General Assembly

Raised Bill No. 1378

January Session, 2025

LCO No. **4867**

Referred to Committee on ENVIRONMENT

Introduced by:
(ENV)

AN ACT CONCERNING WILDFIRE RESPONSE AND MANAGEMENT.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (*Effective from passage*) Not later than February 1, 2026, the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall submit a report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes. Such report shall detail an assessment conducted by the commissioner of the state-wide wildfire danger and shall include any recommendations for the designation or reallocation of requisite resources to decrease such wildfire danger and the attendant likelihood of threats to public safety and the destruction of man-made improvements and natural resources.

Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall provide for the training of firefighters, whether professional or volunteer, and emergency medical services professionals on wildfire preparedness and response. The commissioner shall post information on the department's Internet web site indicating how any such person may obtain such training. Not later

than February 1, 2026, the commissioner shall provide the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment with legislative recommendations concerning the further implementation of this section.

Sec. 3. Section 23-36 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

The State Forest Fire Warden may take such action as said warden deems necessary to provide for the prevention and control of forest fires. Said warden may enter into agreements with federal agencies, with cities, boroughs and fire districts and with forest protective associations for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this section. Said warden, if the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection deems necessary, may prohibit open flames upon any or all lands under the commissioner's control. Said warden shall divide the state into districts for the purpose of preventing and controlling forest fires and shall appoint within these districts such district fire wardens, not exceeding two hundred and fifty, as said warden deems necessary, who shall serve for two years or until their successors are appointed. The State Forest Fire Warden shall have supervision of district fire wardens and shall instruct them in their duties. Each district fire warden may, with the approval of the State Forest Fire Warden, appoint deputies to assist in extinguishing fires and to take charge of such extinguishing in such district fire warden's absence, provided, in cities having paid fire departments and whose boundaries are coterminous with the town boundaries, the State Forest Fire Warden may appoint a district fire warden and may assume responsibility for forest fires only upon the written request of the mayor of such city and for such portions as may be designated by such mayor. Cities without paid fire departments and portions of towns outside of city limits shall be included in forest fire districts and the State Forest Fire Warden may employ volunteer fire companies under the conditions described in this section and sections 23-37 to 23-42, inclusive. The State Forest Fire Warden shall establish rates of compensation for equipment usage, fire fighting materials and

supplies expended and firefighter and laborer time expended in extinguishing forest fires to be paid to such volunteer fire companies as may be employed. In establishing such rates, the State Forest Fire Warden may differentiate between various kinds of equipment and material and supplies used and the provisions of section 23-39, as amended by this act, shall apply to the establishment of rates of compensation for firefighter and laborer time. Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes or any municipal ordinance, upon the declaration by the Governor of the existence of a state of emergency due to forest fire, the State Forest Fire Warden may assume direct authority over efforts to extinguish any forest fire and may assign such authority to any state forest fire control personnel.

Sec. 4. Section 23-39 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

The compensation of district and deputy fire wardens, trained firefighters organized in accordance with rules issued by the State Forest Fire Warden and such laborers as said warden finds it necessary to employ shall be fixed by said warden on an hourly basis, subject to the approval of the Commissioner of Administrative Services. Volunteer fire companies may be compensated in accordance with section 23-36, as amended by this act. The chief of the fire department in any town, city or borough who receives a regular salary shall be paid no additional compensation when acting as a fire warden. District fire wardens shall prepare their bills for services rendered by them and by the personnel and automobiles and other apparatus employed or used by them in extinguishing fires. The chief of any volunteer fire company may prepare bills for services rendered by said company and by the personnel and automobiles and other apparatus employed or used by them in extinguishing forest fires, if said company is allowed by town ordinance to receive payment for such bills. Such bills shall be on a form prescribed by the State Forest Warden and shall be submitted to the State Forest Fire Warden within one month after the services have been rendered, and, if found correct and approved by said warden, shall be

ordered paid by the State Comptroller. The State Forest Fire Warden may extend such one-month submittal deadline due to an emergency. A copy of each bill so paid on account of any fire within a city, as provided in section 23-36, as amended by this act, shall be sent by the State Forest Fire Warden to the city treasurer of the city in which the fire occurred, except bills for which a railroad company is liable under the provisions of section 23-42, and, on or before the tenth day of December in each year, such city treasurer shall draw the treasurer's order in favor of the State Treasurer for the full amount of such bills submitted during the twelve months next preceding. The State Forest Fire Warden may forgive such bills if the state would incur administrative costs in collecting the debt owed that would exceed the actual debt owed. Bills for expenses incurred or services rendered by district or deputy wardens in the performance of duties other than fire fighting shall be submitted to the State Forest Fire Warden on or before the tenth day of December and the tenth day of June in each year. Upon approval by the State Forest Fire Warden, such bills shall be ordered paid by the State Comptroller from any sums available for the expenses of the State Forest Fire Warden. All fire warden bills authorized by sections 23-37, 23-38, 23-40 to 23-42, inclusive, and this section shall show in detail the amount and character of the services performed, the exact duration thereof and all disbursements made by such wardens.

Sec. 5. Section 23-50 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

Whenever it appears to the Governor that by reason of extreme drought or other hazardous conditions there is danger of forest fires, **[**he**]** the Governor may (1) proclaim that any or all sections of woodland and brush land in the state shall be closed, for such time as **[**he**]** the Governor may designate, to all persons except the owners or tenants of such woodlands and their agents and employees, **[**and during such period of closure**]** or (2) proclaim that no fire shall be kindled in the open air in any or all areas of the state, or both. As soon as the woodland is deemed free from the danger of fire, the Governor may revoke **[**his**]** any

such proclamation. Any person who enters upon forest or brush land, except as provided **[**herein**]** in this section, or who kindles or causes to be kindled a fire in the open air, during the period covered by the Governor's proclamation, shall be fined not less than five hundred dollars nor more than one **[**hundred**]** thousand dollars or imprisoned not more than six months or be both fined and imprisoned.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	*from passage*	New section
Sec. 2	*from passage*	New section
Sec. 3	*from passage*	23-36
Sec. 4	*from passage*	23-39
Sec. 5	*from passage*	23-50

Statement of Purpose:
To provide authority for the enhanced ability of the state to prepare for and respond to the threat that wildfires present to the state and its residents.

[Proposed deletions are enclosed in brackets. Proposed additions are indicated by underline, except that when the entire text of a bill or resolution or a section of a bill or resolution is new, it is not underlined.]