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CT environmental groups oppose legislation that would cut electric bills, remove public benefits

BY EDMUND H. MAHONY | APRIL 16, 2025 AT 7:00 PM EDT

Environmental groups lined up at a public hearing Wednesday to criticize the legislature's first comprehensive effort to reduce ever increasing energy costs, complaining that measures to cut customer bills threaten state funding for clean energy and efficiency programs.

The state's electric utilities were generally supportive of the legislation. Eversource and United Illuminating are responsible for less than half of the charges on a typical customer bill and spoke in favor of measures that would substantially reduce or remove from bills charges over which they have no control.

The day-long hearing before the legislature's Finance Committee was the first airing of the proposed legislation which is being promoted as an economic development measure.

Analysts have said the bill could cut hundreds of millions of dollars from customer rates by restructuring how the state buys energy and how customers pay for it. Notably, it would immediately lower the typical residential bill by as much as a quarter by stripping what has become the much-criticized public benefits section from customer bills and shifting the cost to a state-issued bond.

Eversource Vice President Doug Horton told the lawmakers that removing public benefits from customer bills — about \$1 billion a year in state energy related programs financed by utility customers — would immediately save a typical Eversource customer about \$45 to \$50 a month.

Opposition to the bill came from the solar industry, other clean energy advocates and environmental groups who expressed concern that the proposal by Sen. John Fonfara, a Hartford Democrat with long experience in energy regulation, could jeopardize state subsidies to decarbonization and energy efficiency programs.

Tom Swan, executive director of the Connecticut Citizens Action Group, called the bill “destabilizing,” “foolhardy” and “a direct assault on our clean energy programs and goals.”

Asked by a lawmaker about potential savings, he said “If you really think this bill will save 40 percent, I think the legislature ought to impose drug testing.”

At another point, Swan said he has not seen energy costs fall “anywhere in the world” over 32 years as a consumer advocate without government intervention.

Samantha Donowsky of the Sierra Club's Connecticut chapter, said “We don't want to see renewables hobbled at a time when we really need to be bringing them online to meet our state goals.”

Lori Brown of the League of Conservation Voters, said that if energy efficiency programs were removed from subsidization by customer bills, they would have to compete for funding at the legislature against an array of state programs.

“If you reconfigure it the way that you are looking to do that, all those programs could be jeopardized and would be at the whim of every individual legislature every year. So we do not believe that that should happen,” she said.

“I guess I look at it a little differently,” said Sen Ryan Fazio, a Greenwich Republican. “That’s because things that cost hundreds of millions of dollars being at the whim of elected officials is how a democratic system is supposed to work.”

In addition to removing public benefits from bills — energy procurement, conservation, so-called green energy and social welfare expenses — Fonfara proposes creating a more aggressive process by which the state buys the energy that Eversource and United Illuminating distribute to customers. It would save even more by creating substantial financial “time of use” incentives to induce customers to operate energy efficient appliances at times of reduced demand.

In addition to bonding the public benefit costs, Fonfara’s bill would allow utility companies to issue bonds to reduce the cost of storm damage to distribution networks after approval by the Public Utility Regulatory Authority.

Eversource alone has hundreds of millions of dollars in accumulated storm damage that could result in another rate shock when passed to customers by PURA. The utilities said bonding would reduce the cost to customers by reducing the interest rate and stretching repayment out over a far longer period.

One of the strongest opponents of the legislation at Wednesday’s hearing was Sen. Norm Needleman, an Essex Democrat and chairman of the legislature’s Energy and Technology Committee, who sounded at times as if he were competing with Fonfara for control of energy legislation.

Needleman, a utility critic who backs the way the state now supports renewable energy and energy efficiency programs, demanded to know of an Eversource witness whether the utility wrote the language in Fonfara’s bill concerning bonding, or securitization.

“So obviously you found a friendlier ear at this committee and I appreciate that you have been searching for that for a while,” Needleman said.

The witness said the bonding language reflects a position Eversource has advocated for years. When Needleman pressed further on “where the language is coming from,” Fonfara interrupted.

“Senator where it comes from is this person right here,” Fonfara said, referring to himself. “That is where the language comes from.”

“I appreciate the honesty of the answer,” Needleman said. “I’m questioning the speaker at the present time. I’m happy to debate energy with the good senator any time, not here.”

Needleman also criticized a portion of the proposed legislation that would have the state adopt a more dynamic process for entering into supply contracts with energy producers. Such a process is needed, the bill says, because electric rates are “greatly impacted by structural inefficiencies” in procurement.

Since deregulating the energy industry in 1998, the state has negotiated with generators to acquire a diverse energy portfolio that the legislature has said must contain an ever increasing percentage of renewables. Under the contracts, mandated by the legislature, the generators sell energy to Eversource and United Illuminating.

The state now participates in a half dozen or so energy auctions a year at prearranged times, something Fonfara compared to visiting the grocery store on prearranged dates when there may or may not be a sale. His bill would create the quasi-public Connecticut Electricity Procurement Authority composed of energy traders who would search energy markets daily for favorable price fluctuations.

Fonfara's proposal is modeled after a procurement process used by a Norwich-based, municipal energy cooperative

Needleman called a suggestion that the new procurement system could save customers money "a lot of crap."

"People who trade lose money and make money," he said. "We provide stability not a roulette wheel for electric rates, which some people think is a good idea. You like gambling, go gamble. Play the market."

He said a \$200,000-a-year state employee lacks the expertise to trade on energy markets where Wall Street commodity pros are right about half the time.

Representatives of the state solar industry said they are threatened by a provision in the bill that would reduce the credit homeowners receive on their bill for the energy their rooftop solar panels contribute to the utility network.

The change in pricing attempts to account for the success of solar rooftop installation, which have expanded to the extent that utilities have had to raise rates in general to account for revenue losses. Similar measures have been put in place elsewhere in the country.

"It will put us, as well as most solar companies, completely out of business," said Tim Schneider of Earthlight Technologies.

CT legislature gets energy bill that aims to cut customer bills by hundreds of millions of dollars

BY EDMUND H. MAHONY | APRIL 16, 2025 AT 8:19 AM EDT

Nearly a year after record heat and surging electric bills sparked a ratepayer revolt, the legislature is set to take up a bill that could cut hundreds of millions of dollars from customer rates by restructuring how the state buys energy and how customers pay for it.

Most notably, the proposed legislation would immediately lower the typical residential bill by as much as a quarter by stripping what has become the much-criticized public benefits section from customer bills and shifting the cost to a state-issued bond.

The bill, written by Sen. John Fonfara, a Hartford Democrat and acknowledged legislative authority on energy issues, proposes to save more by creating a more aggressive process by which the state and utility companies, Eversource and United Illuminating, buy the energy distributed to customers. It would save even more by creating substantial financial "time of use" incentives to induce customers to operate energy efficient appliances at times of reduced demand.

In addition to bonding the public benefit costs — which consist of energy procurement, conservation, so-called green energy and social welfare expenses — Fonfara's bill proposes to issue bonds to cover the cost, now paid for by utility customers, of storm damage to distribution networks.

Eversource alone has hundreds of millions of dollars in accumulated storm damage that could result in another rate shock when passed to customers by the Public Utility Regulatory Authority. Bonding would take the expense off utility bills and reduce installments by stretching repayment out over a far longer period.

Eversource and United Illuminating were analyzing the proposed legislation this week and were not prepared Tuesday to say how much of it they support. Preliminarily, one utility analyst said Fonfara's proposals could save residential and commercial customers, who now pay the nation's highest electric rates, as much as \$1 billion a year.

A combination of record heat, high electric consumption, energy market volatility and pandemic unemployment drove electric rates and public benefit charges up as much as 400 percent last summer, leading to bipartisan calls for rate relief. But Fonfara's complex, 80-page bill is so far the only comprehensive proposal on rates to emerge in the current legislative session.

Republicans have proposed several cost savings measures, among them removing public benefits from electric bills and transferring costs to the state's general fund where they would be subject to political debate before enactment. But the Republican measures were opposed by the state's appointed energy bureaucracy and killed at the legislature's Democrat-controlled Energy and Technology Committee.

Fonfara, former co-chairman of the Energy and Technology Committee for much of his four decades in the legislature, labeled his bill as an economic development measure and filed it through the legislature's finance committee, of which he is now the Senate chairman.

While considered an influential voice on energy matters by many colleagues, Fonfara has become something of an outsider among Democrats who dominate the state energy debate. He was opposed by some in his own party when his name surfaced earlier this year as someone who could bring balance to PURA, the utility regulatory agency that has come under increasing political scrutiny and criticism.

Fonfara's bill, which incorporates some Republican proposals, has bipartisan support and is scheduled for a public hearing before the finance committee today.

"I think it is going to bring people to the table for a conversation on how to lower electric rates," said House Republican Leader Vincent Candelora of North Branford. "And I think that is the most important thing we can do. Frankly I think the energy committee failed to do that. John is going to bring people into the conversation."

Fonfara said he expects his plan to strip public benefits from customer bills to dominate discussion of the bill because of the widespread rate payer opposition to the charges. More than 75,000 have signed petitions calling for transferring the charges to the state's general fund.

The legislation creates a Green Bond Fund that would take over the cost of the benefit charges. The bill caps the fund at \$800 million, but Fonfara said the figure is negotiable. Utility customers at Eversource and UI paid about \$1 billion in public benefit charges in 2024.

The Green Bond Fund would exist for three years. If, after three years, its operation were judged to be a success, it would continue in operation.

More important to the state's energy future, Fonfara said, is the bill's requirement that the state adopt a more dynamic process for entering into supply contracts with energy producers. Such a process is

needed, it says, because electric rates are “greatly impacted by structural inefficiencies” in procurement and cost recovery.

Since deregulating the energy industry in 1998, the state and the utility companies have negotiated with generators to acquire a diverse energy portfolio that the legislature has required to contain an ever increasing percentage of renewables. Under the contracts, mandated by the legislature, the generators sell energy to Eversource and United Illuminating.

“They now procure in the most inefficient way possible,” Fonfara said. “It is three or four auctions every six months or maybe six auctions throughout the year. And it is scheduled at certain times. There is nothing dynamic, there is nothing opportunistic about it whatsoever.”

He compared the existing state procurement process to trips to the supermarket on prearranged dates a half dozen times a year that miss all the sales.

His bill would create a Connecticut Electricity Procurement Authority composed of energy traders who would search energy markets daily for favorable price fluctuations.

“We would have a team of experts buying every day — long term contracts, short term, hedging, layering, laddering, all these different strategies,” he said. “It is much more dynamic. It is opportunistic so when you see prices are low you move. We believe there will be measurable savings.”

