

Public Safety and Security Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6863

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING POLICE OFFICER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

Vote Date: 3/16/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/9/2023

File No.: 372

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Safety and Security Committee

CO-SPONSORS:

Sen. Herron Gaston, 23rd Dist.

Rep. Patrick S. Boyd, 50th Dist.

Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.

Rep. Kerry S. Wood, 29th Dist.

Rep. James Sanchez, 6th Dist.

Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121st Dist.

Rep. Michael D Quinn, 82nd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

H.B. 6863's purpose is to make a career in law enforcement more appealing to younger candidates as well as retaining police officers in their jobs rather than leaving the profession, with paying special attention to veteran police officers by providing incentives. This is due to the increased scrutiny, lack of trust, and anti-police/government/authority movements that have gained traction in preceding years. Therefore, many police departments have overburdened and overworked police forces with a workforce shortage in conjunction with a lack of public interest in law enforcement careers.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Changes:

- Section 6 removed
- Section 8 removed
- Section 11 amended
- Section 17 removed

Synopsis of changes:

Section 6 (lines 75-128) and 17 (lines 378-388) were removed due to unfunded mandates that are considered unsustainable to municipalities.

Section 11 of the proposed substitute was amended to include (lines 277-291) "The State Retirement Commission shall (1) study deferred retirement option plans and make recommendations for development of such a plan that is (A) administered by the state and (B) permit any police officer in the state to participate in the plan." This amendment makes it so that the state can further study the most efficient way to provide incentives for police officer retention and employment.

Section 8 (lines 136-141) was removed as it would create a property tax exemption which would in turn burden residential and commercial taxpayers with higher tax rates.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

James Rovella, Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection Strongly supports; Commissioner Rovella supports the improved recruitment and retention of firefighters and law enforcement officers. They offer their support to the committee to alleviate financial burdens that currently exist within the bill for efficient agent operations.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Sean Cassidy, CEO of C.H.I.P.

Supports; Sean Cassidy has served in public safety for over 27 years as the owner and operator of C.H.I.P., Certifyfit.com, Policeapp.com, and Fireapp.com. Their companies has facilitated over 100,000 applicants for the recruitment of police and fire in the United States. They state that police recruitment has been declining since 2008 and accelerated in 2012 with the momentum still present through 2023. Factors involved in the decline of police recruitment are "the anti-police, anti-authority, and anti-government movements... combined with a thriving job market (low unemployment), a pandemic and police reform." However, the issue becomes more complicated due to veteran police officers who are retiring are leaving policing entirely; these officers would retire and move to a similar department. The legislature has addressed the nursing shortage by diverting additional funds, and "the same investment needs to be mad in our law enforcement professionals."

Vincent DeMaio, Police Association of Connecticut (PAC)

Supports; Vincent DeMaio is a thirty-four-year veteran of Connecticut law enforcement. All positive legislation about the promotion of law enforcement sends a message to "the men and women of Connecticut law enforcement the Legislature is concerned for the safety and well-being." The PAC's proposals aim to add on to existing incentive programs for recruitment and retention issues facing law enforcement currently while being conscientious about fixed costs for budgeting.

1. Educational incentive program which would target recruitment by attracting and training qualified police candidates and retain them by giving periods of time as they repay their cost of tuition. After a certain period of tenure, "they would have a defrayment of costs for their children's education at a state university or college"
2. "The State could administer at a Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP), which any law enforcement officer in the State could participate in. This would aid in retention of officers, as well as departments' succession planning. There are several municipalities in the State that currently offer DROP programs (Norwalk and Enfield among them). By solely

administering the program, the State would only have to pay for administration of the plan. The actual participants would contribute their own funds into the program.

3. A graduated tax incentive would also benefit recruitment and retention by offering incentives to both become a police officer and to remain in the profession. The tax breaks could be tiered based upon tenure and could be applied to either State Income Tax or Personal Property Tax.

