
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6594

AN ACT CONCERNING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS.

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Reduces the (1) scope of laws enhancing the penalties for illegal drug activities in drug-free zones and (2) size of these zones from 1,500 to 200 feet

§ 28 – SENTENCE MODIFICATIONS

Expands eligibility for sentence modification by allowing the court, without an agreement between the defendant and the state, to modify sentences, including those under plea agreements with seven years or less of actual incarceration

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2021, except the sentence modification provisions (§ 28) are effective upon passage.

§ 1 – DEPOSITIONS FOR THOSE INFIRM AND AGE 75 AND OLDER

Allows the state to depose individuals who are infirm and age 75 and older in certain trials

The bill allows the state to ask the Superior Court or judge to depose witnesses who are infirm and age 75 and older in any case involving an offense where the punishment may be imprisonment of more than one year.

Current law allows these witness depositions to be taken before a commissioner or magistrate that the court or judge designates. The bill also allows these depositions to be before a judge. As under existing law, depositions occur if it appears the witness's testimony will be required at trial and he or she will be unable to testify at trial.

§§ 2 & 3 – SOLICITING SEXUAL ACTS

Changes "patronizing a prostitute" to "soliciting sexual acts"

The bill changes the crime of “patronizing a prostitute” to “soliciting sexual acts.”

§§ 4-8 – TRANSFER OF CERTAIN CIVIL DUTIES TO ATTORNEY GENERAL FROM DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Transfers several civil duties from DCJ to the attorney general, including investigations to remove a town clerk or treasurer and civil actions to recover certain penalties, forfeitures, and fines for the state; eliminates the requirement that the chief state’s attorney establish a bond forfeiture unit

The bill transfers several civil duties from the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) to the Attorney General’s Office.

Investigations to Remove Town Clerks and Treasurers (§§ 4 & 5)

The bill transfers the requirement that a state’s attorney investigate a town clerk or treasurer for removal, to the attorney general. As under current law for state’s attorneys, the bill requires the attorney general to, among other things, investigate charges of misconduct, willful and material neglect of duty, or incompetent conduct. Additionally, the attorney general has the power to, among other things, summon witnesses, require the production of necessary documents, and represent the state in removal hearings.

Fines and Forfeitures (§§ 6-8)

The bill transfers, from the state’s attorney to the attorney general, (1) the responsibility to collect and pay to the state treasurer any forfeitures that accrue to the state and (2) the ability to bring a civil action to recover certain statutorily imposed penalties, forfeitures, and fines for the state. By law, all Superior Court-imposed fines, forfeitures, and penalties, unless the law otherwise specifies, belong to the state.

The bill eliminates the requirement that the chief state’s attorney (1) establish a bond forfeiture unit within DCJ and (2) develop uniform standards for compromising and settling forfeited bonds on a statewide basis. Under current law, the unit is responsible for collecting all forfeited bonds to the state and can compromise and settle forfeited bonds for a lesser amount.

§ 9 – PENSION REVOCATION NOTICE

Requires prosecutors to notify the attorney general of certain proceedings involving pension revocation for public employees and eliminates this notice requirement for federal court proceedings

Under current law, the attorney general must notify the prosecutor when the defendant in a state or federal court criminal proceeding is a public official or state or municipal employee charged with a crime related to his or her office for purposes of pension revocation. The bill instead requires the prosecutor to notify the attorney general of the proceeding and eliminates the requirement for this notice for federal court proceedings. It also requires the attorney general to pursue the remedies under the pension revocation law (e.g., fines, restitutions, or other monetary orders paid from the official's or employee's pension).

§ 10 – VENDOR FRAUD

Expands the definition of vendor fraud to include instances where the person has intent to defraud the state or the beneficiary and has knowledge of an event that would result in lower benefit payments

Under current law, vendor fraud is when a person, acting on their own or on an entity's behalf, provides goods or services to public assistance beneficiaries (including Medicaid) with the intent to defraud either the state or the beneficiary. The bill expands the circumstances that constitute vendor fraud to include instances where the person has knowledge of the occurrence of any event affecting (1) his or her initial or continued right to the benefit or payment, or (2) the initial or continued right to the benefit or payment of any beneficiary he or she applied for or is receiving the benefit or payment for, and the person conceals or does not disclose the event intending to fraudulently secure the benefit or payment either in a greater amount or quantity than is due or when no benefit or payment is allowed.