As part of its shift in procurement strategy, Fonfara would reclassify low priced energy generated by the Dominion Energy’s Millstone nuclear power station in Waterford, making it eligible for purchase as part of the state’s renewable, clean energy procurement portfolio. State energy officials have resisted such a move, arguing that it will hurt state efforts to use Connecticut consumer energy dollars to incentivize construction of new renewable energy generation.

The bill also aims to lower peak energy use in the state by establishing significant savings for customers who consume energy at off-peak, or low use times of the day.

Fonfara said the state now considers noon to 8 p.m. the hours of peak use, but said there is no “effective differential” in price between peak and off-peak consumption. The bill shifts the peak usage period to 4 to 7 p.m. and creates a 300 percent differential in rates.

“This is not going to be command and control, government doing this,” Fonfara said. “This is going to be the market signal to residential and commercial customers that for these three hours, you curtail and you will be rewarded because your bill will be lower and the system will benefit because we are no longer having to build to that peak.”

Fonfara argues that reducing peak electricity consumption lowers everyone’s bill because it reduces the need for the electric utilities to continually build out their infrastructure to meet ever increased peak loads.

His bill envisions a top to bottom regulatory and pricing structure administered by the Connecticut Electricity Procurement Authority that would result in a general reduction in electric rates.

Among other things, Fonfara said it contains incentives for developing technologies such as rapid electric vehicle charging devices and storage systems that would allow homeowners with rooftop solar panels to discharge unused energy into the utility network during higher-priced, peak use hours.

The provision regarding solar panels is just one of the bill components aimed at reducing overall structural costs. While acknowledging that homeowners deploy solar panels to reduce costs, the practice has “resulted in increased electric rates for the remaining ratepayers.”

For commercial customers, the proposed legislation would eliminate sales tax on electricity, as well as the demand charge, which he said can account for as much as 50 to 60 percent of bills.

It would also collect a fee from customers of 7 cents a kilowatt hour that would be used to offset the cost of network improvement by utilities, costs that are now passed on to customers through their bills.

CT says no to feds on signing DEI letters. There's \$553M at stake.

BY LIVI STANFORD | APRIL 16, 2025 AT 5:11 PM EDT

Gov. Ned Lamont and Education Commissioner Charlene Russell said Wednesday that the state Department of Education will not sign a letter on the U.S. Department of Education order that K-12 schools certify that they are in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and that they will eliminate DEI.

The officials cited that Connecticut “already does and will continue to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.”

The U.S. Department of Education ordered K-12 schools to certify not only that they are in compliance with act, but that they are also eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion practices or risk losing federal funding.

But Lamont said that, “in Connecticut, we’re proud to support the incredible diversity of our schools and work tirelessly to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has access to a quality education and the best opportunity at the starting line in life.”

“From our educators, who are mentoring and inspiring the next generation of young people, to our curriculum, our commitment to education is what has made our schools nationally recognized, and we plan to continue doing what makes our students, teachers, and schools successful,” he said, in a statement.

The state Department of Education regularly reaffirms its compliance with federal program, through which USDOE continues to provide federal funding, according to a statement from the governor’s office. Additionally, local education agencies in Connecticut certify their compliance with Title VI to CSDE in annual applications with all assurances required for federal programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance, according to the governor’s office.

“It is thoroughly disappointing that Connecticut Democrats so blatantly refuse to comply with federal law. This political decision to continue DEI policies not only harms the students in our schools but also risks Title 1 funding, which primarily helps support districts with higher percentages of low-income families,” said Connecticut Republican Party Chairman Ben Proto.

Other districts including New York have told the Trump administration that they will not comply with its demands to end DEI practices in public schools.

Daniel Morton-Bentley, counsel and deputy commissioner of the New York Department of Education, said in a letter April 4 that state officials do not believe the federal agency has the authority to make such demands.

Connecticut educators, lawyers and senators continue to navigate what they refer to as an “ambiguous” document but they all surmise that the Trump’s administration’s demands are illegal.

Violation of free speech

Dan Barrett, legal director of the ACLU of CT, said that the vague order violates free speech rights.

“They are asking schools to sign an open-ended promise that the school will not violate the law whatever the current national government considers offensive,” he said. “It gives no parameters. If you were a school administrator you would not have any meaningful way you could even sign that document.”

Barrett said further that the national government is prohibited from imposing on everybody else what things may be said and what things may not be said.

Further, he added that there is a limited range of authority the executive branch has in the form of regulation.

“The executive branch does not have the authority to institute such a law,” he said.

Funding issue remains

In a statement, Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights for the U.S. Department of Education Craig Trainor said “federal financial assistance is a privilege, not a right.

“When state education commissioners accept federal funds, they agree to abide by federal antidiscrimination requirements,” he said. “Unfortunately we have seen too many schools flout or outright violate these obligations, including by using DEI programs to discriminate against one group of Americans to favor another based on identity characteristics in clear violation of Title VI.”

Connecticut’s public school districts receive nearly \$553 million annually in funding from the federal government, according to the School + State Finance Project.

The funding is used for a wide range of purposes from special education services to academic improvement initiatives to multilingual learner education, according to the School + State Finance Project.

Elusive directive

Many educators remained baffled by the directive from the Trump administration and concerned about the order’s chilling effect on free speech.

The U.S. Department of Education did not respond to emails from the Courant for comment concerning what specific DEI programs would violate the law.

Fran Rabinowitz, executive director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, said superintendents resent being taken off the task of educating kids.

“We believe that the respect and belonging of every member of the school community is what DEI means to us,” she said. “I can’t imagine any school that does not have DEI. It is part of the fabric of the school. If you think of DEI as respect and belonging, what school district does not have respect and belonging? It is not a program. It is a vision for schools.”

Rabinowitz said it is a very frustrating time and that every one of Trump's edicts causes confusion.

"We need to be teaching our children to be successful citizens," she said, adding that she believes districts to the best of their ability are going to certify that "there is no attempt in these districts to place one subgroup over another."

Waterbury Interim Superintendent Darren Schwartz said that from the district's perspective, "Waterbury has never intentionally or unintentionally gone after and violated any laws."

"We view diversity as a positive to our community and something that needs to be embraced. We are going to continue to abide by the law and at the same time embrace our diverse student body."

Kate Dias, president of the Connecticut Education Association, shared concerns that she does not want the "censorship of free speech and ideas."

"We value all the unique differences that people bring to the table," she said. "It is one of the most patriotic things that we can do as a country of immigrants."

Dias added that educators feel under attack and are looking at their local administration with the question, "Are we prepared to fight back or are we going to fold to the federal political pressure?"

"Our Board of Education and administration have every intention to work within the obligation of the law," she said. "The people understand the attempts by this administration are attempts to circumvent the law."

Asked if she is aware of what DEI programs the administration is referring to that are against the law, Dias said the Trump administration has not specifically identified programs in order to be "intentionally vague to encourage broad compliance."

U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy D-Conn., said in an email that during her nomination hearing Education Secretary Linda McMahon "left the door wide open for this administration to illegally revoke funding from public schools in Connecticut that celebrate Black History month or teach African American history.

"As shocking as that is, I have received no follow up to suggest she simply misspoke," he said. "This administration doesn't care about educating our kids. They care about dismantling public education so they can sell it off for parts."

100 jobs, middle schools sports targeted for cuts in Hartford schools due to \$6.7M budget gap

BY STEPHEN UNDERWOOD | APRIL 16, 2025 AT 3:30 PM EDT

During an emotionally fraught Hartford Board of Education meeting Tuesday night, a handful of parents, students and educators pleaded with board members to demand the city give more money to the reeling school district that is facing a \$6.7 million budget deficit.

More than 130 Hartford Public Schools staff members, including some teachers, are facing pink slips at the end of the school year if the district can't find a way to close the nearly \$7 million budget gap, a task that advocates say is impossible without additional funding from the city.

The board on Tuesday approved the district's \$452 million balanced budget for the next school year while making an unprecedented appeal directly to the city by adding a resolution asking for funds to help close the \$6.7 million funding gap.

The budget vote included several cuts to middle school athletic programming, security guard positions, student support and success centers and on-track graduation programs, while also attaching a resolution that formally requests the city to "identify an additional appropriation" for \$6.7 million to fund its programs.

The district, which was facing a \$30 million budget deficit earlier this year, already made several reductions and realignments at their central office totaling around \$15 million, according to Hartford Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez. Those reductions, along with an expected \$5 million in additional state funding, have brought the budget deficit down to \$6.7 million. The district expects around \$3 million from the City of Hartford.

Among the challenges facing the city's school system are ballooning operating costs, including tuition and special education funding, a decline in student enrollment, loss of federal funds and continued flat funding on the city level for necessitating the cuts.

The city continues to flat-fund Hartford Public Schools on education spending. Hartford allocates \$284 million, which represents a zero increase over the last decade despite rising costs. Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam contends the majority of district funding comes from the state and that he will work with state leaders to identify funding solutions.

"The City of Hartford remains committed to prioritizing education and ensuring our students and teachers have the resources they need to succeed," Arulampalam said in a statement to the Courant. "That commitment includes the additional \$3 million in funding for the Hartford Board of Education announced in March, continued collaboration with our state leaders to identify long-term solutions and a focus on advancing the recommendations put forward by the Hartford Blue Ribbon Commission on Education."

Also at issue is a decline in student enrollment between Hartford Public Schools and the Capitol Region Education Council or CREC, which operates interdistrict magnet schools that draw interested students by lottery from Hartford and the surrounding suburbs. Torres-Rodriguez has said that the district has seen increased enrollment of Hartford students at CREC schools, which has added to costs. The district must pay tuition for Hartford students who enroll at CREC schools and also lose funding due to decreased enrollment figures within the district.

Since the 2016-17 school year, enrollment across the district has decreased by more than 4,000 students. The largest decrease in enrollment came during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic with a loss of more than 1,100 students during the 2020-21 school year. Since 2010, the district has seen a 21% decrease in enrollment and a 197% increase in magnet and open choice tuition costs, according to the district.

"It's hard to fathom the lasting impact of additional cuts to our public school system. Over the last 11 years of flat funding from the state of Connecticut and the City of Hartford, the district has mitigated almost \$144 million in budget reductions, eliminating 644 positions to adopt balanced budgets," said Torres-Rodriguez.

"We've closed schools and consolidated programs, and we've lost many talented educators because the district did not have competitive compensation. We were able to bring back some essentials, including

middle school sports or student support and success centers that are community priorities, but now we are on the brink of closing down those programs as well in order to balance next year's budget," she added.

Carol Gale, president of the Hartford Federation of Teachers, said that if the cuts go ahead they will have a negative impact on student learning and growth. The Hartford Federation of Teachers said the district has already cut 194 employee union positions over the last few years.

