

**Public Safety and Security Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT**

Bill No.: SB-231

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A GRANT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE UNMANNED
AERIAL VEHICLES TO LAW ENFORCEMENT UNITS AND FIRE

Title: DEPARTMENTS.

Vote Date: 3/12/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/29/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep, Ben McGorty, 122nd District

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill allows DESPP, within available appropriations, to administer a program to provide grants to law enforcement units and municipal and volunteer fire departments to obtain unmanned aerial vehicles. DESPP is required to develop guidelines on eligibility criteria, forms and deadlines.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Carl Fortuna, First Selectman - Town of Old Saybrook: Testified remotely and is in support of this bill. He testified on behalf of the CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM) and as a co-chair of their Public Safety Committee, that some departments have already employed these devices. He also testified that these devices have a variety of benefits and assist with investigations along with enhancing real-time monitoring of vehicle activity. He stated that CT has recently been plagued by a variety of illegal ATV and dirt bike usage and illegal street takeovers and that these unmanned aerial vehicles, in this bill, may enhance law enforcement investigations. CCM recommends that the state fully fund and financially commit to this program.

Betsy Gara, Executive Director – Connecticut Council Of Small Towns (COST): Testified in support of this bill via correspondence. She testified that new technologies could provide

tremendous assistance to police officers and firefighters in addressing public safety issues in their communities. Drones are an efficient use of resources particularly when municipalities are struggling to retain personnel in these fields. She went on to state that drones can cover large areas in a short amount of time thus enabling law enforcement personnel to respond quicker and more efficiently. The birds eye view is very useful to them. She also testified that some departments have borrowed drones from neighboring communities and that lawmakers should consider ways to assist towns in sharing such equipment at a reduced costs to the towns interested in utilizing drones.

Mike Muszynski, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities: Testified in support of this bill via correspondence. He testified that several departments from around the state have already employed these devices and that benefits from use would improve situational awareness, enhance assessment for pre-deployment of first responders, assist with investigations, and improved search and rescue operations. He recommends that the state fully fund and financially commit to this program.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel – ACLU CT: Testified in opposition of this bill via correspondence. He testified that his organization is committed to ending police violence and racism in policing in all forms. CT must divest from policing and reinvest in programs that build strong and safe communities. He went on to state that policymakers must reduce policing's responsibilities scale and tools to build an equitable future for all people in CT and reinvest those funds into the programs, resources and services that truly create stable, healthy, and safe communities. He testified that there are significant privacy concerns that accompany the use of drones by the police, hence the ACLU's opposition to this bill.

Reported by: Michelle Adams

Date: 3/15/2024