By law, there are six degrees of vendor fraud, with penalties ranging from a class C misdemeanor (punishable by up to three months imprisonment, up to a \$500 fine, or both) to a class B felony (punishable by up to 20 years imprisonment, up to a \$15,000 fine, or both), depending on the amount of goods or services involved.

§ 11 – ELECTRONIC STALKING

Increases the penalty for electronic stalking and requires a person to intentionally take certain actions to be considered guilty

Under current law, a person is guilty of electronic stalking when he or she recklessly causes another person to reasonably fear for his or her physical safety by willfully and repeatedly using a global positioning system or similar electronic monitoring system to remotely determine or track the person's position or movement. The bill instead requires a person to intend to kill, injure, harass, intimidate, or place under surveillance another person or use an interactive computer service or electronic communication service, electronic communication system, or electronic monitoring system to (1) place the other person or the other person's immediate family member or intimate partner in a reasonable fear of death of or serious bodily injury or (2) cause, attempt to cause, or be reasonably expected to cause substantial emotional distress to the other person.

The bill increases the penalty from a class B misdemeanor (punishable by up to six months imprisonment, up to a \$1,000 fine, or both) to a class D felony (punishable by up to five years imprisonment, up to a \$5,000 fine, or both).

§ 12 – INTIMATE IMAGES

Specifies what is considered "harm" for distributing intimate images; prohibits dissemination when the other person is not identifiable but there is other identifying information included; and increases the penalty when dissemination is to more than one person over certain electronic platforms

"Harm"

By law, a person is guilty of unlawful dissemination of an intimate image when the person intentionally disseminates an intimate image without the other person's consent, knowing that the other person believed the image would not be disseminated, and the other person suffers harm because of the dissemination.

The bill specifies "harm" includes subjecting the other person to hatred, contempt, ridicule, physical or financial injury, psychological harm, or serious emotional distress.

Identifiable Information

Under current law, there are certain circumstances where disseminating these images is not a crime, including, among others, when the other person is not clearly identifiable. But under the bill, the exemption does not apply if there is personally identifying information associated with or accompanying the image.

Increased Penalty

The bill increases the penalty, from a class A misdemeanor (punishable by up to one year imprisonment, up to a \$2,000 fine, or both) to a class D felony if the unlawful dissemination is to more than one person by means of an interactive computer service, an information service, or a telecommunications service.

Under the bill, “interactive computer service” means any information service, system, or access software provider that provides or enables computer access by multiple users to a computer server, including a service or system that provides access to the Internet, and the systems libraries or educational institutions operate or offer services for (47 U.S.C. § 230).

“Information service” means the offering of a capability for generating, acquiring, storing, transforming, processing, retrieving, utilizing, or making available information via telecommunications, and includes electronic publishing, but excludes any use of any such capability for managing, controlling, or operating a telecommunications system or managing a telecommunications service (47 U.S.C. § 153).

“Telecommunications service” means any transmission in one or more geographic areas (1) between or among points the user specifies; (2) of information of the user’s choosing; (3) without change in the information’s form or content as sent and received; (4) by electromagnetic transmission means, including fiber optics, microwave, and satellite; (5) with or without benefit of any closed transmission medium; and (6) including all instrumentalities, facilities, apparatus, and services, except customer premises equipment, which are used for collecting, storing, forwarding, switching, and delivering

such information and are essential to the transmission (CGS § 16-247a).

§ 13 – SENTENCING PERSISTENT OFFENDERS

Limits the look-back period for controlled substance possession and certain felonies to 10 years for persistent offenders and expands the exemption for these felony offenders to include class E felonies

By law, to be considered a persistent offender a person must (1) stand convicted of certain crimes and (2) have a prior conviction of certain crimes. The bill limits the look-back period for qualifying felonies for prior convictions to 10 years for controlled substance possession violations and certain felonies.

Under current law, a persistent offender for possession of a controlled substance is someone convicted of a controlled substance possession violation who has two prior controlled substance possession convictions. The bill limits the look-back to 10 years.

Under current law, a persistent felony offender is someone convicted of a felony, other than a class D felony, and who has been convicted twice previously of these felonies. The bill (1) extends the exemption to also include class E felonies (punishable by up to three years imprisonment, up to a \$3,500 fine, or both) and (2) limits the look-back period to 10 years.

