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Hartford Courant

A proposed charter school in this CT city is the only one left off the state budget. Many are asking why.

By Jessika Harkay

Several years ago, Barbara Luna Merchan, who's now 13, learned about [a charter school that would open in Danbury](#). She begged her mom to enroll her when she was entering middle school.

She thought it would be an opportunity to finally feel safe at school away from bullying. She thought a smaller class size would change feeling invisible in the classroom. She thought a charter school would be a better space to keep learning English.

But Barbara Luna hasn't had the chance to find out if the charter school would have been a better fit for her. Five years after it was approved by state officials, the Danbury charter school has yet to open.

"I want to try a different school that's going to be better than the one I am at," Barbara Luna told the CT Mirror. "I want to go [to a new school] that is the opposite of the one I go to now."

The [Danbury charter school](#) has been caught in the middle of emotionally charged debates about whether it's a good option for struggling students, particularly students of color, who make up about 94% of the children who attend charter schools in Connecticut and may need a more individualized approach to learning.

Weeks ago, a charter school in Middletown approved by the [state Board of Education](#) garnered hours of emotional debate among state board and community members about whether it would be a better option for students who said they've struggled with racial tensions at public schools.

Across the United States, charter school enrollment has more than doubled between 2009 and 2019, especially in states like California, Texas, Florida, Arizona and Michigan — five states that had the most charter schools in the country between 2020 and 2021. In Detroit, between 1995 and 2015, over 100 charter schools opened despite nearly 200 traditional public schools shutting down, according to reporting by VICE News.

Charter school advocates argue that the schools offer parents and students a choice and have unique characteristics that allow them to run independently from their home districts, providing more room for innovation in their curriculum and teaching styles.

Opponents counter that charter schools, in a sense, privatize public education as they strip away investments into local districts and offer only a select number of students the opportunity to potentially thrive in another school while others, who may be stuck on a wait list, are left without resources.

In Danbury there is an intensity in the debate between the charter school's opponents and supporters, as local organizations, teacher unions, state legislators and parents remain deadlocked over the best options for educating their children. The lack of compromise has contributed to the delay in the school's opening since its approval over five years ago.

Most recently, of four approved charter schools in Connecticut, Danbury's was the only one left out of the state budget endorsed by the Appropriations Committee this session, although a final budget is still in negotiations.

In Connecticut, which is home to 21 charter schools, no charter school has opened since 2015 after legislation changed the way the schools are approved — adding a larger role for legislators in the process. Connecticut is the only state in the country that requires legislative approval in the creation of charter schools, according to the [National Alliance for Public Charter Schools](#).

But a new bill that passed out of two legislative committees this session might give future charter schools a chance to avoid being stuck in the same situation by removing the extra step in the approval process.

The Merchans are one of what may be thousands of families across the state that have asked for school choice after struggling with language barriers, lack of support or an inability to succeed in the traditional public school system.

The family's transition to the United States from Ecuador five years ago wasn't easy.

They first settled in New York City, but moved to Danbury after learning about its diversity and wealthy neighboring towns. Barbara Luna's mother, Evelyn, was also excited that her eldest daughter would be enrolled in what she heard was one of the country's best education systems. She thought it would set her up for success to chase her dream of being a pediatrician one day.

"But the reality was something else," said Merchan, who only speaks Spanish. Her expectations changed the first day she dropped her daughter off at school and learned her new classroom had what she estimated to be 30 to 35 children.

"I asked myself 'How did they give this one teacher all of these students?'" Merchan said. "I started to realize the reality was different than my expectations and the things I had heard. It was hard for me to swallow."

For months, Barbara Luna came home from school saying she felt invisible, like the teacher didn't even know she was in the class.

"She told me 'Mom, the teacher only focuses on the students who know English,'" Merchan said. "She was so sad. She didn't even want to go to school anymore, but I told her no, that she had to go and she had to learn, but she felt they discriminated against her because she couldn't speak English."

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the feelings of isolation. Barbara Luna would sit at her computer and cry every day after Broadview Middle School transitioned to remote learning in early 2020.

Her normal seven-hour school day stretched several hours longer as she had to translate her recorded video lectures line-by-line to understand her lessons and homework.

"My teacher wasn't really my teacher," Barbara Luna said. "My teacher was Google Translate."

Merchan would try to help her daughter with her schoolwork, then excuse herself to go to the bathroom and cry.

"I'd be cooking and I'd hear, 'Mommy, I don't understand this,' and I felt hopeless because I don't know English," Merchan said. "I had the chance to learn it in my country, but I never took it seriously because I didn't think I would need it. I never thought I would move to the United States. So I (would tell) my daughter she needs to do this. She needs to learn. I would see her eyes red [from crying] and it would make me frustrated that I couldn't help her."

For months, the family persevered. Barbara Luna developed her English skills, but her mother says it was because of her daughter's efforts, not through school support.

When classes returned to in-person learning, new challenges arose.

Barbara Luna says she goes to school in fear most days.

"If you go into the bathroom, you see the girls smoking. You can't go to the bathroom or relax or nothing like that. In the hallways, every time, you see people fight," Barbara Luna said. "In the boys bathroom, they fight. It's just a little weird because every time you go to school, you see things like that, and it's bad."

Nearly 160 children, or 14.2% of the students who attend Barbara Luna's school have been suspended this academic year, according to state data. The figure is more than double the state average which sits at 6.5%. Last year, Broadview Middle School reported nearly 300 "incidents," including 80 reports of fighting and battery and 32 verbal or physical confrontations.

School officials, including the school's principal and the district's superintendent, did not respond to requests for comment.

A cry for additional resources

Crowded hallways are a familiar sight at many schools in Danbury. The school district is home to over 12,100 students. Barbara Luna's middle school educated 1,065 students last year, a 4% increase from its enrollment in 2020.

Between 2010 through 2020, Danbury's population grew by 7%, trailing just behind Stamford and Norwalk for the largest number of people moving into a Connecticut city.

The city is limited to just one public high school, which educates nearly 3,600 students, and is the biggest high school in the state. The proposed charter school would serve students in grades six through 12.

In the last 10 years, Danbury High School's total population increased by nearly 25%, or 712 students, including a rapid rise in the number of Latino students from about 36% of the total student body in 2013 to 59% this year.

At the high school, the number of English language learners nearly tripled this decade from 384 students to 917, according to data from the state.

Residents have argued there needs to be a solution to ease the city's growing pains as its influx of Latino immigrants continues to rise.