"Our students are taking the hit of losing 134 staff members in order to reduce an already \$30 million deficit to the current \$6.7 million deficit," said Gale. "For our students, this means higher class sizes, less course offerings, less support, less enrichment and less opportunities. Further cuts only exacerbate the losses."

The district said that under the current plan, Hope Academy, a program that offers small class sizes for students who need support in staying on track for graduation, would lose more than half of its funding. The city's Opportunity Academy, a school that serves approximately 155 students in grades 9 through 12 through project-based learning, would be eliminated.

Haley Lugo, 19, a student at Opportunity Academy, said that eliminating the school would be devastating for its students. Lugo said that as a student at Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy, she had to work part-time to help her family, which made it difficult to learn. Lugo joined Opportunity Academy in 2023 and she credits that decision with helping her complete her diploma and gain employment at the Boys & Girls Club of Hartford. She said she will be graduating this June and expects to attend Manchester Community College's culinary program in the fall.

"My guidance counselor recommended me for Opportunity Academy when I realized I was running out of time to finish my degree," Lugo said. "At my old school, there was not enough time to learn. But at OA, classes are much smaller, and we get more time to work one-on-one with our teachers. My teacher even texts me to make sure I'm on time at school. Last fall, he referred me to Hartford Youth Service Corps and this program connected me to the Boys and Girls Club where I now work with younger kids every day. Now I have five credits left to earn my high school diploma."

William Moffett Jr., a well-known city activist, pleaded with board members to demand extra funds from the city.

"It's sad to say, but at the beginning of the meeting you said 'We are proud of our system.' How can you be proud of what we have done collectively?" Moffett Jr. said. "Budgets are moral documents, every mayor and every governor constantly tries to throw money at the symptoms of the problem, creating this feedback loop. I don't know what the solutions are, but please go to the city, they have the money, but they will not do it. They see Hartford as a scapegoat."

Torres-Rodriguez said that she ultimately believes that funding will have to come from both the city and the state. She said she hopes those discussions can start the process to ensure that critical programs remain. But she also cautioned that it can't be a "one-time fix" and that serious discussions need to address the long-term viability of the district. Torres-Rodriguez announced back in January she would be stepping down from her post at the end of the school year after nearly a decade as superintendent.

"I think it's going to require continued cooperation and advocacy at both the city and state level," Torres-Rodriguez said. "We know that there are funding streams available, and I remain very hopeful. I also think the community needs to engage in a broader conversation. School consolidations do not solve long-term structural funding challenges, but they do provide some immediate efficiencies."

“It is also requiring that we really look at the way we are structured,” she said. “Is it the most efficient and also best way to support students? I think it’s an opportunity more broadly to think about should we continue to educate students in the same way given that these funding models continue to be a challenge here and in other districts.”

CT Insider

Two CT Democratic leaders clash over electric rate proposal: 'I have great concerns'

BY KEN DIXON | APRIL 16, 2025

HARTFORD — Veteran Democratic state Sen. John Fonfara, who has become a political lightning rod over the regulation of electric utilities, joined with House Republicans and Democratic Senate leaders on Wednesday, proposing a revamping of the way the state purchases power and removing a controversial customer charge off of monthly bills.

But after a morning news conference that Fonfara led in the Legislative Office Building, his proposal was criticized by consumer advocates during a public hearing before the tax-writing legislative Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee, of which Fonfara is co-chairman. Gov. Ned Lamont’s spokesman said that some of the items are worth discussion, but he is still opposed to foisting part of consumer bills onto statewide tax payers.

Sen. Norm Needleman, D-Essex, the co-chairman of the Energy and Technology Committee who has proposed a bill from that panel, was skeptical about Fonfara’s bill, which would likely have to be reviewed later by his committee. “I have great concerns,” Needleman, a member of the Finance Committee, said during the public hearing.

During the news conference, Fonfara said his proposal would result in an “immediate” 20 percent cut in residential and commercial electric bills and create a “green bond” to borrow the money for the next three years. His proposal would also create a new state agency to develop a new system with lower costs, cleaner emissions.

“There are certain fundamental truths that we must acknowledge and act on if we want to reverse the path we are on,” Fonfara said. “If we choose to do nothing electricity costs will continue to increase.”

Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney, D-New Haven, and Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, D-Norwalk, praised the bipartisan support for Fonfara’s proposal, stressing that it will likely become part of the overall mix of proposals. “It is a subject matter that is almost a language unto itself,” said Looney, noting that Fonfara is a former co-chairman of the Energy Committee.

“I think this bill will be an important contribution to the debate we’re going to have this session about energy policy,” Looney said. “There are other bills out there as well and I think the goal for everybody in this building to look at various ways in which we can bring down the cost of electricity,” Duff added, praising the rare bipartisan news conference.

“We’re here to support the concepts in this bill,” said House Minority Leader Vincent Candelora, R-North Branford, who along with Republican Senate leaders has several times proposed taking the public benefits charges off of consumer bills. Lamont has opposed the effort to put those charges — the costs

of delinquent bills, often defunct businesses — and a contract with the Millstone nuclear facility in Waterford, into the state budget.

Lamont was out of state on Wednesday along with State Treasurer Erick Russell meeting with bond-rating agencies, but Rob Blanchard, the governor's communications director, agreed that Fonfara's proposal merits conversations.

“The governor appreciates legislators coming together in a bipartisan way to discuss meaningful ways to lower our utility costs,” Blanchard said in a statement. “Within this legislative proposal are ideas that the governor looks forward to discussing further, such as ways to continue improving our standard service procurement process and smoothing out distribution use over the course of the day. However, there are concerns and significant questions as well. ”

Blanchard said that “few examples exist, if at all” where states have created separate procurement authorities “let alone ones that operate outside of mechanisms designed to protect rate payers and that can be done without saddling rate payers with hundreds of millions of dollars more in expenses. Rather than putting annual expenses on our 'credit card' or crowding out bonding for municipal parks, roads, and school construction with items in the public benefits charge, as proposed, the governor would prefer we explore ways to reduce public benefits charges that may be outdated or unnecessary.”

Tom Swan, executive director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group, speaking to the finance panel, was extremely critical of Fonfara's plan.

“We question this committee's jurisdiction over energy policy,” Swan said, adding that the proposed new procurement regulatory would be an unnecessary additional layer of government. “The actual bill reads as if the proponent has an ax to grind with our existing regulatory apparatus. While this bill might offer some rate relief in the short term, the overall bill will increase costs for Connecticut residents on and off of our bills.” He called it a “direct assault” on the state's clean-energy goals.

Needleman, in an interview after the morning news conference, said there are some “serious, problematic issues” with Fonfara's proposal. He said if the bill gets approved in the Finance Committee, the Energy Committee will likely get the referral for review. “I would like to vet this with experts, not with the utilities,” Needleman said.

On Tuesday, Senate Republicans walked out during a vote on the nomination of Public Utilities Regulatory Authority Board Chairwoman Marissa Gillett, amid charges that she has exceeded her authority in regulating the major utility companies, resulting in discouraging their investments in the state. The GOP lawmakers have also criticized the confirmation process, which included a deal to expand PURA's board, turn it into a quasi-public agency and add Fonfara to the board.

Connecticut plans new way of keeping track of Trump funding cuts

BY ALEX PUTTERMAN | APRIL 16, 2025

Connecticut has created a new portal through which businesses, non-profits and municipalities can report impacts of federal cuts, Gov. Ned Lamont announced Wednesday.

The announcement comes as President Donald Trump's administration cancels grants and contracts across the federal government, including many in Connecticut, and implements tariffs that are likely to affect businesses and consumers nationwide.

The state's new portal, accessible at ct.gov/fedimpact, asks users to create an account and report whatever effects they're experiencing due to federal cuts. Examples of impacts worth reporting include "pauses, cancelations, and reductions in federal funding, reductions in employment, and impacts from tariffs," Lamont's office said in a news release.

Information entered into the portal will be shared with relevant state agencies, "which will utilize this data to help inform the state's response as these directives from the federal government continue to be made."

"State government has an important responsibility in responding to any crisis that is happening within our borders, and this reporting tool is intended to shed a light on how these changes from the federal government are affecting people who live, work, and learn in Connecticut," Lamont said in a statement.

Lamont's office emphasized that any reports submitted to the state will be public information "and may be released by the state to interested parties."

In the news release, State Treasurer Erick Russell said the portal "provides real-time information that allows us to push back, to demand accountability, and to fight for the resources we all deserve," while Comptroller Sean Scanlon said it will allow the state to track a fast-changing landscape.

"Federal policies are shifting every day, and we are constantly assessing what this means for our state," Scanlon said. "We're asking the public to use this new reporting tool to ensure we have the most accurate and up-to-date information on the impact funding cuts and freezes are having on Connecticut."

Entering a report through the portal will not assure state response, the governor's office said.

Hartford schools would cut 100+ jobs, middle school sports under proposal

BY NATASHA SOKOLOFF | APRIL 17, 2025

More than 100 positions across Hartford Public Schools, middle school sports and several student support programs are on the chopping block for the next school year as the district faces a multi-million dollar gap in its budget.

The Hartford Board of Education adopted a \$452 million budget Tuesday night, along with a formal resolution asking the City of Hartford for \$6.7 million in extra funds to address the deficit the district says it cannot fill on its own.

And as Hartford Schools Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez wraps up her tenure leading the school system, she said in an interview with CT Insider that the district's longtime budget struggles and the currently looming cuts made her concerned for the future of the school district she would be leaving behind.

"I will acknowledge, as the superintendent and CEO, it is my job. I understand that it is my job to balance the budget," she said. But for years, the district has been lacking what it needed to address its fiscal struggles: sustainable and structural funding, she said.

For fiscal year 2026, the district started with a \$30 million deficit, which they got down to \$6.7 million through slashing some 85 positions and making reductions in a number of areas. "The reality still remains that we've had to mitigate. So we did," Torres-Rodriguez said.

In a district that has already cut "hundreds and hundreds" of staff in the last decade, they were now cutting dozens more general education teachers, as well as special education and central office staff, and school security guards.

The things at risk in Hartford would be considered basic offerings in other communities, Torres-Rodriguez said. "That's the challenging part, because those mitigations are not add ons. We have never had add ons in Hartford Public Schools... we're cutting from what we already cut in the past," she said. "I am very worried."

And if the district doesn't get more money from some combination of the city and state to fill the current \$6.7 million gap in the budget, even more is at risk.

The budget gap leaves the fate of middle school athletic programming at 11 schools, several more jobs, programs that help students stay on track for graduation and provide counseling support, health clinics and more, up in the air.