§§ 14-21 – FEE WAIVERS FOR DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS OR TREATMENTS

Waives, for certain indigent individuals a public defender represents, the fee for certain diversionary programs and treatments and prohibits courts from requiring community service in lieu of any fees for indigent persons

Fee Waivers

For individuals, and students' parents or guardians, as applicable, who are indigent and eligible for a public defender, the bill waives the fees for certain diversionary programs. In certain programs, it also eliminates the requirement that good cause be shown or that the fee would cause economic hardship. The bill waives the fees for the following programs:

1. community service labor program (CGS § 53a-39c),

2. accelerated pretrial rehabilitation (CGS § 54-56e),
3. pretrial alcohol education programs for certain motor vehicle violations (CGS § 54-56g),
4. pretrial drug education and community service program for certain dependency-producing drug offenses (CGS § 54-56i),
5. pretrial school violence prevention program (CGS § 54-56j), and
6. pretrial family violence education program (CGS § 46b-38c).

Under existing law, indigent individuals are exempt from these program fees upon the filing of indigent status, its confirmation, and entering the finding.

The bill prohibits anyone from being denied a Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services clinical examiner examination due to inability to pay the associated fees or costs of the exam or program. The bill waives the fees though the processes described above.

Under current law, a person granted suspended prosecution for drug or alcohol dependence treatment may be deemed indigent if the court determines the person has an estate insufficient to provide for the person's support or there is no other person legally liable or able to support the person. The bill also allows individuals to be deemed indigent if they have been determined indigent and eligible for a public defender to be appointed on their behalf.

The bill makes minor, technical, and conforming changes.

Community Service Prohibition

Additionally, the bill prohibits the court from requiring community service in lieu of paying the fee if waived for any of the programs described above.

§§ 17 & 22 – NARCOTIC DRUG STORAGE

Adds a penalty for failure to keep a narcotic in the original container and allows violators to take the pretrial drug education and community service program

Penalty

By law, a person who legally has any narcotic drug may only possess it in the container was delivered in. The bill makes anyone who fails to do this guilty of a class D misdemeanor (punishable by up to 30 days imprisonment, up to a \$250 fine, or both). Under current law, a person violating a dependency-producing drug provision without a specified penalty is subject to, for (1) a first offense, a fine of up to \$3,500, imprisonment of up to two years, or both; and (2) any subsequent offense, a class C felony (punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment, up to a \$10,000 fine, or both).

The bill's penalties do not apply to anyone who in good faith places the narcotic in either a (1) pill box, case, or organizer stored within his or her residence, or (2) secured or locked pill box, case, or organizer, if these objects are accompanied by proof of the person's prescription.

Pretrial Drug Education and Community Service Program

The bill allows certain individuals charged with improper storage to take the pretrial drug education and community service program. As under existing law, individuals are generally ineligible to participate if they have already previously participated twice in this program, or its predecessor or community service programs. The program has a \$100 application fee, \$150 evaluation fee, and \$600 program fee, unless waived (see above).

Among other things, the program consists of 15 sessions of drug education, at least 15 sessions of substance abuse treatment, and community service. As under existing law, if a person successfully completes the program, the court dismisses the charges, but those who do not complete the program must return to court to face the original charges.

§ 23 — FINE FOR FAILING TO PAY OR ACT FOR CERTAIN INFRACTIONS OR VIOLATIONS

Reduces certain penalties when a person fails to pay or respond to infractions or violations

Under current law, a person charged with an infraction who fails to pay the fine and additional fee, fails to send in a plea of not guilty by the answer date, or willfully fails to appear at a required scheduled court appearance date is guilty of a class C misdemeanor. But for certain infractions or violations, failing to pay the fine and fees, failing to send in a timely plea, or willfully failing to appear in court is a class A misdemeanor. The bill reduces these penalties to an unclassified misdemeanor for which violators may be subject to up to 10 days imprisonment.

§ 24 – PRE-SENTENCE CONFINEMENT CREDIT

Allows for pre-sentence confinement credit on concurrent sentences and that consecutive sentences are only counted once

Under the bill, anyone who is confined in a community correctional center or a correctional institution for an offense committed on or after October 1, 2021, under a mittimus (an order to arrest and bring a person before the court) or because the person is unable to obtain bail or is denied bail, must, if subsequently imprisoned, have their sentence reduced by the number of days they spent in pre-sentence confinement.

In calculating these credits, each day of pre-sentence confinement is counted (1) equally in reducing any concurrent sentence imposed for any offense pending at the time the sentence was imposed, but (2) only once in reducing any imposed consecutive sentence.