But what that solution entails, especially for high school students, has been heavily debated.

The proposed charter school, which would be located in Danbury's downtown area and teach up to nearly 800 students, received its initial approval in 2018 from the Connecticut Board of Education.

To date, the school remains unbuilt.

Prior to 2015, a charter school could begin recruiting students and building its campus as soon as it received approval from the state Board of Education. That year, however, a bill changed the process into a two-tier approval system, where the state Board of Education grants "initial" approval and then funding is approved by lawmakers. The state Department of Education said the change helped make the charter process more transparent.

"That second tier frankly kind of always existed to the extent that when the State Board approved the charter school — it received its full charter — but that didn't mean that there was funding in place," said Kathleen Demsey, the Department of Education's chief financial officer. "The legislature at the time felt an enormous amount of pressure to fund the school, because the schools — once they got their charter — they would begin recruiting students, they had families who were engaged and wanting to go. ... So the legislature decided to create this two step process to make it clear that the state board's approval was an educational approval, and that the actual funding approval, the appropriation of funds, happened by the legislature."

Still, since the 2015 legislation, no charter school has been built in the state. The Danbury school, and another in Norwalk, have been waiting for funding for over five years.

Charter school proposals have to undergo an extensive process before approval, including an analysis of the school's curriculum, model and community need. There also must be public hearings to determine if there's a demand and local support from constituents. Applications often take more than a year to be considered.

The 700-page application for the Danbury charter school was submitted in August 2017 and proposed an International Baccalaureate program, which focuses on preparing students for college. The application said the school would open with a sixth grade class of 110 students, and every year add a new class, eventually reaching a total of up to 770 students.

More than 170 people attended a public hearing for the school in March 2018, with 27 of 37 residents who spoke in favor of the school. The application also had dozens of letters of support from local families, children, the city's former mayor and several local representatives.

Written opposition mainly came from surrounding town's superintendents who were concerned about funding.

"Bethel, like most Connecticut communities, has yet to receive our ECS allocation," wrote Christine Carver of Bethel Public Schools in 2018. "While we understand that Charter School Programs are a separate fund, we believe that full funding of Connecticut's 500,000 student public schools should be the state's first priority."

Leaders of the Region 9 district, which includes Easton and Redding, and the New Fairfield public schools also sent in letters.

Recently, the Department of Education acknowledged the state's difficulty to fully fund its public schools and said it's a "huge conversation" still being had between state leaders.

“There are bills in the legislature to accelerate full funding of the education cost sharing formula, but ... the lens from which we direct resources is with the thought that the vast majority of funding goes to the highest need districts,” Demsey said. “The education cost sharing formula is not based on the cost of educating a child, and I think people forget the education cost sharing formula is designed to even the playing field to raise revenue at the local level to pay for education. And based on that, it does do that. Now can we argue should there be more money put into it? Yes, but the formula itself is a municipal tax aid. It is designed to even the playing fields.”

Alongside the letters from the neighboring districts’ superintendents, former Danbury Public Schools Superintendent Sal Pascarella did not provide direct comment on the charter school, but rather used his letter to ask questions about the school, including whether it came with no cost to the district, where it would be located, and if it was possible to require the school to proportionally represent the district’s large number of English learners.

Funding concerns

Despite its initial approval five years ago, the charter school in Danbury remains at the center of an emotionally charged debate. Advocates have spent this session heavily pushing lawmakers to fund the school and secure its spot in the governor’s budget, while opponents have fought for a second traditional public high school to be built.

The group Latinos for Educational Advocacy and Diversity, also known as LEAD, is one of the major proponents of the charter school. The group gathered hundreds of residents to testify in favor of the Danbury school at several public hearings this session.

The organization’s CEO, Jose Lucas Pimentel, moved to Danbury in the fifth grade and has lived in the area for more than 35 years. After going through the public school system, he shared similar sentiments as the Merchans, saying he felt unsupported.

“(The high school) was a place that had just so many holes,” said Pimentel, who later taught in a Bridgeport charter school. “I was a guy that needed a smaller environment, that needed support, that needed caring people to say, ‘Hey, you’re pretty smart,’ but really, it was like I was just another number.”

Although some opponents understand the appeal of a smaller school, many argue that it’s not a fair system because it will only serve a small number of students and leave others behind.

“We should invest in finding good solutions for the whole student population, as opposed to a charter school solution which would really only address a very small percentage of the student population,” said Sen. Julie Kushner, D-Danbury. “We have worked on that for a number of years and we are making significant progress. We had a bond referendum in June that was approved by the people of Danbury to build a new school, grade six through 12, and it will have room for 1,400 students, which is more than twice as big as the charter school proposal.”

About \$164 million of a \$208 million bond referendum will go toward renovating a building to house the Career Academy — the school Kushner mentioned — which will host “24 pathways” for students, including opportunities in Emerging Technologies & Entrepreneurship, Scientific Innovation & Medicine, Information & Cybersecurity, Professional & Public Service, Art, Engineering & Design and Communication & Design, according to a presentation from Danbury Public Schools.

The school is expected to enroll 1,400 students through a lottery system. Once enrolled, a student’s first year will be centered on career exploration, followed by essential courses then two years of specialized courses toward certification. The Career Academy was supposed to open in 2024, but is expected to be delayed by a year.

But advocates argue a charter school isn’t an “either or” option with the second high school, but an “and” option. They say the charter school won’t be a solution to all overcrowding concerns or displeasure with the traditional public school system, but opens up another choice for parents and students.

“Our school is unique in that it provides the option of an International Baccalaureate Program, which is probably the opposite of what the Career Academies would provide. (The) Career Academies is geared towards school-to-career and the IB program is geared very intentionally towards preparing kids for the

rigors associated with college,” said John Taylor, who served as the executive director of Booker T. Washington Academy in New Haven and was later named the CEO of Elevate Charter Schools, which will manage the charter school in Danbury. “You’re giving parents a different option. The Career Academy is not any direct competition.”

The Department of Education added that choice schools, which includes charters, magnet and vocational schools, educate over 70,000 students, which “is not a small number of students that are served by these programs.”

The department also said that charter schools also often work hand in hand with their district to share what’s working best for students.

“We regularly highlight best practices, regardless of which type of public school you’re attending,” Demsey said. “So if it’s your local school district operated, or if that’s a magnet school, if it’s a charter school, if it’s the technical or vocational, ... one of the things the department firmly believes is that we take where we find success, and we share that because I think everybody benefits from that regardless of what type of school they call themselves.”