Several speakers, including teachers and staff whose positions have been or would be impacted by the cuts, spoke out against the reductions at the Board of Education meeting Tuesday evening, emphasizing the adverse consequences on students and schools with resources already stretched thin. Last year, the district's budget included hundreds of staffing cuts across the district.

Special education, programming and transportation costs continue to rise, without any extra funding to keep pace, Torres-Rodriguez said.

"Sadly, the city has flat funded our public schools for 10 years," said Carol Gale, president of the Hartford Federation of Teachers, at the Board meeting Tuesday night. "For our students, this means higher class sizes, less course offerings, less support, less enrichment, less opportunities. Further cuts only exacerbate the losses."

And Hartford isn't the only district facing a fiscal crisis in its spending plan for the next year. Amidst the expiration of pandemic relief funding and uncertainties at the federal level, many other school districts in Connecticut are facing tough cuts in their budgets, from positions to programs. Multiple districts also face staffing shortages.

But in recent years, Hartford has been hit hard.

"There is, I believe, a disproportionate impact in Hartford Public Schools given the dynamic that we have and the fact that we do operate within an ecosystem of school choice and certain funding structures not changing to keep up with the impact," Torres-Rodriguez said.

The Board of Education has made \$170 million in cuts to balance the district's budget since 2016 due to flat funding and the persisting deficit, according to the Board's resolution. In addition, Hartford has a higher proportion of high needs students compared to most other Connecticut schools, and already faces higher staffing vacancies than other districts.

That was why the Board of Education "felt that they have a responsibility to make the ask" for the city to give the district more money, Torres-Rodriguez said.

And while she said she was hopeful the city and state would work with the district to help address the deficit, many positions and programs were already beyond saving.

"There's a humanistic element to all of this, our teachers, our para educators, our social workers, our security officers, the entire team members... I know how they show up every day. They pour their energy, their passion, their commitment, right into teaching and learning in our students and they care," Torres-Rodriguez said. "And so for me to hear and see that we are potentially going to lose them... Our kids are going to feel that, our communities are going to feel that, and then those that do remain... they're going to carry on an extra load. They're going to have to do more with less. The demands are going to continue to increase."

Connecticut refuses to sign Trump administration's DEI compliance order

BY NATASHA SOKOLOFF | APRIL 16, 2025 12:48 P.M.

Connecticut is rejecting the Trump administration's demand that K-12 schools certify their compliance with the elimination of all "illegal" diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, the state education commissioner announced Wednesday.

Connecticut Education Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker said she would not be signing the U.S. Department of Education's letter certifying compliance with the administration's interpretation of federal civil rights laws, writing in a letter to the federal department that the state is already in compliance with antidiscrimination laws and principles.

The letter marks the state education department's first major pushback against President Donald Trump and his administration's slew of executive orders and directives targeted at the country's education system.

"Connecticut remains committed to safeguarding Connecticut students against the insidious effects of discrimination and continues to align its principles and programs with the requirements and purpose of Title VI, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin," Russell-Tucker wrote in an April 15 letter to the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights.

The Education Department's April 3 letter gave states a deadline to return a letter verifying their K-12 schools' compliance with the department's interpretation of civil rights law, including the rejection of DEI practices that the Trump administration says are discriminatory, as a condition of receiving federal funding.

The letter cited Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits recipients of federal funding from discriminating on the basis of race, color or national origin. Connecticut "already does and will continue to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," according to the April 16 release.

Last week, Russell-Tucker told superintendents they had more time to comply with the certification deadline, which was extended to April 24, as other states like Minnesota and New York took a firm stance against the order, telling the Trump administration they would not be signing it.

The Connecticut State Department of Education's announcement Wednesday brings the state's response closer in line to around a dozen of other Democratic-led states that are declining to sign the letter.

"In Connecticut, we're proud to support the incredible diversity of our schools and work tirelessly to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has access to a quality education and the best opportunity at the starting line in life," Gov. Ned Lamont said in the April 16 release. "From our educators, who are mentoring and inspiring the next generation of young people, to our curriculum, our commitment to education is what has made our schools nationally recognized, and we plan to continue doing what makes our students, teachers, and schools successful."

The federal Education Department's communications surrounding antidiscrimination law violations and DEI have cited both Title VI and the Supreme Court's 2023 affirmative action decision declaring race cannot be a factor in college admissions.

Russell-Tucker wrote that the Connecticut State Department of Education is unaware of any current legal authority for the U.S. Department of Education to require state education agencies to obtain certification from districts as the federal department had ordered, or to report on compliance or propose enforcement plans in conformance with the order.

The April memo specifically threatened to withhold Title 1 funding, which supports districts with high percentages of children from low-income families, if schools are not in compliance with "antidiscrimination obligations." \$1.1 billion from the federal government went to K-12 education in the state in 2023, funds that districts heavily rely on for a number of programs, especially Title 1.

"Federal financial assistance is a privilege, not a right," said Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Craig Trainor in the federal Education Department's April 3 press release. "When state education commissioners accept federal funds, they agree to abide by federal antidiscrimination requirements. Unfortunately, we have seen too many schools flout or outright violate these obligations, including by using DEI programs to discriminate against one group of Americans to favor another based on identity characteristics in clear violation of Title VI."

The Connecticut State Department of Education "has been faithfully implementing education programs in accordance with all federal laws, including antidiscrimination laws, and will continue to do so," Russell-Tucker wrote in her letter to the federal department.

Several Connecticut organizations see funding frozen by DOGE

BY JORDAN NATHANIEL FENSTER | APRIL 17, 2025

Connecticut-based organizations, schools and companies continue to lose millions of dollars as the Department of Governmental Efficiency looks to save federal funds by eliminating grants and contracts.

A CT Insider review of the latest cuts affecting those in Connecticut showed various cuts, from a \$3.5 million allocation to Yale through the Department of Health and Human Services to study the psychology of young women of color to a \$773,000 grant to UConn that funded a study on the relationship between drug use and HIV transmission. Sacred Heart University has lost \$3.38 million grant for a teacher residency program.

DOGE, run by billionaire Elon Musk and tasked by President Donald Trump with cutting federal expenses, has canceled numerous grants, contracts and leases since Trump took office in January. The grants fund a wide range of programs, from studies on alcohol use at Yale and HIV research at UConn, to the entire federal allocation to nonprofit Connecticut Humanities and many others. Combined, the frozen grant funding listed on the DOGE website amounts to more than \$425 million.

Middletown-based Connecticut Humanities, for example, has lost the entirety of its federal funding, more than \$1 million, as Executive Director Jason Mancini said during a Wednesday town hall for arts and culture organizations.

Among other impacts, Mancini said the loss of funding imperils Connecticut's plans for the state's 250th anniversary, scheduled to be celebrated next year.

“Connecticut Humanities will continue our operations as long as we can,” he said. “We might not be here for July 4, 2026. That's the reality.”

The Hartford Public Library has lost a \$450,000 grant for a program intended to “remove key barriers along the path to citizenship.” Several cities, including Bridgeport and Waterbury, have lost funding under the Inflation Reduction Act intended to remove lead from local homes.

In New Haven, \$1 million has been pulled for a program that helped residents currently relying on heating oil to transition to high-efficiency heat pumps, according to Steve Winter, director of New Haven’s office of Climate and Sustainability.

“We're in the Venn diagram of things that the current administration doesn't want to see. They don't they don't want to see action on climate change. They don't want to see investment in disengaged communities like the inner city neighborhoods that this grant was focused on,” Winter said. “But what that really results in is higher energy bills for residents and more pollution. Those are the outcomes. Our residents and our air quality are ultimately what suffers.”

Save The Children, a the Fairfield-based organization, has taken one of the biggest hits in Connecticut. They have seen tens of millions of dollars frozen in recent months.

Rev. Nicholas Porter, founding director of Milford-based Jerusalem Peacebuilders, said during an interview his organization was told they would lose \$30,000 through the State Department that funded an advanced teacher training program in Israel.

“They wrote us saying, we are discontinuing the grant, not because we're not satisfied with what you're doing, not because we want to discontinue it, but because the Secretary of State discontinued it,” he said.

Porter said he knows of many organizations that have relied on federal funding, the loss of which will result in their closure.

“You live by the sword, you die by the sword,” Porter said. “If you live by government grants, you will die by government grants.”

Many of the grant termination notices come from emails without the “dot gov” extension that usually indicates an official government email address. Weston History & Culture Center Executive Director Samantha Fargion said during the Wednesday town hall that she questioned the validity of the email when she first received it.

Porter also questioned the validity of the email he received.

“We did receive a sketchy email, or one that did not, didn't have all the hallmarks of an official government email,” Porter said. “But it was in the name of the State Department, and I forwarded it to the public diplomacy department at the U.S. Embassy, that part of which is still in Tel Aviv, and the head of the department there said, ‘Yes, indeed. I'm sorry to tell you, this is a legitimate email.’”

State Rep. MJ Shannon, D-Milford, said Tuesday that the state was attempting to find ways to aid organizations that have lost federal funding, that a coalition has formed to work on “trying to see a fix for the guardrails, so our nonprofits and agencies and local orgs don't have to just be living on these shoestring budgets every single day.”

"It just is so disheartening that every single day, it seems there's a new cut that the federal government is proposing," he said.

Many of the funding cuts are being challenged in court, including those to Connecticut Humanities and the City of New Haven.

"We don't believe that this termination was reasonable or justified in any way," Winter said. "It's our aim to have the funds reinstated by court order. So I'm not ready to give up on the program just yet."

CT Mirror

CT students' visas revoked: As details emerge, fears escalate

BY EMILIA OTTE | APRIL 17, 2025 @ 5:00 AM

Normally at this time of year, students at Connecticut colleges and universities are caught up in the stress of researching final papers and preparing for exams.

But in recent days, thousands of international students — who have come from far and wide to pursue degrees from the state's renowned higher education institutions — have been consumed with fear of losing their permission to study in the United States.

Earlier this week, the University of Connecticut confirmed that 13 students — six undergrads, six graduate students and one person in a post-graduate professional program — had seen their visa status terminated by federal authorities. None had been given a reason why, a spokesperson for UConn said.

The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, which represents 14 independent schools including Yale University, Trinity College, Quinnipiac University and Wesleyan University, said visas had been terminated for more than 40 students at its member institutions.

Initially, when reports began to emerge late last month of student visa cancellations and legal status terminations at schools around the country, the effort appeared to be focused on students who had protested or voiced opinions in favor of Palestine or against the war in Gaza. President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order in January to "combat anti-semitism," and the administration has stated its intent to "quickly cancel the student visas of all Hamas sympathizers on college campuses."

