces into the workforce and providing these individuals with the opportunities and resources to do so. This bill also could incentivize businesses to focus on hiring veterans with desirable and existing skillsets.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

Because the Connecticut National Guard already has a transition assistance program and the Governor's budget does not include the resources to support a full-fledged career counseling program, the substitute language for this bill removes the career counseling program. It also authorizes the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans' Affairs to work together and regularly update their websites with information regarding veteran employment, requires

DOL to study artificial intelligence models used to connect veterans with jobs in other states, and establishes a one-time $2,500 tax credit per veteran employed available to employers. These measures aim to increase veterans' access to information about employment as well as incentivize employers to hire more veterans.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dante Bartolomeo, Commissioner, Department of Labor: Commissioner Bartolomeo noted that the Department of Labor already provides most of the services outlined in the bill, including a webpage with resources, as well as transitional assistance through the American Jobs Center. Commissioner Bartolomeo expressed that the funding required to hire staff for the Department of Labor as required by this bill is not outlined in the Governor's budget.

Major General Francis J. Evon Jr, Adjutant General, Connecticut Military Department: Major General Evon noted that this bill would provide improvements to the National Guard's existing transition assistance program but questioned the feasibility of the program given budgetary constraints within the Governor's budget. Major General Evon suggested that Connecticut could implement a website with a veteran to job matching service if the funds become available.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Several speakers expressed support for providing veterans and members of the armed forces with resources such as an online portal, an annual career fair, and career counseling. They emphasized the benefit of closing the gap between veterans and members of the armed forces with companies that are hiring and searching for candidates with their existing skillsets. They also appreciated that this bill would support existing resources such as Helmets to Hardhats, which trains veterans in construction trades.

James Amaro, Manchester Veterans Advisory Committee
Michael Colombo, Business Manager, Sheet Metal Workers' Local Union (SMART)
K. Robert Lewis, The American Legion, Chairman
Jay More, Business Agent, UA Local 777 Plumbers and Pipefitters
Allie Rinaldi, Executive Director, Independent Electrical Contractors of New England
Don Shubert, President, Connecticut Construction Industries Association, Inc.
Joseph Toner, Executive Director, CT State Building Trades Council

Paul Amarone, Senior Policy Director for Job Growth and Manufacturing, Connecticut Business and Industry Association: Mr. Amarone expressed support for this bill, but recommended changes to Section 4. Mr. Amarone suggested that to a Job Expansion Tax (JET) credit program be reinstated, which would include a veteran-specific hiring credit for businesses, a retention requirement of the employee for 12 months, and higher credit counts for disabled veterans, recently discharged veterans, and veterans working in high-demand sectors. Further, he recommended greater small business accessibility if these credits were to be instated, and alignment with existing workforce programs. Mr. Amarone expressed that the goal of reinstating the JET program would be to make the job market more accessible for veterans.

Paul Cicarella, State Senator, Connecticut General Assembly: Sen. Cicarella expressed support for this legislation, noting that it will support veterans while strengthening the Connecticut workforce.

Naomi Ray Fucci: Ms. Fucci expressed her support for this bill, emphasizing that strengthening the pathways for veterans to enter the skilled trades would be especially beneficial for women veterans who face unique challenges.

Elizabeth Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Water Works Association: Ms. Gara expressed her support for this bill but requested that the bill be broadened to specifically include operations in the water sector when discussing trades.

Jennifer Jennings, Executive Director, Connecticut Heating and Cooling Contractors Association: Ms. Jennings expressed her support for this bill, noting that this bill would help to recognize the existing skills of veterans. Ms. Jennings suggested an amendment to detail a direct system to transfer skills from service towards job experience credits.

Annie Obama: Ms. Obama expressed support for this bill if a provision is made which mandates an expanded requirement that veterans beyond 65 years of age are considered for the workforce to prevent age discrimination.

Mark Okun, Regional Manager, North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters in Connecticut: Mr. Okun expressed support for this bill, suggesting that it complements existing programs that they use for career development including the Military Veterans Training Program. Mr. Okun suggested that an amendment be added to the Construction Apprenticeship and Training Tax Credit, to permit LLC's and other businesses outside of incorporated businesses to benefit with the goal of reaching more veterans and supporting small businesses.

Ray Ryan, Veteran Military outreach Partner, Electric Boat: Mr. Ryan expressed support for this bill, stating that this bill is beneficial both to veterans and businesses. Mr. Ryan explained that the veteran hiring goal at Electric Boat has been increased to 1000 veterans this year, which this bill will make more attainable.

Reported by: Mariah Leslie **Date: 3/19/2026**