Opponents further argue that a charter school would strip Danbury’s already struggling school system of needed financial resources.

“We are on a fiscal cliff. Our schools are overcrowded, understaffed and under-resourced. The additional costs the district would have to absorb in a charter school, or to open, would push our district and students right over that cliff and have devastating consequences for our schools,” Matthew Sweeney, a Danbury parent and school counselor, said at a state Board of Education meeting in April. “As it stands, we don’t have enough money to adequately staff and support the schools we already have. ... There’s no way we can sustain the associated costs of a charter school, not to mention the loss of ECS funding ... per student who enrolls in the proposed charter school.”

Sweeney noted the school district would have to absorb the costs of transportation and special education for charter school students, which would lead to a loss of millions of dollars throughout the years.

However, Demsey said that impression is wrong.

Connecticut charter schools are funded separately from traditional public schools, and although a public school district does have those responsibilities that Sweeney mentioned, it’s “not as simple as it sounds.” “Would Danbury not receive some revenue because those students attended the charter school? Yes, but by the same token, they are not incurring costs related to educating those students,” Demsey said. “I think in the end, you’re probably looking at something that’s almost cost neutral, because of the fact that if the children don’t go (to the charter), well, then [the home district has] to educate the children. And if there’s enough (students), now you start talking about needing additional classroom space, needing additional teachers. It sounds really easy to say, ‘Oh, we’re missing all that revenue,’ but the truth is that there would be a cost to the district if they were being educated in the district. That’s the other side of it that I think people don’t realize.”

The traditional public school district would fundamentally lose state funding, or ECS money, from the student who transferred because “the state would instead pay a per pupil grant to the charter school educating the student,” the Department of Education said.

“If a child enrolls in a charter school they would no longer count as a resident student in the home district’s Education Cost Sharing grant calculation,” said Eric Scoville, the department’s director of communications. “This is the same as students attending the CT Technical Education and Career System,” which are also known as vocational schools.

Earlier this year, the state Board of Education granted approval to two additional charter schools: one in Middletown and another in New Haven.

The approval of Capital Preparatory Middletown Charter School garnered hours of debate at the March board meeting. Parents in attendance, mostly people of color, overwhelmingly favored the charter school. Yet, the Department of Education initially recommended the Board of Education defer its decision after receiving an influx of letters in opposition to the school the night before the meeting. The board overruled the department’s recommendation and granted the school its initial approval.

Four charter schools now wait in the pipeline for funding. All of them, except Danbury, were written into the Appropriations Committee version of the state budget earlier this month.

As currently written in the state budget, which passed out of the Appropriations Committee with a 40-12 vote, the Norwalk, Middletown and New Haven charter schools would be given \$200,000 each next year, then in 2025, Norwalk would be given \$2.1 million, Middletown \$4.75 million and New Haven \$937,500.

The budget, which is still being negotiated, prompted Rep. Rachel Chaleski, R-Danbury, to request a “surprise” amendment to add her city’s missing school before the committee voted to approve the budget. Chaleski’s amendment triggered a 90 minute recess, followed by an hour of testimony from two dozen state representatives who overwhelmingly voiced their support for the school, but were split between voting in favor of the amendment or voting with their party.

The amendment ultimately failed 33-20, but the Danbury charter school could still be written into the budget as lawmakers expect there to be a few more weeks of negotiations before a final budget is approved.

In the meantime, Senate Bill 1096, proposed this session by Sen. Doug McCrory, D-Hartford, makes an effort to clear the path for the creation of Connecticut charter schools and dial back on the 2015 law that required the two-step approval.

McCrory’s bill would return to a one-tier approval process and also start a separate state grant account “for the purposes of providing the initial funding for a local or state charter school that has been granted a new charter,” according to its language.

The bill had state representatives split along party lines before it passed 30-13 out of the Education Committee. It was then approved by the Appropriations Committee.

“These communities ... who are underserved, marginalized, underrepresented and under-resourced ... these [communities are] largely Black and brown children and families, and they’re poor, and they want another option,” McCrory said at the Education Committee’s March 24 meeting. “It’s time for us in this state to give our parents a choice and give these children a chance.”

CT Post

Despite bear attack in Connecticut, a hunt remains unlikely

By John Moritz

Police in Avon [warned residents](#) this week about an attempted home break-in by an adult black bear, just over a week after another bear in town reportedly attacked and bit a woman walking her dog.

On Easter, in nearby Windsor, a collared bear was [filmed rummaging through candy](#) left in a resident's yard for a children's Easter Egg hunt.

Despite a series of startling encounters between humans and bears that have made headlines in Connecticut, however, lawmakers in Hartford do not appear to be moving any closer toward legalizing a hunting season after their efforts stalled earlier this year.

In March, a bill to address the rising number of conflicts with bears was advanced out of the legislature's Environment Committee only after lawmakers [agreed to remove a provision](#) that would have permitted hunters to kill as many as 50 bears each year in Litchfield County, where the population of bears is the largest.

That decision appeared to end discussions around a bear hunt temporarily, until encounters with the animals again began to make news.

The No. 2-ranking Democrat in the House, Majority Leader Jason Rojas, D- East Hartford, raised the possibility of resurrecting the debate over bear hunting on Wednesday, telling reporters that the [attack on a 74-year-old woman in Avon](#) had sparked renewed interest in the topic.

"There are now legislators interested in perhaps coming back to that issue," Rojas said. "That doesn't mean that necessarily something is going to happen with it, but there are opportunities to re-engage on issues."

While acknowledging that there has been increased chatter around the bear hunting proposal in the wake of the attack and other recent incidents, however, two Democrats involved with the drafting of the bill said on Friday that little has changed since the decision to drop the language establishing a hunting season.

"To include an open hunt... the votes are not there, and they're not close," said state Sen. Rick Lopes, D-New Britain, who co-chairs the Environment Committee.

The bill that remains pending before the Senate would clarify the circumstances in which a bear may be killed in self defense, and allow the the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to issue permits to kill nuisance bears that are causing damage to livestock, crops or apiaries.

In addition the proposal would prohibit people from feeding potentially dangerous wildlife, and allow DEEP to issue fines to those who ignore formal warnings about issues such as trash or bird feeders being left out in places where they may attract bears.

Each of those provisions has enough supporters and detractors to place the bill on a tenuous footing with about a month to go in the legislative session, according to the other chair of Environment, state Rep. Joe Gresko, D-Stratford.

"There are probably colleagues that are going to our leadership and saying, 'Don't make me vote on this,'" Gresko said.