That no longer appears to be the only criteria.

CCIC President Jennifer Widness and lawyers who spoke to The Connecticut Mirror said the majority of the students whose statuses were being terminated were not involved in campus protests. Instead, the terminations appear to be connected to a wide range of interactions with law enforcement — many of which may not be deportable offenses, the lawyers said.

"This has been very painful on the students," Dana Bucin, an immigration attorney and partner at the law firm Harris Beach Murtha, said. In recent days, Bucin said, she's been contacted by about a dozen students, some from inside Connecticut and some from other states, all of whom have had their immigration status revoked.

"I can tell you this: Instead of focusing on finals and dissertations and graduations, now they have to figure out how to protect themselves from sudden arrest," Bucin said.

On the evening of April 8, a graduate student at UConn received a message in his inbox from the university's office of International Student & Scholar Services, informing him that his immigration status had been terminated.

The student, who asked that his name be withheld because of concerns for his immigration status, said he knew it was coming.

The student told the CT Mirror that he had been arrested once. In 2024, he'd had what he described as a "minor argument" with his ex-girlfriend while on the street, he said. It became physical, and a bystander called the police. He was arrested on a family violence charge, but the court referred him to counseling and the case was dismissed within a few months, according to both him and his lawyer. Court records confirm the case was dropped.

The student — who was expecting to graduate in the fall of 2026 — said he knows of other students at UConn whose visas had been revoked. He said he'd formed a group on social media that included hundreds of students nationwide.

"People are feeling panic. And some of them have already got their visas terminated, and some of them have the arrest records, and they are expecting that day to come," he said.

Chris Llinas, a criminal defense and immigration attorney in Connecticut, said a person's visa status can be terminated only if that person is convicted of certain types of crime and sentenced to a year or more of prison time.

"I've been in touch with many of the affected Connecticut students, and none of them have that," Llinas said.

Llinas said he's spoken to students who are in diversionary programs, who have had their cases dismissed after participating in diversionary programs (alternatives to prosecution and incarceration) or court supervision, and one who was found not guilty of a crime.

Bucin said she's spoken to students whose closest brush with a crime was a traffic violation.

"It sounds like it's simply if there's been any interaction with law enforcement whatsoever, even for a small traffic ticket, these people are being targeted for status revocation," she said.

Most international students affiliated with Connecticut primary, secondary and higher education schools in March 2025 had come from India, China, Canada, South Korea and Nigeria. Indian students made up 33.41% of the total, with 5,934 students, followed by 4,468 students from China, 25.16%. Students from Canada were 4.14% of the total, while South Korea and Nigeria made 2.84% and 1.75% of the total, respectively.

Connecticut has a total of 17,760 international students with F and M visas. F visas are for full-time students at academic institutions. M visas are for students in vocational programs.

Bucin described three avenues students could take if they've had their immigration status terminated. First, she said, they can appeal to have their F-1 visa reinstated, which they need to do within five months of termination.

Bucin noted that a student would have to apply to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which is housed under the Department of Homeland Security — the same agency that terminated the student’s status. “It’s as if your judge is your prosecutor,” she said.

Another avenue is to self-deport, since once a person’s status is revoked, they can legally be detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and deported at any time. But Bucin said she didn’t like that option.

“I hold the legal opinion that these F-1 status revocations have been done illegally. So for you to voluntarily give up your tuition payments and your course of study and everything you’ve built here in this country, and just voluntarily depart ... it just goes counter to my sense of justice,” she said.

The third way, she said, is to file a lawsuit, either as an individual or a class action, in federal court.

Earlier this week, the law firm Kuck Baxter filed a class-action lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Northern Georgia against top officials in the Trump administration. The firm is now representing 150 students who have had their immigration status terminated.

On March 25, the American Association of University Professors filed a lawsuit against members of the Trump administration, in which they allege that the policy of deporting international students who have participated in protests supporting Palestine to be a violation of the First and Fifth Amendments.

One of the plaintiffs in the AAUP lawsuit is Aslı Bâli, a Yale Law School professor and president of the nonprofit Middle East Studies Association. The lawsuit claimed Bâli’s work is being disrupted by the policy and that she had received “a cascade of requests for advice and assistance from noncitizen students and colleagues who fear that they will be targeted for deportation based on their speech.”

“Many of these individuals have deleted their social media profiles, removed online references to their involvement in campus groups that have supported Palestinian rights, and taken down previously public writing about Palestine,” the lawsuit read. “One noncitizen colleague is considering declining an offer to chair their department out of concern that they might be limited in what they could say or do in the role without making themselves a target for deportation.”

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., has written to DHS and the State Department seeking more information about the visa revocations, according to a press advisory sent late Wednesday. Blumenthal and New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker are expected to provide more information on the letter at an event Thursday morning in New Haven.

Later in the day Thursday, AAUP is holding protests against the federal government’s actions toward universities at Yale University and UConn’s Storrs campus.

Llinas said attorneys are still trying to decide the best course of action to address the status revocations.

“There are good lawyers who care deeply about this, who are working hard to figure out the best possible way to approach this, to serve the F-1 student visa holders across the state who have been affected by this,” he said.

Police-social work partnership could grow with state funding

BY EMILIA OTTE | APRIL 16, 2025 @ 11:43 AM

Francelis Gonzalez remembers one evening during her internship with the Norwich police department vividly. At the time she was studying social work at Fordham University and accompanying officers on calls, where she'd help to de-escalate situations and offer assistance to individuals and families in crisis.

That evening, from the window of the police car, Gonzalez spotted a man sitting on the Water Street Bridge. Within moments, she and the officer received a call. The man she'd seen on the bridge was threatening to jump.

“My legs went completely numb,” Gonzalez said.

But she got straight to work. While the officer attended to the man, Gonzalez called an emergency psychiatric care team, known as mobile crisis.

She also connected with the man's family as they arrived at her location, answering questions and helping them understand the process. Gonzalez recalled telling the man's grandmother about the dive team waiting in the water and pointing out the ambulance ready to rush him to a medical facility.

Sgt. Nick Rankin, supervisor for the Community Policing Unit in Norwich, said it was the type of situation where the presence of a social worker is particularly useful.

Often, officers on a scene are so focused on the individual in crisis, they're not able to assist family members, Rankin said. “So having the ability to pass them to a social worker that's going to be there and be helpful for them — that's invaluable.”

Rankin also serves as director of police social work integration for the Social Work Law Enforcement Project, where Gonzalez was among the first interns.

The project was founded in August 2020, a few months after the mass protests against the death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police, and immediately after the Connecticut legislature passed a wide-ranging law regulating various aspects of policing. The law included a requirement for local police departments to conduct a study on whether social workers could respond to certain calls either independently of or alongside police officers.

The co-founders of the Social Work Law Enforcement Project — Isabel Logan, then a professor of social work at Eastern Connecticut State University, and Matthew Solak, a lieutenant with the Willimantic Police Department — said after they shared their model with a task force on police accountability and transparency in 2021, other professional schools and police departments began reaching out.

Soon the program, which they had been running for free, was too large to sustain without additional help, Logan said. So they're seeking help from the state.

This year, the legislature is considering a bill that would establish a social work and law enforcement institute at Southern Connecticut State University, where Logan now teaches. The bill sets aside \$2.2 million in both 2026 and 2027 to support the program.

“So the difference is that now it'll turn from just my research to an institute that will be able to provide the resources that we need to be able to deliver the services at a bigger scale,” she said.

Understanding how each other work

Logan had worked as a social worker in the court system for 20 years when she and Solak developed the concept to integrate social workers into police departments.

The model focuses on three separate components of social work: helping individuals who have a run-in with the police through de-escalation or providing services; community engagement; and data collection and advocating for local and state policies. Interns who are placed with the police departments go through a week-long training focused on things like ethics, policy and safety.

One of the most critical components of her program, Logan said, was training police officers and social workers together, so they each understand how the other operates.

Within roughly a year of the program's launch, other local police departments, including Milford and Norwich, had signed on along with five universities in the state. Logan said the organization sends between six and 13 social work interns to police departments in a year, and that 23 people have graduated from their program.

Still, when Logan called up Rankin in Norwich about the program in 2021, he said he was a little leery at first — he liked the idea, but it was a tense time for police officers and he wasn't sure how much the program might interfere with the department's normal operations.

But Rankin recalled, as a young officer, that he'd had the opportunity to ride along with clinicians, and he said he'd learned things like how to recognize certain mental health diagnoses and what questions to ask people struggling with those conditions. He thought it could be useful for Norwich officers to learn similar things.

“[Social workers] only see all the bad things happening to the person. [Police] only see all the bad things the person's doing as a result.”

Capt. Garon DelMonte with the Milford Police Department said he was immediately on board with the idea. Social workers are able to follow up with people in the community, something an officer wouldn't do, he said.

“Law enforcement obviously needed something, especially post-George Floyd. We were struggling to really kind of close the gaps back with our community. So this just seemed like a really ... holistic approach to law enforcement that could better serve the people of our community, because we can be so limited at times,” he said.

Building relationships

Tina Marie James, now a full-time social worker with Milford's Police Department, is still in contact with the first person she got a call about as an intern. The person was homeless and struggling with alcoholism. James went to the encampment where he was living.

“I met with him and, and I said to him ... ‘If I could wave my magical wand’ — we say that often, as social workers — ‘what could I possibly provide you support with?’” Working together with the client, James said she was able to help him find housing, and he went on to mend his relationship with his daughter.

James said for people facing overlapping challenges like homelessness, substance abuse and mental health issues, it can be triggering to come face-to-face with a police officer. “They see a police officer, [and] what’s coming into their mind — They’re going to go to jail, they’re going to be arrested, they’re not going to be treated well,” James said.

“Developing the relationships with the officers and going out and having the conversation, letting them know that we are here together as a unit — not necessarily because they’re here to arrest you. They’re here for your safety, they’re here for my safety. And it has helped a lot,” she said.

Milford Capt. DelMonte said one of the signs that the social work program was having a positive effect was a decrease in calls from people he called “frequent callers” — individuals who have regular psychological episodes that end in a call to the police. DelMonte said that while police might get the person to the hospital, they wouldn’t normally follow up beyond that.

A social worker, on the other hand, can. “We’ve had members in this community that have called us 50, 60, a hundred times for help, that once the social workers became ingrained with those people, they haven’t called us since,” he said.

Both the police officers and the social workers said they felt social workers acted as a bridge to improve trust within their communities.

Rankin said if lawmakers approve the funding and establish the institute at SCSU, the program would be able to standardize the training and requirements for a field that is growing.