4. Lastly, educational incentive pay, such as the Quinn Bill in Massachusetts would serve to bolster recruitment and retention throughout the State and attract qualified personnel. The program could also be incentivized to pay more to officers working in our urban centers and city departments that are having a disproportionate recruitment and retention problem.”

Nicholas Lukiwsky, Police Officer

Supports; Nicholas Lukiwsky is a police officer in the state of Connecticut, an important aspect in this bill to them is their pensions equal or greater than the Municipal Employees Retirement Systems (MERS) as many police officers do not have adequate retirement benefits. Due to the demanding nature of being a police officer a lack of financial security can be detrimental to the communities they serve. Subsequently, losing effective officers due to poor financial security puts communities at risk and makes law enforcement less effective. Officer Lukiwsky urges the committee to make “pensions equal to or greater than the MERS a requirement for police officers in Connecticut.” This would improve retention rates as well as make sure officers are fairly compensated.

James McGovern

Supports with modifications; James McGovern states that this bill is weak and that members of the community should assemble a panel to hire police officers and on that panel there should be diverse representation in terms of political affiliation so there is no bias. Police Chiefs across the state should be an integral part of the community and it is imperative that they engage with community and recruitment efforts.

Nicholas Trigila, Detective for the Hartford Police Department

Supports; Detective Trigila is a 16-year veteran of the Hartford Police Department. Policing is becoming less attractive day-by-day due to the lack of public support and scrutiny. The Hartford Police Department has lost over 100 officers since 2020 due to transfers to different departments in neighboring towns. Additionally, there have been reduced medical and retirement benefits and tied in with public scrutiny and mistrust, a career in law enforcement is rather unattractive. This bill would enhance benefits and make a career in law enforcement far more attractive, especially to younger candidates.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Betsy Gara, Executive Director of Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST)

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) supports certain provisions that would aid in the encouragement of people to pursue career opportunities as police officers and/or firefighters. However, they strongly oppose provisions that mandate municipal police to be enrolled in the Connecticut Municipal Employees Retirement System (CMERS).

Municipalities have expressed concern within CMERS as they strain the budgets of those municipalities. Without additional changes to the CMERS system, it is unsustainable for participating towns and puts additional pressure on property tax systems. Municipalities enrolled in CMERS are almost always unable to withdraw from the program. Municipalities participating in CMERS should be given another opportunity to obtain more pension costs – it should be modeled after the state’s Tier 111 program.

Michael, Muszynski, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) Opposes, has concerns about certain provisions and urges no action be taken by the committee; in section eight there would be a \$10,000 tax exemption for police officers in Connecticut – this is unsustainable due to property tax being imperative to the income to fund local services. Subsequently, residential and commercial taxpayers would have their property tax increased. In section thirteen, language seems to be unnecessary and should be deleted regarding “municipalities to have police and firefighters to join the Connecticut Municipal Employee Retirement System (MERS) or provide comparable benefits.” They ask the committee to establish a second tier before moving forward with the bill proposal. In section sixteen, it “would require municipalities to continue medical benefits for officers and their spouses once they retire after serving for not less than 10 years.” Retirement benefits for employees should remain within the local level with each municipality being able to impose benefit programs that work best for their employees. There must be a balance to ensure that incentives do not provide unnecessary burdens on local budgets and property taxpayers. Municipal mandates do not provide flexibility or solve the collective bargaining process.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, ACLU Connecticut
Opposition; the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Connecticut is committed to ending police violence and racism in policing in all aspects. Connecticut must focus on investing in community programs that build resilient, strong, safe communities. The ACLU does not support any initiatives that support the increase of policing in communities, however, they support programs that take funds from policing and reinvest them into community programs. They define real public safety as “access to mental healthcare, affordable housing, income, proper childcare, opportunities for young people, and safe recreational spaces.”

Reported by: Gregory Chipchak

Date: 3/28/2023