In particular, conversation groups and animal rights advocates have continued to urge lawmakers to embrace non-lethal bear management practices before making it easier for property owners to kill bears.

"We understand the concerns, that thinks have gotten unsustainable," with the number of conflicts involving bears, said Ann Gadwah, an organizer for the state chapter of the Sierra Club. "But there's a lot of things you can do before hunting."

Those who have expressed support for a hunt include farmers, sportsmen and wildlife officers for DEEP, who say that culling a small number of bears each year will help reduce encounters with humans, which [reached record highs](#) in recent years.

According to Lopes, DEEP officials reached out to committee leaders last week to gauge whether lawmakers would be willing to reconsider the decision to forgo the bear hunting provision. After speaking to other members of the committee, Lopes said he determined that their attitudes had not changed.

In a statement Friday, DEEP spokesman Paul Copleman said that the agency continues to support the legalization of bear hunting, along with other lethal and non-lethal methods of managing the state's bear population.

"DEEP continues to work with the Legislature in an effort to reduce the frequency and severity of bear-human conflicts," Copleman said. "Our [2022 bear report](#) clearly demonstrates that bear-human conflicts are becoming more severe – specifically, with 67 bear-home entries reported in 2022 (up from fewer than 10 in 2015), including two reported bear attacks ."

After passing a second, [bi-partisan vote](#) this week in the Judiciary Committee, Lopes said that there is "momentum" to move forward with the bill as written in the Senate. Still, he and Gresko said that the legislation is likely to elicit a lengthy debate on the floor of each chamber, meaning leaders will have to schedule time to consider the proposal within the legislature's already-packed calendar.

Connecticut is one of only two states in New England that does not allow bear hunting. The other Rhode Island, does not have a sizable population of black bears.

In these CT neighborhoods, residents would not have to pay income taxes under long-shot proposal

By John Moritz

Legislative leaders say it has a slim chance of passing. Some even question whether it is even legal.

Yet [a proposal](#) by state Sen. John Fonfara, D-Hartford, to give some residents in Connecticut's poorest census tracts a break from paying the state's income tax has been thrust into the center of the legislature's annual budget negotiations — increasing the likelihood that it could serve as a catalyst for future debates about how to address generational poverty.

Fonfara, a 13-term senator who co-chairs the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, inserted the novel tax exemption into a [state bonding measure](#) in April, along with a proposal to borrow \$165 million to spend on projects specifically within census tracts where more than 30 percent of residents live below the federal poverty line.

Under Fonfara's bill, the tax exemption in qualifying tracts would last for up to three years, followed by a review to determine whether enough economic progress has been made in those neighborhoods to remove them from the list, or keep them on for another three years.

Democrats on the committee swiftly voted to adopt the measure, though Gov. Ned Lamont and other party leaders remain cool to the idea.

During an interview last week in his state Capitol office, Fonfara explained that rationale for the proposal was to provide an incentive for upwardly-mobile earners to stay within struggling neighborhoods, rather than fleeing to the suburbs or tonier areas of the city along with their cash for local business or home improvements.

“Concentrated poverty isn't just a place where poverty resides, it is a generator of poverty,” said the senator, who is also [running for mayor of Hartford](#), one of the cities whose residents would benefit the most from the exemption.

“The vast majority leave from that area as soon as possible, because they want better for their families just like everybody else,” Fonfara said. “But when that happens, we further concentrate poverty because we're constantly exporting success stories.”

Legislative researchers have yet to determine how much the proposal would cost the state in terms of lost revenue, though a preliminary fiscal analysis noted that cities with the highest number of qualifying tracts — including Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven and Waterbury — accounted for more than \$300 million income tax revenues in 2020.

Fonfara said that qualifying census tracts likely account for just a fraction of the more than [\\$10 billion](#) that Connecticut collects from income taxes, and that not all residents of those areas would be exempted from paying income taxes.

Under his proposal, anyone earning more than \$120,000 a year, or \$200,000 for a couple, would still be required to pay state income taxes.

If passed, experts said Fonfara's proposal would likely be the first of its kind in the nation to target tax relief based on their address, rather than earnings.

Jackson Brainerd, a tax and economic development researcher at the National Conference of State Legislatures, said that while many states offer tax incentives to individuals or businesses to invest in certain locations, he was not aware of any other states that offer income tax exemptions based on geographic area.

In addition, Brainerd said that the proposal could potentially violate the equal-protection clause of the 14th Amendment, a concern that has also been raised by some of Fonfara's fellow lawmakers.

At least one congruent example to Fonfara's proposal, however, may be found in the [twin cities of Texarkana](#) straddling the border between Texas and Arkansas.

Residents who live in the city on the [Arkansas-side do not have to pay state income taxes](#), in order to discourage people from simply moving to the Texas-side of town, where there is no state income tax. Fonfara said that he hopes other states will look to replicate his idea, along with the federal government, as they seek to turn around declines in blighted, under-developed communities. "The income the same income tax is a pittance compared to the federal income tax, and therefore, that would really have a significant impact on these neighborhoods," he said.

In Connecticut, however, leaders of both parties have expressed a desire to stick with broad-based tax relief for lower-and-middle-income earners, as well as an expansion of existing programs designed to benefit poorer workers, such as the [earned-income tax credit](#).

The top Republican in the House, Rep. Vincent Candelora, R-North Branford, called the proposal "problematic," adding that Fonfara had a long way to go in convincing his fellow lawmaker's after inserting the language into the budget without a public hearing.

"Just because you have a concentrated area of poverty, you shouldn't exempt everybody's income taxes," Candelora said. "It's got to be more individually-based."

Both House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, and Lamont have similarly thrown cold water on the proposal, saying that they and other lawmakers would rather cut taxes based on earnings, which would apply in all areas of the state.

"I get the concept, it's just hard to get the votes for it," Ritter said during a news conference Thursday when he was asked about the proposal.

Lamont has also expressed skepticism about Fonfara's plan to use bonding to fund programs in the same census tracts, pointing to his general opposition to borrowing money for long-term operating expenses. In an effort to court his fellow lawmakers, Fonfara has had his staff develop maps showing which Senate districts include qualifying census tracts, which he has distributed to his colleagues.

CT Mirror

Connecticut is weighing several changes to Medicaid. Here's a look at some of them

By CT Mirror Explains

Medicaid, known as [HUSKY in Connecticut](#), provides health coverage to people with incomes below certain thresholds. [Over a quarter](#) of Connecticut residents currently receive coverage through Medicaid. The Connecticut General Assembly has proposed several changes to the state's Medicaid program this legislative session. Here's an overview of what they are and where they stand as the session enters its final month.