“It’s a developing field, so you need to establish best practices.,” Rankin said. “There needs to be somebody to look to and go, ‘Who’s going to provide the training? Who’s going to do the research? Who’s going to find out what works best and why?’ And then disseminate that information.”

The proposal has been supported by both Democrats and Republicans in the legislature.

Rep. Greg Howard, R-Stonington, who is a police officer, noted during a press conference in March that police were having to deal with more and more calls regarding mental illness, which required someone who could follow-up with those people.

Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, D-West Hartford, a social worker, called the combination of social work and law enforcement “more important now than ever.”

The bill has passed out of the legislature’s Public Safety Committee and is waiting to be heard in the House of Representatives.

For Gonzalez, who now works for the Department of Veterans Affairs, one of the most salient lessons she said she learned during her internship was that police work and social work aren’t all that different. The best thing police officers and social workers can do is show the community that they work as a unit, she said.

“Social workers are everywhere. They’re in hospitals, they’re in the military, they’re everywhere. So why can’t we be here? I learned that we can be here ... and work together,” she said.

CT refuses to comply with Trump order to end DEI in schools

BY JESSIKA HARKAY AND LISA HAGEN | APRIL 16, 2025 @ 2:30 PM

Connecticut will not comply with demands to end diversity, equity and inclusion practices in its K-12 schools, a decision that will likely put the state in a standoff with the Trump administration, which has threatened to pull federal funding over the issue.

States were issued letters earlier this month from the U.S. Department of Education, calling on officials to “certify their compliance with their anti-discrimination obligations in order to continue receiving federal financial assistance.” Gov. Ned Lamont and Connecticut Education Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker announced Wednesday that the state responded to the request and will not sign it.

In the letter dated April 15, Russell-Tucker wrote to the federal Education Department that Connecticut and state officials are already in compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

“We will continue to build on the collective efforts of our educators, families, and school communities to create learning environments where every student is valued and supported,” Russell-Tucker said in a statement. “We remain focused on the work happening in our schools every day and are staunchly committed to ensuring that all our 508,402 students have access to a universe of opportunities.”

Lamont echoed that sentiment on Wednesday.

“In Connecticut, we’re proud to support the incredible diversity of our schools and work tirelessly to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has access to a quality education and the best opportunity at the starting line in life,” Lamont said in a statement. “From our educators, who are mentoring and inspiring the next generation of young people, to our curriculum, our commitment to education is what has made our schools nationally recognized, and we plan to continue doing what makes our students, teachers, and schools successful.”

“It is thoroughly disappointing that Connecticut Democrats so blatantly refuse to comply with federal law,” said Connecticut Republican Party Chairman Ben Proto in a statement released late Wednesday. “This political decision to continue DEI policies not only harms the students in our schools but also risks Title I funding, which primarily helps support districts with higher percentages of low-income families.”

Hundreds of millions of dollars that Connecticut receives from the federal government in K-12 education assistance could be at risk.

Specifically, the April 3 letter from the U.S. Department of Education threatened to pull back Title I funding, which provides support to school districts with high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds.

Connecticut received about \$553 million in federal funding for education during the 2023-2024 school year, according to School and State Finance Project. About half of that funding goes toward Title I and special education through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, also known as IDEA.

While education is mostly controlled at the state and local level, certain municipalities would feel the strain of federal changes or cuts more than others. Connecticut’s biggest cities rely much more heavily on those dollars. For Waterbury, 22% of its school funding comes from the federal government, with much of it from Title I.

Outside Betances Elementary School in Hartford on Wednesday afternoon, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., challenged the federal policies, calling them “just plain dumb and cruel.”

“This so-called guidance that threatens a loss of funding saying, ‘We’re gonna eliminate all of the hundreds of millions of dollars that Connecticut received in funding if it continues social-emotional learning,’ when, in fact, these kinds of services help stop violence, promote academic success and make students feel better about going to school,” Blumenthal said.

“This kind of policy ought to be rescinded as quickly as possible so students can be taught the basic kinds of tools they need to build friendships and avoid conflict and stop violence. It’s really pretty simple, but the Trump administration seems on a DEI bender toward destroying American education, and this particular aspect of it is so important, not just emotionally, but also academically,” Blumenthal continued.

In recent years, the Connecticut legislature has worked to diversify its teaching workforce, as several studies have shown that having educators in classrooms who look like their students can improve academic performance.

In 2023, the state legislature passed the Aspiring Educators Diversity Scholarship Program, which has begun to provide up to \$10,000 annually to graduates from Alliance Districts to go into the teaching profession.

Legislation proposed this year that passed out of the state’s Education Committee would expand the scholarship beyond the state’s 33 Alliance Districts — the lowest-performing schools — to any Connecticut high school graduate, with hopes the scholarship could also diversify the workforce by bringing more men into classrooms, Committee Co-Chair Doug McCrory, D-Hartford, said at a committee meeting on March 24.

Blumenthal fears these kinds of initiatives are at risk as well.

“This policy of denigrating diversity is just plain dumb. It’s dumb and cruel because we want students to look at their teachers and see themselves,” Blumenthal said. “If they’re kids of color, if they’re kids of different religions and backgrounds, we want teachers to reflect their classrooms, and so saying, ‘Oh, we don’t want diversity in teachers’ is just really stupid. I hate to use that word. I always told my children never to call someone stupid, but this is stupid.”

Last week, Blumenthal signed a letter from a dozen lawmakers across the country that urged the federal Department of Education to “immediately rescind” correspondence sent to state education leaders in February that alleged that public education has “toxically indoctrinated students with the false premise that the United States is built upon ‘systemic and structural racism’ and advanced discriminatory policies and practices.”

In document released by the federal Department of Education titled “Frequently Asked Questions About Racial Preferences and Stereotypes Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act”, the department hinted that diversity, equity and inclusion efforts may be unlawful.

“Many schools have advanced racially discriminatory policies and practices under the banner of ‘DEI’ initiatives. Other schools have sought to veil racially discriminatory policies with terms like ‘social-emotional learning’ or ‘culturally responsive’ teaching,” the document states.

“But whether an initiative constitutes unlawful discrimination does not turn solely on whether it is labeled ‘DEI’ or uses terminology such as ‘diversity,’ ‘equity,’ or ‘inclusion.’ OCR’s assessment of school policies and programs depends on the facts and circumstances of each case,” the document continues. “Schools may not operate policies or programs under any name that intentionally treat

students differently based on race, engage in racial stereotyping, or create hostile environments for students of particular races.”

Lawmakers across the country have opposed the Education Department’s interpretations. In an April 9 letter to Education Secretary Linda McMahon and Craig Trainor, the acting assistant for the Civil Rights Department of Education, Blumenthal and about a dozen other lawmakers — including Cory Booker, D-N.J., Suzanne Bonamici, D-Mich., and Summer Lee, D-Pa., said the guidance from the federal government has begun to “mischaracterize federal civil rights laws, overturn state and local control laws and practices, invade local curricula decisions, and threaten the rescission of critical federal funding.”

The letter also addressed social-emotional learning.

“The FAQ document spreads misinformation by falsely suggesting, without evidence, that social and emotional learning (SEL) and culturally responsive teaching are discriminatory,” the lawmakers’ letter states. “Although SEL can take place anywhere, SEL in schools often refers to educational practices, frameworks, and programs that create supportive environments and opportunities for students to learn and practice social and emotional skills.”

CT News Junkie

Behavioral Health Bill For Connecticut Police Officers Advances Unanimously

BY VIKTORIA SUNDQVIST | APRIL 16, 2025, 4:45 AM

The Public Safety and Security Committee on Tuesday unanimously advanced a bill that makes changes to a prior law requiring periodic behavioral health assessments for police officers.

Currently officers must submit to a mental health screening at least once every five years as a condition of continued employment.

A substitute for H.B. No. 7069 would allow each police officer or their union to choose a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker to complete the behavioral health assessment, instead of being mandated to use a provider chosen by their department. The bill would also expand the confidentiality requirements for such an assessment.

“The police officers of this state do a difficult job,” said state Rep. Greg Howard, R-Stonington. “I think it’s important that our police officers – when they seek any medical attention, but specifically psychological attention from their own providers – that they have confidentiality in that specific encounter.”

State Rep. Liz Linehan, D-Cheshire, questioned why the language of the substitute bill does not spell out the qualifications needed for the mental health professionals, and state Rep. Jill Barry, D-Glastonbury, explained that those requirements are already spelled out in the current policy.

“We’re just adding the confidentiality part,” Barry said.

State Sen. Herron Gaston, D-Bridgeport, questioned whether anything from the psychological evaluations could be reported to a supervisor; for example, if there were a risk to the public or the officer.

“There needs to be some level of guardrails there in a case where there’s an acute situation,” Gaston said.

Howard noted that fitness for duty is reported to a supervisor and if someone were to say they wanted to hurt themselves or others, a mental health provider would already be required to report that.

The Connecticut Police Chiefs Association submitted testimony opposing part of the bill due to language concerns and said it is critical that police chiefs maintain the right to select the providers who perform mental health evaluations on their officers.

“The stress that accompanies the duties of police officers is unique, as officers are repeatedly exposed to tragic events and threats to their safety,” the association stated in submitted testimony. “Department vetted providers who have worked with our agencies are likely to have familiarity with our officers.”

The bill would prohibit a provider from accessing or requesting the police officer’s medical records through an electronic health record system as part of the assessment and would prevent them from disclosing the results of the assessment to anyone other than the officer and the law enforcement unit’s administrative head.

The Council 4 union of American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees and the Hartford Police Union both submitted testimony in strong support of the bill.

“This bill is needed to shield police officers from having their health records released unnecessarily,” AFSCME wrote in its submitted testimony. “This bill would provide protection to all police officers so that their health details, not dealing with mental health, are not brought up or exposed during the mental health assessment.”

CT Lawmaker, Advocates Push ‘Just Cause’ Tenant Protections, Decriminalization of Homelessness at Hamden Forum

BY KARLA CIAGLO | APRIL 17, 2025, 5:00 AM

HAMDEN, CT – As Connecticut’s housing crisis deepens, lawmakers, advocates and residents gathered in Hamden this week for a public forum calling for legislative action to strengthen tenant protections and support people experiencing homelessness.

The event, Housing as a Human Right, was hosted by state Rep. Laurie Sweet, D-Hamden, and Hamden Councilwoman Sarah Gallagher.

The discussion centered around two key bills before the General Assembly: HB 6889, which would implement “Just Cause” eviction protections, and HB 7033, aimed at decriminalizing basic life-sustaining activities—such as sitting or sleeping in public—when individuals have no other place to go.

Sweet, who serves as vice chair of the recently formed Legislative Caucus to End Homelessness, said Hamden’s “Housing as a Human Right” ordinance, which she called aspirational, is an important framework for the near future, especially considering the rising rates of homelessness in Connecticut.

