
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5460

AN ACT CONCERNING STATE-WIDE FIRE PROTECTION.

SUMMARY

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

1. requiring municipalities to (a) establish a local fire protection plan, which the state fire administrator must review and rate, and (b) register the entity responsible for fire protection within its jurisdiction with the National Emergency Response Information System (§ 1);
2. requiring the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control to develop standards for (a) rating local fire protection plans, (b) firefighter safety and emergency response protocols, and (c) grading fire protection service operational performance (§ 2);
3. requiring all municipalities to exercise their authority to provide fire protection (§ 3);
4. establishing the position of deputy state fire administrator, and a Connecticut Fire program to be overseen by the deputy, to create a framework for the state to assist municipalities and fire authorities (§§ 4 & 5);
5. establishing a working group to develop the Connecticut Fire program (§ 7);
6. establishing a Connecticut Fire grant program to incentivize regionalized services and resource sharing (§ 6);
7. establishing the position of regional fire coordinator to (a) act as a liaison between the Department of Emergency Services and

Public Protection's (DESPP) Division of Fire Services Administration and local fire departments, (b) facilitate the Connecticut Fire Program, and (c) coordinate fire protection resources in Connecticut (§ 8);

8. requiring the comptroller to establish a First Responder Health and Benefit Services Unit to provide information about firefighters' benefits (§ 10);
9. shifting general administration of the firefighters cancer relief account from the treasurer to the comptroller (§§ 11-14);
10. expanding which officials can use steady red, blue, or red and blue lights on vehicles (§ 17);
11. requiring DESPP, in coordination with the state comptroller, to establish 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 (§ 9);
12. requiring, by July 1, 2027, DESPP's Division of Fire Services Administration to establish and maintain a registry identifying the fire chief of each municipality and fire district in Connecticut (§ 15); and
13. 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 program eligibility (§ 16).

The bill also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026, except provisions are effective upon passage for the (1) Connecticut Fire program, grant program, and working group; (2) creation of regional fire coordinators; (3) system collecting computer-aided dispatch data; (4) First Responder Health and Benefits Unit; and (5) registries of fire chiefs and firefighters.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE INFORMATION SYSTEM REGISTRATION

The bill requires each municipality, by July 1, 2027, to register, and provide demographics and contact information for, each entity responsible for providing fire protection services within it with the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS, see National Emergency Response Information System below). The municipality must keep the data accurate and review it yearly.

Under the bill, an “entity” is any person; business entity; state or local government agency, political subdivision, or authority; or religious, social, or union organization, whether operated for profit or otherwise. “Fire protection” is preventing and suppressing fires, investigating their origin and cause, responding to hazardous materials incidents, and technical rescues.

MUNICIPAL LOCAL FIRE PROTECTION PLAN

The bill requires all municipalities, by July 1, 2027, to establish a local fire protection plan and submit it to the state fire administrator. The plan must at least:

1. state generally how fire protection services are provided in the municipality;
2. disclose the municipality’s subdivisions or districts responsible for fire protection services (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 are served by each entity that provides fire protection services to it;

6. name each person, including the fire chief, responsible for each fire protection services entity that provides fire protection services in the municipality;
7. describe the municipality's fire protection performance standards, including response times, minimum fireground staffing levels, and apparatus requirements;
8. describe the process for collecting and tracking personnel and response data, including any software used; and
9. describe mutual aid agreements the municipality is part of.

State Fire Administrator Review

Under the bill, the state fire administrator must review and assign a rating to each local fire development plan under protocols the bill requires the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control to develop (see below). The state fire 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 a performance improvement plan.

Each municipality must review and revise its local fire protection plan once every five years and report any substantial changes to the state fire administrator.

COMMISSION ON FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL

By law, this commission 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 bill additionally requires the commission to:

1. 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) methods to ensure the health and wellness of fire service personnel;

2. establish, in coordination with the state fire administrator, a standardized classification system to evaluate and grade the operational performance of municipal and fire district fire protection services (the commission must consider nationally recognized standards, including those by the National Fire Protection Association and the Center for Public Safety Excellence);
3. by January 1, 2028, develop and submit for the state fire administrator's approval a standardized protocol for state fire protection entities to submit operational data; and
4. establish, once every five years and in coordination with the state fire administrator, a standardized protocol for the administrator to review and rate local fire protection plans.

As with other commission responsibilities under current law, the bill allows the commission to recommend, and the DESPP commissioner to adopt, necessary regulations.

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 necessary or desirable to protect the municipality from fire. The bill requires municipalities to exercise this authority regardless of any statutes, special act, charter, or home rule ordinance, including by providing the facilities necessary for the municipality's fire protection services.

CONNECTICUT FIRE

Program Establishment and Deputy State Fire Administrator

The bill creates the Connecticut Fire program within DESPP's Division of Fire Services Administration, which is overseen by the deputy state fire administrator. The deputy state fire administrator must report to the state fire administrator. The DESPP commissioner must appoint the deputy, who must have at least five years of experience in

fire service, and the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control may recommend candidates for the role.

Under the bill, 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 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.

