

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5445

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING STATE STAFFING LEVELS.

Vote Date: 3/24/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/15/2022

File No.: 405

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.
Rep. Michael A. Winkler, 56th Dist.
Rep. Joshua M. Hall, 7th Dist.
Rep. Anne M. Hughes, 135th Dist.
Rep. Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.
Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.
Rep. Michael D'Agostino, 91st Dist.
Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, 18th Dist.
Rep. John "Jack" F. Hennessy, 127th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

There will be a great number of retirements coming at the same time leaving gaps in the experienced workforce. The vacancies should be filled as quickly as possible so there is no gap in services.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

State of CT, Comptroller, Natalie Braswell: Supports the bill because it will be a transformational time for the State government workforce with approximately 12,000 employees across all branches of State government eligible to retire by July of this year. This is about ¼ of the entire workforce. The Comptroller's office is working collaboratively across all agencies to prepare. Processing thousands of retirements in a single month is essential – but it is what comes next that is important. There will be a significant loss of experience and

institutional knowledge, compounding the challenges of recruiting top talent in competition with the private sector.

State of CT, Dept. of Administrative Services: Opposes the bill because Section 2 directs DAS, the superintendent of the technical high school system and the human resources department of each State agency to keep open requests for applications of all job classifications and to continuously hire for all vacant positions. "Open requests", or "continuous recruitments" are used on a limited basis for jobs that are not characterized as competitive. These jobs are typically the most difficult to fill. For the DAS to continuously recruit in an efficient and legal manner, revisions to the State Personnel Act would be required. The number of applicants would increase dramatically and add significant time to the overall process. Screening and reviewing applications, conducting selection procedures and provide individualized explanation for affirmative action purposes must be done before filling each job. It could add weeks or even months to the time need to fill a position

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

State Federation of Vocational Teachers 4200A, President, Paul Angelucci: Supports the bill because, as a former teacher in a trade school, he knows first-hand how hard it is to find a licensed plumber, electrician, mason, etc. who is willing to drop everything and substitute for a short period of time due to a teachers' absence. The need to have auto refill in the CTESC would enable delivery of as much state mandated apprenticeship hours as possible to ensure students get full credit of their apprenticeship upon graduation. This bill will have a direct and immediate positive impact.

AFSCME Council 4, Executive Director, Jody Barr:

Supports the bill because it would require every State agency to refill vacant positions caused by the upcoming retirement wave and would adopt continuous recruitment policies. There are hundreds of vacancies across nearly every agency, and it is critical that these positions are filled. This would avoid further privatization and services could continue without interruption.

CT Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 511, President, Carl Chisem: Supports the bill because it will implement policies that make continuous recruitment and automatic refills of vacant positions mandatory. State agencies are desperately understaffed, and a huge number of retirements are coming up this year. There has never been a better time to act on these issues.

CSEA SEIU Local 2001, CT Dept. of Transportation employee, Gregory Cohen: Supports the bill because as an IT Analyst II for the Dept. of Social Services, his experience was that the department was short staffed. There was only a small crew to support thousands. The situation at the DOT is even worse. There are only 3 people working on the help desk for an agency with thousands of staff and consultants. There is no need for such a skeleton crew in an agency that accounts for so much of the budget. Elected officials want to make things better and more convenient for the residents, and the way to do this is through technology. State employees are ready for the challenges ahead, but they need the resources, support, and staff to get the job done.

SUOAF/AFSCME Council 4, President, Gregg Crear: Supports the bill because students sometimes can't get financial aid because they don't have the staffing to help them with the financial aid process. Students are returning to campus needing technology support, but so many of the information technology people retired that they can't get assistance. Students, receiving their associates' degree after 4 years, are now ready to go to the University, but are unable to get assistance with the transfer articulation that Gateway and SCSU offers because there is no one to help them with the transfer paperwork. These are some of the problems this bill would solve if vacancies were filled through a practice of continuous recruitment. Every agency would be assured proper staffing and the ability to provide services without delay.

CSEA SEIU Local 2001, Member, Dept. of Transportation Employee, Jen Caro: Supports the bill because the Dept. of Transportation has lost staff employees and they are barely keeping up with the essential work. With a staff of 17 employees a year and a half ago, 6 retired or left, and 3 more are retiring imminently. Zero replacements were hired. When construction work begins in full force again now that winter is over, they will be completely overwhelmed. In the private sector, when hiring is needed, it happens in a few weeks. In the State, it takes months. This is complete dysfunction. The hiring process must be streamlined.

AFSCME Council 4, President Clerical Local 318, Patricia Davis: Supports the bill because there is a staffing crisis of a magnitude she has not seen in her 27 years of service. Across all clerical levels, 40% could retire by June 30, 2022. Clerical workers are the backbone of every agency. The tasks they do in each agency are varied, but one thing is a common denominator; they are the glue that holds the process together. With improper staffing, the citizens of CT are the ones who suffer the most. This situation will get much worse if something isn't done.