HUSKY insurance for immigrant children

The legislature's Appropriations Committee has proposed setting aside \$3 million to expand Medicaid coverage for children, regardless of immigration status, from age 12 to 15 starting in July 2024. Connecticut currently offers Medicaid to children without permanent legal status who are 12 and younger. Lawmakers introduced a bill earlier this session that would have extended the age to 20 beginning in January 2024, and then to age 25 by June 2024. Before the bill was voted out of the Human Services Committee, however, the age limit was changed to 18.

The Appropriations Committee's budget proposal would again adjust the age limit, to 15.

Supporters of the expansion said they were disappointed by the latest recommendation, and they are pressing for a broader age limit before the session ends in June.

"Expanding coverage for immigrants up to age 15 is only going to impact a small amount of youth who are not already currently covered by the recent expansion up to 12," said Carolina Bortolletto, a volunteer with the HUSKY for Immigrants Coalition and a co-founder of Connecticut Students for a Dream. "We definitely feel that expanding to age 15 is not enough. I don't think that expanding to age 15 has a true impact on health equity in our state. ... It shouldn't be acceptable to folks who want to promote health equity in this state."

Medicaid reimbursement rate increases for specialists

The Appropriations Committee proposed earmarking \$9.2 million in fiscal year 2024 and \$18.3 million in fiscal year 2025 to fund an increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates for physician services.

The proposal would bump them to 65% of Medicare rates as of Jan. 1, 2024. Most specialists currently receive 57.5% of 2007 Medicare rates for care provided to patients on Medicaid. This would represent [the most significant increase in Medicaid reimbursement](#) rates that most specialists have seen in nearly two decades.

The rate increases fall slightly below those passed by the Human Services committee in House Bill 6885, which proposed raising the rates to 75% of Medicare by fiscal year 2025, with the eventual aim of getting them to 100% of Medicare by July 1, 2027.

During the bill's public hearing, several physicians testified to explain how the low reimbursement rates can force them to see fewer patients on Medicaid or, in some cases, stop seeing them altogether.

"This might be one of the most important things we're talking about right now in this entire legislative session," said Rep. Michelle Cook, D-Torrington, during the Human Services committee vote on the measure. "We've heard begging and pleading on the increase of rates, and if we do not increase rates, people are going to go without services, people are going to go without care that they need."

Medicaid reimbursement for community health workers

Community health workers, also known as outreach workers, health coaches, patient navigators and promotores de salud, help people navigate health care and social services. They have an encyclopedic knowledge of all the resources available to residents in need, and they are experts in navigating the infinite obstacles that can come up when trying to access them.

Currently, the funding for their roles is piecemeal and largely sustained through grants, which can be insufficient and unreliable. But two bills currently under consideration by the legislature aim to make it easier for organizations to employ community health workers by making their services reimbursable by Medicaid.

Medicaid reimbursement for community health workers is proposed as a stand-alone measure in [Senate Bill 991](#) and as part of the Democrat caucus [Senate Bill 10](#).

Health Equity Solutions and the Community Health Workers Association of Connecticut spent a year talking to community health workers about the best way to structure Medicaid reimbursement for their work. Those conversations shaped SB 991.

SB 10 passed the Appropriations Committee and now heads to the Office of Legislative Research and Fiscal Analysis for a fiscal note.

Legislators eventually plan to substitute the CHW-related language in SB 10 with the language from SB 991, which has some minor differences, including a statement guaranteeing that people with disabilities won't be denied services.

Increases for HUSKY C income and asset limits

The state's eligibility criteria for HUSKY C, the Medicaid program for people who are over 65, blind or disabled, requires non-working people to remain in poverty and severely limit their savings in order to keep their Medicaid coverage.

To qualify, residents must effectively earn less than \$1,182 per month, around 97% of the federal poverty level. Individuals must have less than \$1,600 in assets, and couples must have under \$2,400.

This session, the human services committee passed two different proposals to increase both the income and asset limits for HUSKY C, but only one will go to the floor for a vote.

The first, included as part of [House Bill 5001](#), proposes raising the income limit from \$1,182 to a fixed rate of \$1,465 per month and the asset limits to \$3,600 for a single person and \$5,400 for a couple. The bill passed the Appropriations Committee last month.

Several advocates believe this change would provide inadequate relief because it raises the income limit to a fixed amount, the value of which would erode with inflation.

The second proposal, [House Bill 6630](#), sought to bring the HUSKY C income limit up to the same level as the HUSKY D income limit, which is set at 138% of the Federal Poverty Level, currently \$1,677 a month. The bill would also have brought the asset limits up to \$10,000 for an individual and \$15,000 for a couple.

Even though it had the support of advocates, House Bill 6630 failed to make it out of the appropriations committee. But several high-ranking lawmakers said they hoped to replace the language in House Bill 5001 with the higher limits proposed in 6630.

"We have the capacity to end this historic discrimination," said Sen. Matt Lesser, D-Middletown, who co-chairs the human services committee. "It's just a question of whether we have the will."

State on track to enact 14 days of early voting

By Mark Pazniokas

Tradition-bound Connecticut, a laggard among states in modernizing voting practices, would offer 14 days of early voting next year under a bill passed Thursday night on a 107-35 vote by the House of Representatives.

“It’s not for nothing Connecticut is called the Land of Steady Habits,” said state Rep. Matt Blumenthal, D-Stamford. “For almost three centuries now, we have had some of the most restrictive voting laws in the country.”

One of only four states not allowing early in-person voting, Connecticut can make the change only since passage last November of a constitutional amendment that struck a prohibition against expanding the days of voting.

“We saw this not only as a policy decision that we support, but also as a mandate and an obligation dictated to us from the voters,” Blumenthal said. “So that’s how we see it: The voters have given us a charge. We’re making good on it today.”

[Fifteen Republicans voted with 92 Democrats](#) for passage, including state Reps. Jonathan Steinberg and Dominique Johnson, who represent parts of Westport. No Democrat was opposed.

“This is a momentous occasion for expanded voting access for eligible voters in Connecticut, and it is the product of hard work on the parts of many individuals,” said Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas, the chief elections official. Thomas, who was elected to the post in November, previously represented the 143rd House District, which includes part of Westport.

A four-hour debate began at 3:20 p.m. Thursday on [House Bill 5004](#), a measure that still was being tweaked hours before being called for debate.

