

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-414

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING EQUITY IN STATE EMPLOYMENT.

Vote Date: 3/21/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/12/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor & Public Employees Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To establish a diversity, equity and inclusion division within each department at the recommendation of the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health which shall utilize diverse hiring panels comprised of individuals of various backgrounds for open positions, require employees to attend diversity equity, and inclusion training, and study progress and barriers to providing underserved communities with benefits and services provided by each department.

The substitute language adds the offices of the Secretary of State, Comptroller, Treasurer and Attorney General to the departments effected by this bill. It also, in line 77, adds "and ensuring that underserved communities are encouraged to provide feedback on department activities" after "division", and "constitutional officer" to individuals entrusted with overseeing implementation of the goals of the bill. It also adds in line 109 "and continually assess the progress made or not made towards attaining such community engagement during the prior year". In subsection "d" to section 1, it adds a requirement that the department head consults with the director to ensure proposed policies will not have indirect or direct adverse impact on underserved communities. Finally in line 140, it replaces "a candidate is multilingual" with "a candidate is conversant in a language other than 155 English that is spoken by the diverse populations served by the department."

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Muna Abbas, Associate Commission Analyst, Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health: Provided testimony in support of the bill, which implements four of the nine

recommendations from the Commission. The Commission states that the bill takes steps to ensure Connecticut continues to embrace equity as a commitment by weaving equity into all aspects of government decision making. The creation of agency equity plans will identify and investigate where inequities exist and help the state reach equity goals, which will be published in order to hold agencies accountable. Further, the bill will aim to make hiring practices more equitable by working to achieve representation of underrepresented groups, as well as work to eliminate implicit biases through mandatory diversity training.

Jeffery Beckham, Secretary, Office of Policy and Management: Provided testimony in support of the bill. The Office states the bill progresses towards a more diverse, equitable and inclusive Connecticut, however believes its goals would be better served with the further establishment of a Chief Equity and Opportunity Officer within the Office of Governor. This would serve to centralize diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives by providing oversight and coordination in training and policy. The Office believes the creation of positions for each department is unnecessary and will result in inconsistent policies and unnecessary spending.

Michelle Gilman, Commissioner, Department of Administrative Services: Provided testimony in support of the bill. While the Department writes in favor of the bill, they express concerns over sections 3 and 4. They worry section 3's requirement for state agencies to collect demographic data will violate Title VII law by encouraging demographically motivated hiring decisions. Section 4's requirement for diverse hiring panels meanwhile may make the process for filling vacant positions lengthier and more complex.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Mohamad Alkadry, Director, School of Public Policy, University of Connecticut: Provided testimony in support of the bill. Alkadry endorses the creation of DEI leadership positions at the department and agency level. He further recommends central oversight of DEI through a position in the Governor's Office, conducting studies through UConn and Office of State Comptroller annually, and requiring state agencies report race and ethnicity data in their state payroll system.

Carl Chisem, President, Connecticut Employees Union Independent, SEIU 511: Provided testimony in support of the bill. SEIU supports the state's role as an agent for equity and anti-racism. The bill would implement recommendations from the State government report towards addressing equity, racism, and discrimination in the workplace.

Sean Scanlon, State Comptroller, Office of State Comptroller: Provided testimony in support of the bill. The Comptroller believes this legislation will aid in agencies' DEI initiatives. He recommends three additional measures to improve the effectiveness of state DEI recruitment strategies. First, to require DEI directors report directly to agency leadership to ensure accountability. Second, to require strategic DEI plans be submitted to the legislature to ensure those initiatives are not merely shelved. Third, to require the state improve its employee data so that future analysis can be more meaningful.

Zak Leavy, Legislative Director, AFSCME: Provided testimony in support of the bill. Leavy states the bill will improve equity in the hiring process and throughout and employees tenure.

Jessie Zheng, High School Student: Provided testimony in support of the bill. Zheng states the bill represents a crucial step in ensuring equal rights and protections for LGBT individuals.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Nigel Olivea: Provided testimony in opposition to the bill. Olivea states the bill constitutes extreme government overreach and conflicts with the spirit of the American Constitution.

Reported by: Garrett Smith

Date: 04/05/2024