“We all know that right now, in our country, housing is not a human right—but we want it to be,” Sweet said. “What that meant for us as a council is really tying that thread of what can we do at the town level to move in that direction.”

Under HB 6889, landlords would be required to provide a valid reason—such as nonpayment, lease violations, or reclaiming a unit for personal use—before terminating a lease. Currently, no-cause evictions allow landlords to non-renew leases without explanation, a practice that housing advocates say is often used to retaliate against tenants who report unsafe conditions or request repairs.

“Tenants speak up about mold or safety issues—and suddenly they’re getting notices to vacate,” said Alex Kolokotronis, director of the Naugatuck Valley Project and a longtime housing organizer. “Just Cause would stop that.”

Kolokotronis said rising rents are being driven by institutional investors buying up entire neighborhoods, disrupting housing stability for renters and homeowners alike.

“The broader our protections, the more we can stabilize communities—and that benefits everyone,” he said.

The second proposal, HB 6739, would prohibit municipalities from arresting or ticketing people for sleeping, sitting or lying down in public spaces when no shelter options are available.

“There will not be a penalty for engaging in basic life-sustaining activities,” Gallagher said. “This bill doesn’t legalize tent cities—it just says people shouldn’t be arrested for existing outside when there are no alternatives.”

Instead of issuing fines that unhoused individuals cannot afford, the legislation encourages municipalities to connect people to outreach workers and support services.

“What this legislation is intended to do is offer a different response,” said Katie Rose, a housing advocate with lived experience. “It’s an agreement among constituents that when someone is in need, the response should be compassionate and move them toward what they need—not penalize them for surviving.”

Rose also noted that the approach builds on existing efforts. “The city has already been putting resources toward meeting that response,” she said.

Rose said the measure is not only humane but fiscally sound.

“Hospitalization costs \$3,300 a day. Incarceration is \$282. Housing and case management is \$62 a day,” Rose said. “We would rather keep people out of the criminal justice system and get them on their feet.”

The forum highlighted sobering data from Hamden and beyond. In the Greater New Haven area—including Hamden—more than 650 people are currently unhoused. Statewide, nearly 3,000 residents experience homelessness on any given night. A 2024 count revealed a 15% year-over-year increase. In 2023, Rose detailed how 12 people died from cold exposure, and one in four people seeking shelter were turned away.

“We are absolutely in a crisis,” Gallagher said.

“The reason we’ve seen rising homelessness—and the reason we need tenant protections—is because housing has become so commodified,” Rose said. “It’s simply not profitable to build for people who need supportive services or rely on housing assistance. We treat housing like a commodity.”

Panelists pointed to the steep financial barriers that make affordable housing development difficult, particularly for nonprofits.

Gallagher also stressed the growing burden on renters and homeowners alike.

“Forty-seven percent of renters are cost-burdened, and about 32% of homeowners are, too,” she said. “That means they’re paying more than 30% of their income toward housing.”

Connecticut is facing a shortage of more than 85,000 affordable rental units. To afford a modest two-bedroom apartment, a renter must earn \$27.37 per hour, far above the state’s current minimum wage of \$15.69. In Hamden, median rent exceeds \$1,300, and eviction filings have steadily increased, particularly in communities of color.

“We know what works,” Kolokotronis said, pointing to the success of pandemic-era rental assistance programs. “We just need the will to keep going.”

State Officials Call For Trump Administration To Disburse Title X Funds for Planned Parenthood

BY JAMIL RAGLAND | APRIL 16, 2025, 3:59 PM

HARTFORD, CT – Elected officials and pro-choice advocates are demanding that the Trump administration release the Title X funds it is withholding, while opponents of Planned Parenthood have questioned whether the organization is truly facing financial hardships.

“Over 41,000 residents in our state rely on Title X federal funds at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, and they rely on those funds to access routine, basic, preventative, reproductive, and other kinds of health care,” Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz said, flanked by advocates and members of the State House of Representatives Reproductive Rights Caucus.

“This is a major public health concern. We know that the quicker patients are diagnosed, whether with an infection or with cancer, the quicker they get treated. That results in a higher treatment success rate and mitigates outbreaks of communicable diseases,” Bysiewicz noted.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) stands to lose \$1.89 million in federal funding after it received notice that the Trump administration is withholding the funds, effective March 31, pending a “compliance review” of the organization.

Title X is a federal program that provides funding for family planning and preventative health services. By law, Title X funds cannot be used to provide abortions.

Gretchen Raffa, chief policy and advocacy officer for PPSNE, called the Trump administration’s actions “shameful, but not surprising.”

“The Trump administration and Elon Musk don’t care about the people these cuts are going to harm and the devastation that this is going to cause,” she said. “They are pushing their dangerous political agenda using patients as political pawns to defund Planned Parenthood, which will only worsen the public health crisis that they’ve created. This is not just an attack on Planned Parenthood; it’s an attack on health, dignity, and freedom of the more than 40,000 Planned Parenthood of Southern New England patients that rely on the Title X program every year to access this essential preventative care.”

Elected officials also took the opportunity to call on the governor and legislature to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates, especially for organizations providing family planning services.

“When you look at the Medicaid rates that we provide for family planning to Planned Parenthood, we haven’t increased the rate for an IUD insertion, which is a best-practice, long-acting birth control method,” said Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, D-West Hartford, co-chair of the Reproductive Rights Caucus. “We pay about \$150 less per visit than our surrounding states. You look at a 20-minute appointment and we are woefully behind. You look at a pregnancy test, we are woefully behind. And so we need to increase those Medicaid rates to ensure that Planned Parenthood can continue to operate strongly in the state of Connecticut and be the trusted provider that they are and we want them to be.”

Gilchrest said that she thinks there’s a good chance that increased Medicaid reimbursements will make it out of the General Assembly this session.

Gilchrest also stated that while budget negotiations are ongoing, she and her legislative partners are committed to continuing their support for Planned Parenthood, even if federal funding continues to be withheld. The legislature already approved an additional \$800,000 for PPSNE in a spending bill signed by Gov. Ned Lamont in March.

However, there are some who feel that Planned Parenthood already has the resources it needs to carry out its mission. Chris Healy, executive director of the Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference, called the decision of elected officials in the state to use taxpayer money to support Planned Parenthood “disappointing.”

“While other nonprofit agencies that provide food, mental health services, and services to the homeless beg the state for additional funding, taxpayer money just keeps flowing into PPSNE. Hopefully the fake claim that PPSNE will have to cut services, due to a reduction in Title X funds, will not result in another financial win for PPSNE and a fiscal and moral loss for Connecticut taxpayers,” Healy said.

Peter Wolfgang, president of the Family Institute of Connecticut Action, said that he was thankful to President Trump for being sane and not funneling money to Planned Parenthood.

“I think it’s outrageous that Planned Parenthood has gotten an extra \$6.3 million of state taxpayer funding when they’re already sitting on a \$47 million endowment,” he said, referencing numbers that he said his organization found in tax documents. “It feels a little bit like a money-laundering operation. The politicians vote for more state taxpayer funds to Planned Parenthood, who then in turn elect the politicians who are funneling money to them. And the whole thing stinks and I hope the state becomes more aware of it.”

Lamont Unveils Online Site For Reporting Impact of Federal Actions

BY STAFF REPORT | APRIL 16, 2025, 12:33 PM

HARTFORD, CT — Connecticut municipalities, businesses and nonprofits that have been affected by recent actions by the federal government are being encouraged to report the impact to the state through an online reporting tool at ct.gov/fedimpact.

The information will be compiled into a central database to provide policymakers with a better understanding of how the directives are affecting various groups, regions and economic sectors, according to Gov. Ned Lamont’s office.

“State government has an important responsibility in responding to any crisis that is happening within our borders, and this reporting tool is intended to shed a light on how these changes from the federal government are affecting people who live, work, and learn in Connecticut,” Lamont said. “Submitting this data is purely voluntary, but I think everyone understands the importance of sharing this information so that we can better understand what exactly is happening and formulate a response on the state and local levels.”

Users will need to create a login and then will be prompted with a series of questions to report any impacts they may be experiencing. Examples of items that are encouraged to be reported include pauses, cancellations, and reductions in federal funding, reductions in employment, and impacts from tariffs. The information collected will be shared with the relevant state agencies, which will utilize this data to help inform the state’s response as these directives from the federal government continue to be made.

“Federal policies are shifting every day, and we are constantly assessing what this means for our state,” Comptroller Sean Scanlon said. “We’re asking the public to use this new reporting tool to ensure we have the most accurate and up-to-date information on the impact funding cuts and freezes are having on Connecticut.”

Treasurer Erick Russell said the consequences and impact of slashed federal funding are being felt every day,

“The reporting system unveiled today not only shines a light on the true scope of the damage being done to our economy and our people, but it provides real-time information that allows us to push back, to demand accountability, and to fight for the resources we all deserve,” Russell said.

Any information submitted through this reporting tool should be considered public information and may be released by the state to interested parties, state officials said. The reports are only for information purposes and the state makes no commitment to taking action in response to any situation.

News 12 CT

CT lawmakers claim they can cut your power bill by 40%. Will it work?

BY JOHN CRAVEN | APR 16, 2025, 4:44 PM

Democrats and Republicans can’t agree on much these days. But they agree that Connecticut’s electric rates are too high.

Now, a bipartisan coalition claims they can cut customers’ bills up to 40%.

But critics – including Gov. Ned Lamont –worry that the proposal could backfire.

“CHARGING TOO MUCH”

Connecticut has the third highest electric bills in the nation.

“They’re charging too much,” said Elaine Levy, of Norwalk. “I don’t know what they charge per kilowatt. I have no idea.”

The reasons are long and complicated. But at the state Capitol, lawmakers from both parties are scrambling to find immediate relief before the legislative session ends in June.

“Fix the electric bill crisis,” said state Rep. Joe Polletta (R-Watertown). “Single parents trying to raise a family cannot afford these bills every single month – three, four, five hundred dollars. Something needs to change.”

UP TO 40% SAVINGS?

On Wednesday, a bipartisan group of lawmakers proposed sweeping changes that could immediately lower power bills by 20%, and eventually up to 40%.

The bill removes Public Benefits Charge from bills for three years and shifts the cost to state bonding. The fee pays for energy efficiency and a variety of other programs.

“[Customers say] ‘I don’t want to pay this Public Benefits Charge. That’s not fair,’” Jess Cain, Eversource’s Vice President for Customer Operations and Assistance Programs, told lawmakers. “And they’re pissed that they’re paying for customers’ unpaid bills.”