Final passage of the early-voting legislation in the Senate is assured, as is a signature from Gov. Ned Lamont.

House Minority Leader Vincent J. Candelora, R-North Branford, complained about the late availability of the final language and the length of early voting. Republicans urged a more modest start, with three days of early voting spread over five days.

“Take a few steps towards early voting. See how it works,” said state Rep. Tom O’Dea, R-New Canaan. “See how it works for an election cycle or two, and then perhaps go to 10 days or 14 as is proposed.”

The 14-day window was the most expansive of four options proposed by the secretary of the state, based on a study commissioned by her predecessor, Denise Merrill, from the Center for Election Innovation and Reform.

A shorter early voting period would be offered for elections other than the November general election: seven days for state and local primaries, and four days for special elections and presidential primaries. With a local option for additional sites, municipalities would have to offer early voting at a minimum of one location from the hours of 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on 12 days and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the Tuesday and Thursday before Election Day.

“We didn’t want to force one version onto the towns, especially as we’re starting out here,” said Blumenthal, a key sponsor as the co-chairman of the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

Legislative leaders have pledged to include funding in the state budget for municipalities to cover the added costs of early voting, including staffing over two weekends. Early voting is estimated to cost the state \$4.5 million.

Republicans said even with state reimbursement, 14 days of early voting would be an unnecessary burden for small towns, which already struggle to recruit temporary workers for election day.

“I understand that we’re going to fund it, but it’s getting the people to work it, to run it and to make it safe,” said state Rep. Jay Case, R-Winsted. “Some of our registrars are part time. How are they going to take 14 days to see this in a small town?”

“That to me is the epitome of inefficiency,” said state Rep. Doug Dubitsky, a Republican from Chaplin, an eastern Connecticut community with a population of 2,200.

Republican amendments to limit the length of voting to either three days or 10 failed on party-line votes. Candelora, the House GOP leader, noted the strong Republican support for the constitutional amendment that gave the legislature purview over the days of voting but bemoaned what it produced Thursday.

“The legislation that we’re voting on today did not have bipartisan input,” Candelora said. “And so my no vote today is really a rejection of this process, and not a rejection of early voting.”

Blumenthal, House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, and House Majority Leader Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, said in a press conference before the debate that they expect changes to early voting as the state learns how it is used by an electorate used to voting in person on Election Day.

Thomas, a Democrat elected to her first term as secretary of the state in November, had [recommended 10 days](#), which would have provided voting over two weekends. Ritter acknowledged there was nothing magic about 14 days.

“If we find, for example, that 10 is better, or maybe 21’s better, we can change it,” Ritter said. “That’s why it was nice to get the voters to approve the amendment and let us move it around. So maybe we’re wrong. Maybe it should be more, maybe it should be less, you can always be flexible. I think you’ll have data in a couple of years to know.”

U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, a Democrat up for re-election in 2024, urged the General Assembly in an [op-ed piece](#) to be aggressive.

“We shouldn’t settle for a mediocre right to vote early,” Murphy wrote. “Fourteen days of early voting should be the bare minimum the state legislature accepts. In our high cost state, hundreds of thousands of voters work jobs with inconvenient, unpredictable hours and long commutes, so it’s crucial that we include early morning, evening, and weekend hours.”

Blumenthal offered another reason.

“We’re kind of at the end of the line getting to the early-voting party. We didn’t want to be the bottom of the barrel as well,” Blumenthal said. “Fourteen days is a significant amount of early voting, but it is less than the national average, which is 21 days.”

Early voting would be similar to absentee ballot voting with two key differences: Absentee ballots can be obtained only under certain circumstances, such as being away on election day, and the early ballots must be cast at polling places, not returned by mail.

Ballots cast early will be sealed in envelopes not opened until Election Day, similar to the process for handling, securing and tabulating absentee ballots.

“It’ll be very similar in many ways, which is why ... arguments you might hear today really don’t seem to apply,” Ritter said.

CT News Junkie

Coalition Fights Against Health Care Discrimination For Disabled, Older Adults

By Christine Stuart

The Appropriations Committee had until today to raise the asset limit for low-income and disabled adults, but it didn't. However, advocates are not giving up the fight.

Advocates for low-income individuals with disabilities and older adults gathered outside the state Capitol Thursday to call attention to the matter. They said it amounts to discrimination because the Medicaid program includes funding for groups with higher income limits but failed to address the health care needs of vulnerable populations.

The bill HB 6630 passed unanimously out of the Human Services Committee but wasn't funded as part of the Appropriations Committee budget.

Sandy Roberts who works at the Center for Disability Rights said she's been on Medicaid for the employed-disabled since it came into existence. She said she's recently been experiencing a lot of neck and back pain and it's made it hard to focus.

She said she thought about retirement, but if she does she will lose her health care benefits. That would likely mean moving to a nursing home because she would lose her home health aide.

"I'm pissed off," Rick Famiglietti said. "I worked my ass off. I'm still working my ass off."

He said he will soon be a victim of discrimination to spend down his income to \$1,600 in order to remain eligible for HUSKY C. He said he will lose the opportunity to keep his income of \$75,000 a year.

"Without the increase in HB 6630, this will be my retirement," Famiglietti said.

He said he will end up in a nursing home and cost the state of Connecticut money after filing for bankruptcy and losing his home as a result of the income limits.

"How is it that able-bodied people can access HUSKY D with no assets?" Famiglietti asked. "Why does Connecticut punish people with disabilities who have been working in spite of their disability, and now I have to lose all the things that I've saved?"

Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, D-West Hartford, said there's still a month left and they are pushing for the funding to be included in the budget.

She said not funding this doesn't make sense because it allows people to keep working but threatens them with the possible loss of their health care if they keep working.

"We all understand just how difficult it is to live not just in Connecticut, but anywhere on 97%," Rep. Lucy Dathan, D-Norwalk, said.

She's referring to 97% of the federal poverty level which is the current income cap for this population. The non-disabled population is allowed a 130% of federal poverty level income cap to receive health care benefits.

Advocates are urging lawmakers to prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations and take action to end discrimination in the Medicaid program. They argue that, especially in light of Connecticut's unprecedented fiscal position, it is imperative that the state address the healthcare needs of all of its residents, regardless of their income levels.

Rep. Susan Johnson, D-Windham, said state officials really need to understand Medicaid, which is a "spiderweb of laws that keep you from getting qualified from the things you need."

She said one of the crucial things to the debate is the spending cap and understanding how that impacts this program for health care.

