

OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS

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sHB-6841

AN ACT CONCERNING FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 24 \$	FY 25 \$
Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection	GF - Cost	877,606	532,880
Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection	GF - Savings	26,000	26,000
Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection	GF - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection	GF - Potential Revenue Gain	See Below	See Below
Higher Education Constituent Units	Tuition Funds - Revenue Loss	Potential Significant	Potential Significant
Public Health, Dept.	GF - Cost	188,225	973,921
Public Health, Dept.	GF - Cost	See Below	See Below
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Cost	235,588	287,665
Comptroller	GF - Cost	See Below	See Below
Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA)	Resources of CHFA - Cost	Potential	Potential

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 24 \$	FY 25 \$
All Municipalities	Potential Savings	See Below	See Below
All Municipalities	Potential Cost	See Below	See Below

¹The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 42.82% of payroll in FY 24.

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Explanation

The bill makes numerous changes designed to help recruit and retain people in firefighting and emergency medical services (EMS) careers, resulting in a cost to the state of at least \$1.3 million in FY 24 and \$1.8 million in FY 25 as well as the various other impacts described below.

Section 1 requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to hire a firefighter recruitment and training coordinator in each of the state's five emergency preparedness regions, resulting in a cost of \$405,540 in FY 24 and \$414,429 in FY 25. The associated fringe benefits for these positions will result in a cost to the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) of \$152,242 in FY 24 and \$156,048 in FY 25. The starting salary for this position² is \$71,108, with an associated fringe benefits cost \$30,448. There is also an estimated cost of \$50,000 for equipment and training expenses each year.

Section 2 requires the State Fire Administrator to develop facilities to assist in training and testing for the candidate's physical ability test (CPAT). It is anticipated that five new facilities will be created across the state and each one will cost a minimum of \$76,130 in equipment costs, resulting in a total one-time cost of \$380,650 in FY 24. Such equipment for CPAT testing includes helmets, gloves, vest weights, weighted manikins, and machinery designed to mimic fire rescue scenarios. Maintenance and replacement of damaged equipment is expected to cost up to \$25,000 in each year thereafter.

This section also requires DESPP to hire one full-time cadet or explorer program coordinator, resulting in a cost to DESPP of \$91,416 in FY 24 and \$93,451 in FY 25 and a cost to OSC of \$34,862 in FY 24 and \$35,734 in FY 25 for associated fringe benefits. These costs reflect an estimated starting salary for this position³ of \$81,416 and \$10,000 for equipment and training expenses each year.

² The salary of the firefighter recruitment and training coordinator is expected to be comparable with that of a Fire Academy Trainer.

³ The salary of the cadet or explorer program coordinator is expected to be comparable with that of a Lead Fire Academy Trainer.

Section 3 requires that a fire service instructor's compensation be comparable to that of a law enforcement instructor, which may reduce the compensation that some fire service instructors receive, resulting in estimated savings of \$26,000 to DESPP in FY 24 and FY 25. Currently, all law enforcement instructors are compensated at an hourly rate of \$20, whereas there are three levels of fire service instructors, with Instructor I receiving \$20 per hour, and Instructor II and Instructor III receiving hourly rates of \$24 and \$26, respectively.

This section also requires DESPP to conduct at least three classes at the state fire school each year, which can result in a potential cost or potential revenue gain depending on the number of students in each class. Currently, DESPP conducts two classes per year with attendance ranging from approximately 30 to 70 students. If there are less than about 55 students enrolled, tuition costs will generally not cover the cost of running the class. If greater, there is a potential revenue gain from tuition costs. The costs of running a class range from \$285,378 to \$428,619, and the tuition revenue per class can range from \$224,550 to \$523,950.

Section 4, which requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish a paramedic candidate scholarship program, results in a cost to the agency of \$35,079 in FY 24 and \$143,822 in FY 25, and \$15,021 in FY 24 and \$61,585 in FY 25 for associated fringe benefits, to support a Health Program Associate (HPA) and a Health Program Assistant 1 to implement the program.⁴ In addition, it is anticipated that the agency would require approximately \$750,000 annually to provide paramedic candidate scholarships, beginning in FY 25.