These provisions apply only to people whose inability to obtain bail or bail denial is the sole reason for their presentence confinement. However, if a person is imprisoned at the same time he or she is in presentence confinement on another charge and the conviction for the imprisonment is reversed on appeal, the person is entitled, in any subsequent sentencing, to a reduction based on the presentence confinement.

Under the bill, in the case of a fine, each day spent confined before sentencing is credited against the sentence at a per diem rate equal to the average daily cost of incarceration as the correction commissioner

determines.

§§ 25-27 – SALE OR POSSESSION OF DRUGS IN DRUG-FREE ZONES

Reduces the (1) scope of laws enhancing the penalties for illegal drug activities in drug-free zones and (2) size of these zones from 1,500 to 200 feet

This bill reduces the scope of laws enhancing the penalties for illegal drug activities near schools, licensed child care centers, and public housing projects (i.e., drug-free zones). It reduces the size of these zones from 1,500 to 200 feet and specifies that they are measured from the perimeter of the property.

The bill also provides that for the enhanced penalty to apply for some of these crimes, the offender must commit the crime with the intent to do so in a specific location which the trier of fact (i.e., the jury or judge) determines is within the zone. This applies to violations involving drug paraphernalia or illegal drug sales and related crimes (such as possession with intent to sell), but not to illegal possession. To the extent this provision applies to illegal drug sales and related crimes, it codifies case law (see *Background- Related Cases*).

Drug-free zones, which the bill reduces from 1,500 to 200 feet, generally require a mandatory sentence, in addition and consecutive to any prison term imposed for the underlying crime, as follows:

1. one year for various drug paraphernalia crimes near a public or private elementary or secondary school when the defendant is not enrolled as a student there;
2. class A misdemeanor with a required prison and probation sentence for possessing illegal drugs near a public or private elementary or secondary school when the defendant is not enrolled as a student there, or near a licensed child care center identified by a conspicuous sign; or
3. three years for selling illegal drugs, transporting or possessing them with intent to sell, or related crimes near a (a) public or private elementary or secondary school, (b) licensed child care

center identified by a conspicuous sign, or (c) public housing project.

Exceptions to Enhanced Penalties; Departing From a Mandatory Minimum

By law, the enhanced penalties do not apply to (1) drug paraphernalia-related actions involving less than one-half ounce of marijuana or (2) possessing less than one-half ounce of marijuana.

Also, judges can impose less than the law’s mandatory minimum sentence under the laws described above when no one was hurt during the crime and the defendant (1) did not use or attempt or threaten to use physical force; (2) was unarmed; and (3) did not threaten to use or suggest that he or she had a firearm, other deadly weapon, or other instrument that could cause death or serious injury. Defendants must show good cause and can invoke these provisions only once. Judges must state at sentencing hearings their reasons for (1) imposing the sentence and (2) departing from the mandatory minimum (CGS § 21a-283a).

Background - Related Cases

In a series of cases, the Connecticut Supreme Court has interpreted the statute setting enhanced penalties for drug sales and related crimes in drug-free zones as requiring the state to prove that the defendant intended to sell drugs at a specific location within such a zone. The state does not have to prove that the defendant knew that the location was within such a zone (see *State v. Denby*, 235 Conn. 477 (1995); *State v. Hedge*, 297 Conn. 621 (2010); *State v. Lewis*, 303 Conn. 760 (2012)).

§ 28 – SENTENCE MODIFICATIONS

Expands eligibility for sentence modification by allowing the court, without an agreement between the defendant and the state, to modify sentences, including those under plea agreements with seven years or less of actual incarceration

The bill expands eligibility for sentence modification (i.e., sentence reduction, defendant discharge, or placement of the defendant on probation or conditional discharge). Current law requires both the defendant and prosecutors to agree for the court to hold a modification hearing when the defendant’s entire sentence exceeds three years.

The bill allows the court, without an agreement between the defendant and the state, to modify plea agreements, including those with an agreed upon sentence range, which include seven years or less of actual incarceration. The bill requires such an agreement if the plea is over seven years. As under existing law, there must be a hearing and good cause shown. In addition, the bill allows defendants whose sentence is a result of a trial to move for sentence modification without an agreement, regardless of sentence length.

The bill prohibits the defendant from filing a subsequent motion for relief under these provisions until five years after the date of the most recent decision denying him or her relief by a sentence reduction or discharge.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Judiciary Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 5 (04/05/2021)