By July 1, 2028, the deputy state fire administrator must, within available appropriations, implement the recommendations of the working group described below. 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 Working Group

The bill establishes a working group to develop the administrative, operational, fiscal, and personnel framework for the Connecticut Fire Program. The working group is an independent body within the Legislative Department for administrative purposes only, and the Public Safety and Security Committee's administrative staff must serve in that role for the working group. Under the bill, the working group consists of:

1. the Public Safety and Security Committee's chairpersons;
2. the comptroller;
3. the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary;
4. the DESPP commissioner;
5. the state fire administrator;
6. the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control chairperson and vice-chairperson;

7. three members of the Joint Council of Connecticut Fire Service Organizations;
8. a representative from the Office of Fiscal Analysis, appointed by the Public Safety and Security Committee's chairpersons;
9. the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities executive director; and
10. the Council of Small Towns executive director.

Members may choose a designee to serve in the place, except for the Office of Fiscal Analysis representative and members of the Joint Council of Connecticut Fire Service Organizations.

The Public Safety and Security chairpersons must (1) schedule the first meeting within 60 days of the bill's passage, and (2) select two working group co-chairpersons from among its group members.

By September 1, 2027, the working group must report its findings and recommendations to the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control. By January 1, 2028, the commission must (1) review the report and recommendations, (2) approve them with or without modifications, and (3) submit the approved report and recommendations to the deputy state fire administrator. The working group ends when it submits an approved report and recommendations or on January 1, 2028, whichever is later.

Connecticut Fire Grant Program

The bill requires the OPM secretary to administer a Connecticut Fire grant program to give municipalities that participate in the Connecticut Fire program 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 bill requires the secretary, starting by July 1, 2028, 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 success of the program and the fire protection services funded by it.

REGIONAL FIRE COORDINATORS

The bill establishes the position of a regional fire coordinator and requires each coordinator to (1) serve as the primary liaison between DESPP and the local fire departments within their region, (2) facilitate the Connecticut Fire program, and (3) coordinate their region's fire protection resources.

The bill requires the state fire administrator to coordinate with DESPP's Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security to establish fire coordinator regions that match the division's five regions. The state fire 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 recommend coordinator candidates to the state fire administrator.

FIRST RESPONDER HEALTH AND BENEFIT SERVICES UNIT

The bill requires the comptroller, in coordination with DESPP, to establish a First Responder Health and Benefits Unit within the comptroller's Division of Healthcare Policy and Benefit Services by July 1, 2027. The unit must coordinate and spread information about public benefits for firefighters, including claims for the firefighters cancer relief account, the Fallen Hero Fund, injuries or disabilities, and workers' compensation.

The unit must (1) consult with the Connecticut State Firefighters Association on its purposes and (2) communicate with regional fire coordinators about firefighter benefits and claims and to promote their efficient processing.

FIREFIGHTERS CANCER RELIEF ACCOUNT ADMINISTRATION

By law, the firefighters cancer relief account provides wage replacement benefits for eligible paid firefighters diagnosed with cancer. The bill generally shifts the administration of the account from

the state treasurer to the state comptroller, including for:

1. reimbursing employers that provide benefits to firefighters diagnosed with cancer;
2. remitting wage replacement benefits;
3. annually reporting to the Public Safety and Security Committee on the account's status; and
4. payment processing for certain firefighters entitled to wage replacement benefits from the Connecticut State Firefighters Association.

Under the bill, the treasurer retains certain responsibilities relating to the account, including investing its funds and auditing.

STEADY COLORED LIGHTS ON VEHICLES

The law generally requires a permit to use colored or flashing lights on motor vehicles or equipment. The bill allows certain fire and emergency medical service personnel and certain constables during traffic operations who are currently authorized to use flashing blue or red lights to also use steady lights in those colors. It eliminates a provision that only police officers and Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) 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.

BACKGROUND

National Emergency Response Information System

NERIS is an emergency reporting system that replaced the National Fire Reporting System. It is a cloud-based platform that allows agencies to enter, manage, and use their own data. It was developed in collaboration between the U.S. Fire Administration, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate, and UL Research Institutes' Fire Safety Research Institute, and will continue to develop.

The National Fire Protection Association and Center for Public Safety Excellence

The National Fire Protection Association produces model codes and standards for fire, electrical, and life safety guidelines and requirements. The Center for Public Safety Excellence offers education and accreditation to fire departments and fire and emergency services personnel.

Related Bills

SB 349 (File 51), favorably reported by the Labor and Public Employees Committee, combines, and modifies the content of, the treasurer’s report on the firefighters cancer relief program and account with an additional report to the Firefighters Cancer Relief Fund Advisory Committee.

sSB 407, favorably reported by the Public Safety and Security Committee, allows the DMV commissioner to issue permits to organ transport vehicles to use steady or flashing blue, red, yellow, or white lights.

sSB 410, favorably reported by the Public Safety and Security Committee, expands the Fallen Hero Fund to provide compensation for firefighter cancer deaths. It also requires nonstate public employers to provide Partnership Plan benefits to survivors of first responders that die due to certain cancers. These employers must be reimbursed from the firefighters cancer relief account instead of the Fallen Hero Fund.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 29 Nay 0 (03/17/2026)