CT Legal Rights Project, Inc., Executive Director, Kathy Flaherty: Supports the bill because staffing State agencies, like the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, is more than a labor-management issue. The clients are residing in state-operated in-patient psychiatric facilities and the staff affects everything about their lives. This means young adult clients generally have 8 different psychiatrists and several different social workers during their first two years. Average stay is about 3 ½ years. Turnover in clinical staff means there is reduced opportunity to establish therapeutic alliances and trusting relationships. Staff shortages can result in a decrease of active treatment. Mandated overtime means staff may be over-tired after a stressful shift. This workforce issue needs to be addressed because it not only affects the workforce, but also has a direct effect on the people they serve.

Capitol Community College, Professor, Seth Freeman: Supports the bill because community college budgets have tightened, and they have lost many employees due to attrition. This has led to understaffing across all departments and the workloads transferred to remaining staff. This leads to students not receiving quality service. Understaffing has hurt student activity programs, mental health counseling, and delays in student aid awards.

CT AFLCIO, President, Ed Hawthorne: Supports the bill because staffing shortages have led to inefficiencies of services and consequences for the employees left to carry the weight. Creating continuous recruitment and automatic refill policies requiring open-job postings will ensure a pool of available candidates. Adequate staffing levels will alleviate many problems faced by State agencies.

AFSCME Council 4, Dept. of Revenue Services, Office Assistant, Margo Jones: Supports the bill because it would eliminate the waiting period to have someone qualified to pick up where a departing employee left off. It will promote economic growth by providing vital resources needed to serve citizens without interruption.

AFSCME Council 4, Newtown Correctional Officer, Tom Lally: Supports the bill because it would alleviate the staffing crisis facing their agency. Frontline prison staff are getting burned out and leaving. As vacancies climb, so do staff assaults and injuries. They are being forced to work 16 hours a day, 80 hours a week, with no support and no relief in sight. Maintaining adequate staffing levels is essential to keeping prisons safe, secure, and operational for staff and offenders alike.

AFSCME Council 4, Court Recording Monitor, Sotonye Otunba-Payne: Supports the bill because even though the number of judges has increased, support staff needed to carry out duties in the courtroom has not increased with them. It delays proceedings in court and delays justice from being carried out. The expected retirement wave approaching on July 1st is going to add additional work onto an already strained staff and cause delays in operations. This additional work will eventually burn out workers.

Administrative and Residential Employees Union, Member, Ally Sexton: Supports the bill because it would be a huge improvement over the administratively time-consuming process now required to fill a vacancy after a retirement or resignation. At many departments, the cost of NOT hiring staff is expensive. Sometimes private consultants are hired at hourly wages which are higher than DOT employees. In one case, the consultant engineering firm hired a retired state employee. If it weren't for the Office of State Ethics opining that the arrangement would violate the state's revolving door law, the DOT would have paid the consultant multiples of his former State wages to do the same former job.

The Alliance, Senior Public Policy Advisor, Jeff Shaw: Supports the bill because the need for essential community services continues to grow, especially as people recover from the trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The State should expand the use of community services to use limited dollars more effectively for those in need. With a significant number of State employees expected to retire this summer, the State has a rare opportunity to make real, structural change. Expanding the use of community services operated by nonprofits will save money, preserve services, and serve more people.

AFSCME, Council 4, Social Service Analyst, Dept. Of Social Services, Michael Stebe: Supports the bill because their work interfaces with DOL, IRS, DMHAS, HHS, DCF and more. To say that the work is essential to the safety and wellbeing of so many families in our state is an understatement. The BITS QM group should have about 30 State staff serving as analysts and supervisors, but since June 2021, they have lost more than half their staff. There are now 9 doing the work of what should be 25. None of these positions have been filled. The State has lost decades of programmatic and technical knowledge by not replacing these workers. Allowing levels to dwindle in the name of budget savings had decreased essential services to the most frail and needy.

CSEA SEIU Local 2001, CT Dept. of Energy, Eric Thomas: Supports the bill because critical and highly effective long-term relationships and capacity building with town leadership,

landowners and business communities, and others has been deeply set back with the attrition of professionally trained program employees. Recent retirees and pending retirees are leaving this State agency with career-long institutional knowledge that has not been supported and captured with adequate succession planning. There is a negative impact on the workload and stress regarding job performance anxiety. This bill protects public services.

AFSCME Council 4, Correctional Officer, Stewart Local 392, Amanda Tower: Supports the bill because, as union steward, she heard the venting of frustrated employees who worked with the risk of COVID and needed activated special operations units for the medical isolation and transportation of COVID-positive offenders. When employees left vital positions, there were no trained people to step in. While recovering from COVID, she realized how difficult it was to hang on and not give up when feeling so unseen and unwanted. Burnout was followed by guilt from not being able to do better. This bill gives these employees greatly needed support.

CSEA SEIU Local 2001, President, Travis Woodward: Supports the bill because the State drastically staffed up after the Mianis River Bridge collapse in Greenwich, and then experienced a "Silver Tsunami" as these employees reached retirement age. Instead of level hiring since the late 1990's, the state workforce has been neglected and slowly starved to the brink. Most State employees that left the Department of Transportation since then have been replaced by higher priced private consultants. To prevent a similar situation in the future, we must move to level staffing over the upcoming years. State employees do it better, faster and for less.

Service Employees International Union, CT State Council, Representative, Stacey Zimmerman: Supports most of the agenda.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Self, David Godbout: Opposes all bills because they violate his Fourth Amendment rights.

Reported by: Marie Knudsen

Date: April 1, 2022