"It's a way to keep people in poverty," Johnson said. "... Notice there is no cap on tax credits."

She said the spending cap is a way to limit resources to low-income communities and she will continue to fight against it.

CT Public/NPR

Randy Cox seat belt bill clears state house, advances to state senate

By Eddy Martinez

Police officers in Connecticut may soon be required to fasten the seatbelts of suspects riding in police vehicles.

A statewide bill mandating suspects be secured with seat belts in police transport vehicles cleared the state House of Representatives Thursday.

One of the co-sponsors of the bill is Democratic State Rep. Anne Hughes, who represents Weston, Easton and parts of Redding in Fairfield County. While Hughes is pleased her bill cleared the state house, she lamented the need for a law in the first place.

“This is the public we're talking about. And we shouldn't have to litigate and legislate for basic humanity. But here we are,” Hughes said.

The proposed legislation is also known as the Randy Cox Bill, named after a New Haven resident who was permanently paralyzed while riding unsecured in a police van in 2022.

The bill would have the state's Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) create a statewide policy mandating seat belt usage for suspects. It would also require police training to ensure suspects are safely secured while in transit.

The text of the bill states POST would be required to develop guidelines for seat belt usage by the end of 2023.

The bill passed the state house with 140 yes votes and 11 house members were absent. The state senate must pass the bill before it gets sent to Governor Ned Lamont's desk for his approval.

Republican State Representative Craig Fishbein, who represents Middlefield and Wallingford, co-sponsored the bill. Fishbein said cities and towns would carry out the regulation, but POST would be responsible for punishment. Under the bill, an offending officer could face losing their state certification.

“The municipalities are supposed to implement the policy and officers are supposed to follow the policy otherwise POST, which created it has the ability to decertify,” Fishbein said.

No one in the house voted against the bill, but it faced opposition from the Connecticut Council of Police AFL-CIO, which issued public testimony against the bill.

Members claimed the policy would be difficult to follow due to the day to day realities of policing, where officers say they regularly deal with combative and violent suspects.

Hughes was and remains skeptical of that position.

“I think that's misinformed, quite frankly, that's misinformed. You have a person that's likely handcuffed and you can't seatbelt them? I don't get that,” Hughes said.

Hughes is skeptical because she is also a social worker and regularly dealt with aggressive behavior, when transporting people.

While she admits getting them situated can be challenging, she said she is able to get them strapped in single handedly without too much hassle. She notes many police officers often work with another officer.

The bill is a new proposal and comes not only after Randy Cox was paralyzed, but long after other high profile cases shed light on instances where those in police custody were severely injured or killed while riding unsecured in a police vehicle.

Freddie Gray was a Baltimore resident who died in 2015 after suffering a spinal cord injury after being tossed around in the back of a police van, while being transported unsecured.

When asked why this bill is only being considered now, Hughes was frank, and referenced two Bridgeport women whose families were not quickly notified of their deaths.

“The legislature is a little bit clunky. And we are reactive,” she said. “I mean, the same thing with the Lauren Smith-Fields and Brenda Lee Rawls bill that we passed, requiring police to notify families of their loved one’s death within 24 hours, Why should we have to legislate basic humanity and respect, but we tend to have to do that reactively,” Hughes said.

New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker said the city’s police department quickly moved to ensure all suspects are secured in police vehicles. Suspects are no longer allowed to ride in vans unless there are several suspects, he said. The policies were enacted shortly after Randy Cox was paralyzed last year.

The four officers charged in Cox’s case, are facing possible termination from the police department but remain employed.

Elicker said the police commission would act but only after careful deliberation.

“I have confidence that the police commission wants to do the right thing and wants to be cautious and thoughtful about how they consider the evidence in front of them that’s been presented by both parties,” Elicker said. “And I am confident that they want to be deliberate and take their time.”

Last month the commission postponed deciding the fate of Officer Jocelyn Lavandier, one of the officers charged in the Cox case and did not announce a follow up date.

Cox is suing the city of New Haven and the police department. He is represented by nationally recognized civil rights attorney, Benjamin Crump.

Crump also responded to the passage of the bill and says Cox’s family just wants to make sure this doesn’t happen to anyone else. He said he and Cox’s family appreciate the state working to ensure people’s safety.

Crump also said the state didn’t need Randy Cox to get to this point, referencing Freddie Gray.

“It was just so unnecessary, that Randy Cox had to suffer these permanent life injuries, of being paralyzed, for the state of Connecticut, to say, we have to have legislation to make sure that this never happens again,” Crump said.

The Day

House approves bill creating panel to study mandatory public comment periods

By Brian Hallenbeck

Connecticut's House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill this week that would establish a task force to study requiring public comment periods at meetings of all public agencies.

The bill will move to the Senate for consideration.

The measure [originated](#) in response to a policy in effect in Groton, where public comment is allowed during monthly Town Council meetings but not at twice-a-month meetings at which the council convenes as Committee of the Whole.

State Rep. André Bumgardner, D-Groton, who resigned from the council in March, co-sponsored the bill.

Following a public hearing, the legislature's Planning and Development Committee unanimously approved the bill, which originally called for public comment periods to be mandated. Subsequently, the committee proposed that a task force be created to study the matter.

The version approved Wednesday by the House calls for the task force to be made up of seven members, one of whom would be the executive director of the state Freedom of Information Commission or the executive director's designee.

The Yankee Institute for Public Policy, a conservative think tank, listed the measure among what it considered "good" bills that had survived the legislative session's committee process and were worthy of public support.

"To think that public comment periods are not required at public agency meetings currently is unbecoming of a representative democracy," the Yankee Institute wrote in a statement. "... We need transparency and accountability — and this bill will foster those ideals."

The bill would require that the task force examine the benefits and drawbacks of mandatory public comment periods and the best practices for conducting such periods, "including the length of time allotted for comments, the rules governing comment and the process for signing up to speak .."

Legal and practical considerations, costs associated with additional staff support and the potential for abuse or disruption of the public comment process also would be part of the task force's purview.

The task force would be required to report its findings to the Planning and Development Committee by Jan. 1, 2024.

SUNDAY FOCUS: Unfinished business at the legislative session

BY Paul Hughes

An updated medical-aid-in-dying bill succumbed again to bipartisan opposition in the Judiciary Committee, one of a growing list of legislative casualties for the 2023 General Assembly session. For a third year, the Public Health Committee advanced legislation to permit mentally competent but terminally ill adults access to life-ending medications.

