

Veterans' Affairs Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6427

AN ACT CONCERNING THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND BYLAWS
Title: OF THE MILITIA UNITS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/18/2021

File No.: 226

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' Affairs Committee
Sen. Catherine A. Osten, 19th Dist

REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation is meant to reconfigure the administration of four military units in the state (First Company Governor's Foot Guard, Second Company Governor's Foot Guard, First Company Governor's Horse Guard, Second Company Governor's Horse Guard), under the governor, who serves as commander in chief of Connecticut. It would also change language that currently requires military units to adopt their own bylaws. This legislation codifies military control over the militia units; it does not have an impact on governance of the nonprofit corporate entities that are set up to support the militia units.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Major General Francis J. Evon, the Adjutant General, Military Department:](#) This bill was introduced at the request of Major General Evon and the Military Department. The Adjutant General provided both written and spoken testimony in support of this bill. He referred to the current statutory requirement as a "relic of the 19th century when local militia units formed the basis of the armed forces of the state." He further spoke of this bill allowing for the Military Department to codify existing practices, address potential liability issues, and promote further effectiveness of state military units. In his spoken testimony, he recognized that there is opposition from the Board of Trustees of one of the four military units (First Company Governor's Foot Guard), but that this bill has no impact on their operations as a private, nonprofit corporation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Joseph Balesano, Major, Connecticut State Guard](#): Major Balesano submitted written testimony in support of the bill; he noted that while historically, "bylaws" had relevance to the militia units, once the militia units became units of the armed forces of the state, the units became governed by the chain of command and service regulations. The bylaws that are referenced in this bill do not govern the closely associated nonprofit corporations (e.g. the Board of Trustees of the First Company Governor's Foot Guard), which are governed by IRS Code and state and federal statutes. Balesano further notes that "these are two separate and distinct entities. The military unit is part of the State Government and is administered by the Adjutant General and the Military Department. The corporation is not a part of the military unit and is not part of the State government."

[Russell J Bonaccorso Jr, Military Administrative Officer, Military Department](#): Mr. Bonaccorso submitted written testimony in support of the bill from his perspective as the state's administrative support to all four militia units. He noted that those testifying against this bill are not members of the military unit authorized under CGS 27-2 and that this bill therefore has no impact on them. He further noted that the reinvigoration of the military units as operational units has led to an increase in recruitment and that they played a key role in the deployment and execution of DPH's Mobile Field Hospital used in support of the state's COVID-19 pandemic response.

Additional support

Current and past commanding officers of the four military units (First Company Governor's Foot Guard, Second Company Governor's Foot Guard, First Company Governor's Horse Guard, Second Company Governor's Horse Guard) all submitted written testimony in support of this bill. They each noted how this bill represents an evolution of purpose for the militia units, allowing them to maintain tradition while acknowledging that their mission has grown beyond just being a ceremonial unit. They noted that recruitment has increased since emphasizing the "non-traditional" roles, as new members are looking for opportunities to serve in meaningful ways.

- [Jeffrey P. Clark, First Lieutenant, Second Company Governor's Foot Guard](#)
- [David T. Dwelley, Major, Commandant First Company Governor's Foot Guard](#)
- [James R. Marrinan, Major, Commandant Second Company Governor's Horse Guard](#)
- [Chris Miller, retired Commandant First Company Governor's Horse Guard](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Multiple members of the Board of Trustees of the First Company Governor's Foot Guard submitted both written and spoken testimony in opposition to the bill, referring to the First Company Governor's Foot Guard as a self-governing unit that has existed for 249 years. Fears were expressed that this bill would remove their control over operations. Concerns were shared over the interpretation of active members and how the Military Department is defining them, versus how the Board of Trustees defines them, as well as the ownership of the property on High St.

Submitted testimony:

- [Terri Camilleri, Trustee of the First Company Governor's Foot Guard](#)
- [Michael Chiaro, Sergeant 1st Class, Trustee of the First Company Governor's Foot Guard](#) (also provided spoken testimony)
- [Stanley J. Sobieski, Trustee of the First Company Governor's Foot Guard](#)
- [Todd Unkefer, Trustee of the First Company Governor's Foot Guard](#) (also provided spoken testimony)

Spoken testimony:

- Dennis Conroy, member of Board of Trustees, First Company Governor's Foot Guard
- Lewis Vazquez, President of Board of Trustees, First Company Governor's Foot Guard
- Max Covell, First Company Governor's Foot Guard
- Chuck Lignelli, Concert Band Director, First Company Governor's Foot Guard

Reported by: Erica Byrne, Clerk

Date: March 24, 2021