Supporters estimate that the proposal could save customers \$500 a year. But to pay for it, Connecticut would have to borrow \$800 million a year in new “green bonds.”

“It spreads those costs over many years,” said state Sen. John Fonfara (D-Hartford). “We did that with respect to teacher retirement; we did that with respect to state retirement.”

Lawmakers also want to change the way Connecticut buys wholesale electricity.

Right now, it’s similar to home heating oil. Utilities lock in a price every six months, which is subject to state regulatory approval. But under the new proposal, a new quasi-public Connecticut Electricity Procurement Authority (CEPA) could buy electricity whenever it's cheap.

“It’s like you go to the store and buy peaches for three dollars a pound in the middle of winter,” Fonfara said. “You don’t, but that's what we’re doing.”

LOTS OF SKEPTICISM

Critics are worried that CEPA would have no oversight. And they’re skeptical about whether it could actually lower bills.

“I spent 10 years trading commodity markets. It's very, very difficult to do profitably,” said state Sen. Ryan Fazio (R-Greenwich). “And the few people in the entire world who could it do very profitably and beat the markets – buy things cheaper than regular people can on the competitive marketplace – are extraordinarily rich.”

Lamont is also wary.

“Few examples exist, if at all, of states that have successfully introduced separate procurement authorities, let alone ones that operate outside of mechanisms designed to protect ratepayers and that can be done without saddling ratepayers with hundreds of millions of dollars more in expenses,” Lamont spokesman Rob Blanchard said. “Rather than putting annual expenses on our ‘credit card’ or crowding out bonding for municipal parks, roads, and school construction with items in the public benefits charge, as proposed, the Governor would prefer we explore ways to reduce PB charges that may be outdated or unnecessary.”

Environmentalists told lawmakers that removing the Public Benefits Charge could actually cost customers more money.

“It does contain the very programs in it that save people money,” said Lori Brown with the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters. “The energy efficiency, clean energy type programs.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

Lawmakers held a public hearing on SB1560 on Wednesday. Democrats are also crafting SB4, another proposal to lower energy costs, but that bill contains few details yet.

The General Assembly sessions ends on June 4.

State lawmakers discuss future of Medicaid in Connecticut

BY MARK SUDOL | APR 16, 2025, 6:43 AM

The future of Medicaid has been a hot topic in Connecticut, and state lawmakers held roundtable Wednesday on its future.

More than 900,000 people in Connecticut rely on Medicaid. State leaders gathered at the Connecticut Institute for Communities in Danbury to hear from leaders of state agencies about how cuts to Medicaid are going to hurt them.

State Comptroller Sean Scanlon, Rep. Jahana Hayes and Danbury Mayor Roberto Alves joined state legislators, providers and advocates to assess the impacts of cuts and explored solutions to safeguard Medicaid coverage.

One in five Americans are on Medicaid. With the passage of federal legislation necessitating \$880 billion in budget cuts, potential Medicaid cuts threaten to disrupt health care access for millions across the country.

"Children in this district is a big concern for me because over 50% of children get all of their health care through Husky care. And if we're not doing preventative treatments, I mean behavioral health, mental health, addiction and harm reduction services are primarily reimbursed through Medicaid," says Hayes.

"The state of Connecticut got \$6 billion of funding from Medicaid from the federal government in the last fiscal year, and this is money that we use help insure that 1 million of the most vulnerable people in our society, seniors in nursing homes, young kids, disabled individuals, get the health care they need and deserve," said Scanlon.

Some state health organizations say the money they usually receive on Monday from the federal portal has not been received. State Sen. Julie Kushner says she hopes Connecticut's wealth might be able to keep some of these programs going.

WTNH

Lawmakers propose bill that would reduce cost of electricity in Connecticut

BY MIKE CERULLI | APR 16, 2025 03:51 PM EDT

HARTFORD, Conn. (WTNH) — Promising an immediate 20% reduction of the average electricity bill, State Sen. John Fonfara (D) unveiled a sweeping piece of legislation on Wednesday that would reorient the state’s system of energy purchasing and remove the controversial public benefit charge from ratepayers’ bills.

Fonfara said the immediate savings would be realized with the removal of the public benefits charge off of ratepayers' bills and the introduction of a new form of state borrowing, dubbed "green bonds," to finance the programs currently funded by the charge.

CT's top utility regulator clears key vote in legislature

"This 20% reduction is accomplished by the removal of the public benefits charge from the electric bill and establishing the green bond to support each of the initiatives over three years," Fonfara said at a press conference held on Wednesday morning in advance of public hearing on the bill.

The public benefits charge was the focus of ratepayer anger last summer, when unusually high temperatures coincided with a spike in the charge caused primarily by costs associated with a long-term deal the state entered into to purchase energy from the Millstone Nuclear Power Station in Waterford.

Republicans in the legislature have long advocated for the public benefits charge to be taken off of ratepayers' bills. They've argued that some of the programs funded by the charge — including long-term agreements to purchase renewable energy — place an unnecessary burden on ratepayers in a state where structural market forces already produce higher energy costs relative to the rest of the country.

State Rep. Vincent Candelora, the Republican leader in the state House, stood alongside Fonfara at Wednesday's press conference. One of Candelora's top deputies, State Rep. David Rutigliano, and several other key members of the House Republican caucus also attended the bipartisan press conference.

"Let's reduce the public benefits charge," State Rep. Joe Polletta, a Republican from Watertown, said. "There's no reason why people should be paying that every single month and sacrificing groceries, sacrificing food for family, sacrificing leisure."

Representatives of Eversource, the state's largest utility, also offered favorable words on the bill — saying that the removal of the public benefits charge from electricity bills could yield as much as \$55 in monthly savings for the average resident.

The second leg of savings outlined by Fonfara would be provided by a new, quasi-governmental entity tasked with purchasing energy for the state and serving as a strategic "architect" for other long-term energy goals. Fonfara said the current purchasing process for the energy used by the vast majority of residential customers is inefficient because it relies on a series of pre-scheduled bids that are not reactive to market conditions.

"It's like buying stocks three times a year irrespective of whether the market's up or down," Fonfara said. "You wouldn't do it."

Instead, the bill Fonfara is pushing would task the new entity with seeking out deals on the open market that are more favorable than the ones produced by the current purchasing scheme.

Can state lawmakers reduce high electric rates?

The proposed legislation also includes a host of other changes, including the adoption of measures intended to incentivize energy conservation during times of peak electricity usage.

While several high-profile Republicans joined Fonfara on Wednesday to speak favorably about the legislation, a bipartisan duo of influential legislators also expressed some doubts that the bill could deliver on the promise to lower rates.

State Sen. Ryan Fazio, the ranking Republican on the legislature’s Energy and Technology Committee, said there were elements of the bill he supports, but he wasn’t sure that the state would actually be able to achieve lower costs by altering its energy purchasing strategy in pursuit of better deals.

“I spent a decade of my career trading commodities and it is an extremely difficult thing to beat the market,” Fazio said.

State Sen. Norm Needleman, the Democratic co-chair of the Energy and Technology Committee, echoed his counterpart across the aisle, saying the purchasing proposal has a “casino feel.”

“I don’t necessarily think it’s gonna work out quite the way people are proposing it,” Needleman added.

As he works to answer questions about the effectiveness of the proposed energy bill, Fonfara will also have to contend with political conflicts emanating from both sides of the aisle in the State Senate.

On Tuesday, Republicans in the State Senate, including Fazio, walked out of the senate chambers in protest of a vote to re-confirm the state’s top utility regulator, Marissa Gillett, to another term on the job leading the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA).

The focus of the Republican protest was on a deal struck by the governor’s office to ensure Gillett’s reconfirmation — a deal that News 8 is told will result in Fonfara’s appointment to a six-figure job on PURA’s board. State Sen. Steve Harding, the Republican State Senate leader, has repeatedly alleged corruption and called for official investigations of what Gov. Ned Lamont has described as an “arrangement” to secure the Gillett vote.

In February, Fonfara denied to News 8 that he ever conditioned his initial ‘yes’ vote on Gillett for an offer of a job. On Tuesday, Fonfara recused himself from the final vote on Gillett.

Gillett, Arconti approved by House to serve as PURA commissioners
Within his own caucus in the State Senate, long-simmering tensions between Fonfara and Needleman spilled into public view during the public hearing for the bill.

In a highly unusual exchange, Needleman objected to the fact that the bill was introduced in the committee co-chaired by Fonfara rather than the committee he chairs which deals primarily with energy-related issues. Fonfara co-chairs the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee — a committee primarily associated with tax-writing but also responsible for the state’s bonding policies.

“I hope this bill comes to our committee, where it belongs,” Needleman said while Fonfara sat several seats to his right. “This is not the way to solve anything nor is it procedurally right and the senator to my right knows that.”

The bill will have to be voted on favorably by the Finance Committee, and possibly others if Needleman has his way, before it can be considered by both chambers of the legislature.

WHSU Public Radio

CT lawmakers, advocates ask federal government to restore Planned Parenthood funding

BY MOLLY INGRAM | APRIL 16, 2025 AT 2:05 PM EDT

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Fourteen Planned Parenthood sites in Connecticut are affected by a temporary freeze on \$1.8 million in federal funding.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, which also has one location in Rhode Island, found out about the pause on March 31.

The funding comes from Title X, which funds sexual and reproductive health care for low-income people. It doesn't fund abortions.

Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz (D) spoke with advocates at the Capitol on Wednesday. She said Connecticut is one of 23 states impacted.

“Withholding these funds is really an attempt to cut off access to birth control, cancer screenings, STI and STD testing and reproductive health care in general,” Bysiewicz said. “This is a major public health concern.”

HHS told TIME they're pausing the funding while they review possible violations of civil rights laws and an executive order from President Trump that bars undocumented immigrants from getting taxpayer-funded benefits.

Each of the organizations with grants on hold received a letter explaining the reason for the pause, according to an HHS spokesperson. The letter requested documentation within 10 days to assess compliance with grant terms and conditions.

WSHU asked HHS how long the review would take but did not receive an answer.

Gretchen Raffa, PPSNE's chief policy and advocacy officer, said the pause would hurt the 41,000 people in Connecticut who rely on Title X funding at her organization.

“This decision will have devastating consequences, especially for Black and Latino communities, women, people living in rural areas, and those living with low incomes, the very communities that already face the highest barriers to care,” Raffa said. “This move will only widen those disparities and make it harder, if not impossible, for many people to get the health care they need and they deserve.”

Last month, Connecticut lawmakers allocated \$800,000 to Planned Parenthood, citing federal funding uncertainty.

Bysiewicz said the legislature would continue to assess the situation to determine if further state funding is needed.