Section 5 prohibits fire departments from denying employment to lawful resident noncitizens, resulting in no fiscal impact to the state or municipalities.

Section 6 results in potential costs beginning in FY 24 to the

⁴These costs reflect a quarter of the fiscal year in FY 24. Costs to DPH in FY 25 are annualized.

Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA), from the quasi-public's own resources, associated with developing, marketing, and providing a program of mortgage assistance to uniformed members of fire departments. Costs for providing such mortgage assistance are not anticipated to be substantial but would depend on: (1) the number of firefighters assisted and (2) the type of assistance provided.

CHFA has various existing programs that could help firefighters purchase a house where they work, including the First Time Homebuyers Program, the Down Payment Assistance Program, and the Time to Own Forgivable Down Payment Assistance Program, the latter two of which are both supported with state bond funding. Given the low utilization rate of CHFA's other occupation-specific mortgage assistance programs, the bill is not anticipated to materially change the rate of spending.⁵

Sections 7-9 result in a potentially significant revenue loss beginning in FY 24 to the higher education constituent units, associated with waiving tuition for certain firefighters and their dependents, along with particular fire school students. The tuition waivers will be available to: 1) uniformed members of fire departments who have served for at least two years in the state, 2) dependent children of uniformed members of fire departments who have served for at least five years in the state, and 3) students attending the state fire school who are enrolled in a program offered together with a community college or state university that accredits courses in the program.

There are an estimated 26,800 paid and volunteer firefighters in Connecticut. It is unknown how many individuals will be eligible for the tuition waivers and take advantage of it, or which constituent unit they would choose to attend. The scope of the revenue loss will vary based on the number of waivers and the institution waiving tuition. For example, 500 additional tuition waivers at UConn results in a revenue

⁵ Out of the 1,610 first mortgages originated through CHFA in 2022, zero were under the Police Homeownership Program, 17 were under the Teachers Mortgage Assistance Program, and 12 were under the Military Program.

loss of approximately \$8.2 million annually while 1,000 additional community college waivers results in a revenue loss of approximately \$4.2 million annually. To the extent that some of the waiver beneficiaries enrolling in Connecticut State Universities and Colleges institutions might not have otherwise attended, these institutions may experience higher fee and other revenue (e.g., room and board) due to the bill. The exact number of additional waivers that would occur because of the bill is unknown, but the revenue loss to the constituent units may be significant.

Examples of Tuition Waiver Value, FY 24			
# of Students	UConn	CSUs	Community Colleges
<i>Per-Student Value of Tuition Waiver, FY 24</i>	16,332	6,470	4,176
100	1,633,200	647,000	417,600
500	8,166,000	3,235,000	2,088,000
1,000	16,332,000	6,470,000	4,176,000

Sections 10-11 may result in start-up costs to the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) to establish a volunteer firefighter length of service award program and trust fund. The State Retirement Commission may contract with a third party to administer this system. The fund will be used to make payments towards the administrative costs of the program.

Section 12 may result in significant costs to OSC in establishing a new tier in the retirement system. The bill can also result in costs to participating municipalities to the extent of the employer contributions set by the retirement commission to develop the new tier in the municipal employees' retirement system.

Section 13 requires the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control in DESPP to conduct a study on firefighter training, certification, and benefits, not anticipated to result in a fiscal impact to the state.

Section 14, which requires DPH to establish a pilot program by 10/1/23 to provide emergency services organizations with: (1) equipment capable of identifying individuals at high risk of cardiac arrest, (2) an early detection system capable of identifying individuals who are at low risk of cardiac arrest before such individuals experience critical cardiac issues, or (3) both such equipment and system, is anticipated to result in the need for a Senior Healthcare Technology Consultant at a cost to DPH of approximately \$75,000 in FY 24. The consultant will research and identify what, if any, equipment is available to assist emergency services in identifying individuals at high risk for cardiac arrest and for identifying people at low risk before they have a critical cardiac event, and the cost of this equipment, which is currently unknown. A HPA is needed to work with the consultant on developing the pilot program and to manage it. The cost for the HPA salary is \$78,146 in FY 24 and \$80,099 in FY 25. Associated fringe benefit costs are \$33,462 in FY 24 and \$34,298 in FY 25.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to the number of grants administered, tuition waivers granted, and inflation.