

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5418 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING THE KIRKLYN M. KERR PROGRAM AT THE
Title: UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT.

Vote Date: 3/12/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/5/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Gregory Haddad, 54th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The reason for HB-5418 is to reinstate the Kirklyn M. Kerr program and allow collaboration between universities that have an established veterinary program and the University of Connecticut, allowing reserved seats for several Connecticut students who would go to said state and study with an equivalent in-state tuition. Due to the lack of a veterinary program at any school on Connecticut, our state is seeing a reduction in licensed and trained veterinarians, cutting affordable access to pet, as well as livestock and agricultural animal care. With a higher supply of veterinarians this bill is theorized to create, that gap can be addressed, and residents of the state can pursue their goals to become veterinarians in an affordable manner.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute language for HB-5418 dictates how a student may receive grants for the difference between in-state and the host institutions' out-of-state tuition. It also dictates that a memorandum of understanding with the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental 25 Loan Authority regarding issuance of forgivable student loans that would arise from this program of grants filling in the gap between in-state and out-of-state tuition.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Connecticut Department of Agriculture, Commissioner, Bryan Hurlburt](#): Commissioner Hurlburt expresses his tacit opposition to this bill as it stands on the grounds of funding. Though the Commissioner maintains that the Kirklyn M. Kerr program has existed in the state

in the past and the USDA has estimated a Type III shortage in public practice veterinarians in this state, the department does not possess enough money to fund it. According to lines 5 and 6 of this bill, which mandates the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to create a memorandum of understanding with UConn regarding the usage of funds necessary to implement the program, creates a problem. According to Hurlburt, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture does not have the funds to support this grant, which they have no role in. Also, as this measure is not part of the Governor's Budget, the department would be unable to implement the above sections.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, Mark Albin: Supports this legislation claiming that by supporting admittance in a university that has a veterinary program through UConn, more veterinarians will stay in the state to live and work, providing critically needed care for pets and livestock alike. In research by the American Association of Veterinary Medical College's, only 45% of students are accepted into veterinarian courses nationally, and with a price tag of over \$300,000 for many students attending private universities like Tufts, such barriers prevent them from even attending university in the first place. With this program reinstated, more students can affordably attend college and become veterinarians with more opportunities for guaranteed placement and a less costly tuition rate.

Connecticut Humane Society, Executive Director, James Bias: Executive Director Bias supports the legislation claiming that in the environment of high need for veterinarians and growing debt related to attaining such a degree, such a bill reducing this debt can have a positive impact on students across Connecticut. By encouraging these students back to Connecticut also, this bill addresses our need for veterinarians' services in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

University of Connecticut, Associate Dean of Academic Programs in the College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources, Kristin Govoni: Associate Dean Govoni expresses support for the bill claiming that the Kirklyn M. Kerr program's reinstatement is theorized to positively impact students and veterinary practices around the state by incentivizing resettlement of students in Connecticut after they get their degree out of state. Pursuant to Special Act 24-22, UConn underwent a feasibility study on implementing the program once more, finding it possible at \$1.4-\$1.6 billion as of academic year 2025/2026. Yet, Govoni states that UConn does not have the funds or expertise to implement the loan forgiveness program within the bill's current verbiage, claiming that if they were to run it, more financial impact would be incurred. Hence, they advise another entity should be consulted with more experience in loan forgiveness programs to operate this section of the legislation.

Veterinarian, Elizabeth Lamperelli: Supports this legislation based on personal experience gained from pursuing a veterinary degree with the Kirklyn M. Kerr program, and the fiscal impact that they have avoided due to it. Lamperelli claims that they were given \$80,000 in Connecticut State Financial Aid to attend Iowa State University to get their degree, paying what equates to in-state tuition, making it much easier for them to graduate with less debt. With the elimination of the program, they claim it has had adverse effects on aspiring veterinarians in the state and would be beneficial financially to them and the state workforce if reinstated.

Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, Veterinarian, Andrea Lavigne: Supports this bill claiming that students need these tuition reductions provided by the bill as many go into six-figure debt from attaining a degree outside the state. By offsetting tuition costs, Lavigne claims students will thrive post-graduation as the workforce statistically needs them. In addition, Lavigne claims the state will see a strengthened public health infrastructure with more veterinarian's studying health risks in animals and treating others in private practice, including for large animals, which is are in increasing need of practitioners.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: Tom Atwood

Date: 3/25/2026