The controversial bill died in the Judiciary Committee for a third year because the vote count came up short again. As a result, the bill was shelved without a committee vote.

The same fate befell the 2021 version of the bill – the first one to ever get out of the Public Health Committee. High hopes for the 2022 bill were dashed after opponents split the joint committee into its House and Senate panels and Senate members separately voted 5-4 to defeat the bill.

More than 3,000 bills and resolutions have been introduced since legislators returned to the state Capitol in early January. Most have already fallen by the wayside, either initially failing to get picked up by a committee, or failing to get out of committee.

All of the failed bills mattered to the their legislative sponsors and supporters, but some of the lost bills are more notable than others, and the medical-aid-in-dying bill is one of the most prominent to go down in defeat this year.

A MEDICAL-AID-IN-DYING BILL has been introduced regularly since 2012, but one leading proponent is questioning if supporters should try again in 2024.

“I have always been an advocate for doing it every year. I think I may have changed my tune,” said Rep. Jonathan Steinberg, D-Westport. “It is not about the Public Health Committee anymore. It is about the Judiciary Committee. I think our only realistic expectation of a different outcome is with a different Judiciary Committee.”

The Judiciary Committee roster is unlikely to change significantly until the 2025 session following next year’s General Assembly elections.

Steinberg said supporters continued to make more changes to accommodate the concerns of Judiciary Committee members, including requiring patients be at least 21 years old, have less than six months to live, be a state resident for at least one year, and see their physician every 30 days after receiving a life-ending prescription.

“We worked with Judiciary. We listened to them. We made changes based upon what they said they would like to see happen. We tried to address and anticipate all of the reasonable contingencies they were talking about,” he said. “We were afraid this would be too restrictive. Even then, whether they were bargaining in good faith or not, they choose to use the same tactic to keep it from happening.”

But other advocates are unwilling to give up the struggle.

“We will continue to advocate for passage of this legislation,” said Tim Appleton, senior campaign director for Compassion & Choices Action Network, a nonprofit advocacy group that supports medical aid in dying.

RANKED-CHOICE VOTING is a concept that’s time did not come in the 2023 legislative session, either.

There were a record five bills proposing this alternative method of electing candidates for public office since legislation was first proposed in Connecticut five years ago.

Currently, a voter in Connecticut chooses one candidate, and the candidate with the most votes wins.

Candidates do not need an outright majority to be elected, but rather only a plurality of the ballots cast.

With ranked-choice voting, voters select candidates in order of preference. If no candidate wins more than 50% of the votes, then the election goes into elimination rounds, and voter rankings come into play,

as candidates with the fewest votes are eliminated and votes are redistributed until one candidate achieves the required majority.

No ranked-choice voting bill advanced out of the Government Administration and Elections Committee by its March 29 reporting deadline.

The committee also opted to take no action on controversial proposals to mandate that qualified voters cast ballots in elections and to allow incarcerated prisoners to vote after both proposals had received a hearing – a required step for any bill or resolution to be eligible for a committee vote.

The committee also shelved a proposed constitutional amendment to lower the voting age from 18 to 16, but advanced a proposal to amend the state Constitution to allow 16 year olds to register to vote ahead of their 18th birthday. It also did nothing with a proposed amendment to allow immigrants without legal immigration status to vote in local and state elections.

The committee took no action on legislation to establish a Connecticut Reparations Task Force to study slavery and its effects throughout American history and make recommendations concerning reparations. TIME ALSO RAN OUT on a contentious bill to authorize the spending of state funds to help patients from other states to come to Connecticut to terminate pregnancies.

The Human Services Committee introduced legislation directing the state Department of Social Services to provide medical assistance for abortion care and related services for residents of other states that ban abortion or severely limit abortion access. The committee ended up taking no action on the bill.

Gov. Ned Lamont also dropped his proposal to appropriate \$2 million for a so-called “Safe Harbor Fund” for paying for transportation, lodging and abortion care for patients traveling to Connecticut.

The two proposals responded to last year’s U.S. Supreme Court ruling that overturned its landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that legalized abortion nationwide and subsequent state actions to ban or restrict abortion access.

The Government Administration and Elections Committee did advance a proposed a constitutional amendment to recognize a right of individual privacy, including a right to prevent, continue or end one’s own pregnancy.

LEGISLATIVE STUDIES OFFER SECOND CHANCES for bills that lack enough support to move out of committee or get through both legislative chambers.

“Sometimes they are helpful,” said House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford.

The Planning and Development Committee advanced a bill that proposed to raise the uniform assessment rate for determining property taxes from 70% to 75% of fair market value. If this policy had been in place for the 2021 grand list year, the legislature’s budget office estimated grand lists across all 169 municipalities would have increased by approximately \$27.6 billion.

Rep. Maria Horn, D-Salisbury, the House chairwoman of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, advised her committee’s members ahead of a vote Tuesday on legislation that the measure was going to be turned into a study bill.

Members of the Planning and Development Committee were told the same thing Monday about another bill that proposes to require members of local government bodies participating in public meetings via video conferencing platforms to be visible when speaking during a debate or casting a vote.

SOME 645 BILLS AND RESOLUTIONS remain on the House and Senate calendars awaiting action with roughly five weeks left in the legislative session.

Most of these remaining measures are destined to be consigned to the legislative trash heap, but there is still hope for some yet – even for bills that failed to get out of committee.

This is because the legislature regularly incorporates content or concepts originating in other bills into legislation that gets passed into law. In the last so-called “long session” in 2021, proposals that started out in 168 separate bills were integrated into 58 public acts that became law. In all, Lamont 235 public acts in 2021.

In fact, no bill or resolution will be truly done until the gavel comes down on the 2023 session at midnight on June 7.

“I think there are a few things that didn’t make it out of committee that possibly could come back,” said House Majority Leader Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford..

One possibility that Rojas mentioned was bear hunting.

The Environment Committee stripped a provision in a bill to permit the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to set up a lottery system for hunters to kill up to 50 black bears each year in Litchfield County. DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes proposed the bill be revised to allow limited hunting in bear management zones to cover other parts of the state that also have high bear populations and use a quota system, rather than a lottery.

Bear hunting is getting another look after two black bears were recently euthanized after one bit a 74-year-old Avon woman on her leg and arm while she was walking her dog two weeks ago and the other entered homes in Salisbury and Falls Village.

“There are now legislators interested in perhaps coming back to that issue,” Rojas said. “That doesn’t mean necessarily something is going to happen, but there are opportunities to re-engage on issues, even though they didn’t make it out of committee.”