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Monday, May 13, 2024

Hartford Courant

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Hartford Courant

Housing, education, paid sick days, police and more: Bills that passed in CT's 2024 legislative session

Alison Cross

Hundreds of bills came before [Connecticut lawmakers](#) in the 2024 session on dozens of subjects from the state insect to solving the state's housing crisis but only a few will become law. Though many bills were put on the calendar for a vote, a lack of political will or time, as legislators worked down to the last few minutes before the mandatory session ended at midnight Wednesday, limited what was approved. Here is a look at what passed.

Budget Stabilization and Bonding

In lieu of opening up the state budget for revision, lawmakers approved a [\\$360 million spending package](#) that doles out millions of unspent federal pandemic aid to fund higher education, children's mental health, municipalities and nonprofits, among others.

The legislature also authorized [nearly \\$2.5 billion in bonding for capital projects](#) next year. The package includes up to \$625 million in bonding through 2031 for the UConn 2000 development project, on the condition that the university's philanthropic commitments total at least \$100 million over the next eight years.

Paid sick days, strikes

All employees will soon be entitled to [paid sick days](#) under [House Bill 5005](#).

The legislation paves the way for a three-year phase-in of Connecticut's sick leave requirements for companies with fewer than 50 employees. Under the bill, employees will accrue one hour of sick time for every 30 hours worked. Employees become eligible for this time after working for their employer for 120 calendar days. They can use up to a maximum of 40 hours off each year.

Gov. Ned Lamont said the paid sick days expansion "makes Connecticut one of the leaders."

"You've got to work hard in this day and age. Make sure that you keep your workers and make sure they're able to stay. I don't want people showing up to work sick. We got that done, and hats off there," Lamont said.

The governor was not so keen on another labor win, the creation of a state fund to [pay striking workers](#).

Lamont told reporters he would [not support House Bill 5431](#), which would establish a \$3 million fund under the direction of the State Comptroller to provide financial assistance to workers who go on strike.

“I support the right to organize, I support defined benefit plans, I support expanded healthcare and I want to make sure that we have a strong labor,” Lamont said. “Does that mean I want the taxpayers subsidizing striking workers? I don’t think I do.”

Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney said Lamont’s opposition to the bill is something that Democratic lawmakers “regret and hope he’ll change his mind on.”

Nurses

Lawmakers passed [Senate Bill 1](#), an expansive health care bill that [strengthens protections](#) for nurses and home health care providers.

The legislation was inspired by the death of [Joyce Grayson](#), a 63-year-old visiting nurse who was found dead in the basement of a halfway house following an at-home visit with a registered sex offender.

“S.B. 1 was really significant,” Looney said. “It provides protection for home health care workers and tries to have a system for building up security so that people who need home care can get it, but that the workers who provide it have greater protection. That’s important.”

The legislature also passed [House Bill 5058](#), which would allow Connecticut to enter into the Nurse Licensure Compact. The move would ensure that nurses can acquire a multistate license to practice in any state that is a party to the compact.

Housing

This session, House Speaker Matt Ritter, a Hartford Democrat, said the legislature made “incremental progress” on housing but accomplished “certainly, not all that people perhaps had hoped for.”

The highlight was [House Bill 5474](#), a proposal that incorporates numerous concepts from the Majority Leaders Affordable Housing Roundtable to encourage affordable housing development.

It requires municipalities to allow developers to convert vacant nursing homes into multifamily housing. Additionally, it allows cities and towns to regulate short-term rentals like Airbnb and Vrbo rentals. The bill also requires landlords to provide a written notice of proposed rent increases to tenants 45 days in advance.

“I think we made some progress on housing,” Lamont said. “We’ve added population over the last few years, that’s a good thing. The one thing that can slow us down and put us at risk (is if) there’s not a place for people to live.”

Lamont said he is a fan of the provisions in H.B. 5474.

“I like the fact that it gives the added incentives for workforce, housing, and affordable housing in downtown areas. I like the fact it gives a little incentive in terms of why you want to do that. I like the fact you get an extra credit if you zone it accordingly and you get some relaxed relief on 8-30g. I think these are all ways that we work with our municipalities and communities to get more housing out there,” Lamont said.

Elder care reform

Ritter said Connecticut lawmakers had “a really good year in terms of focus on elder care and aging in place type legislation.”

[House Bill 5001](#) makes [sweeping changes](#) to the state’s elder care system by increasing oversight, streamlining Medicaid access and requiring the state to maintain a virtual registry of home care providers.

Starting July 1, 2026, H.B. 5046 prohibits new nursing home residents from being admitted to a room with more than two beds. The bill also sets penalties for health care institutions who fail to comply with corrective action plans, among other measures.

Education

After a report from Dalio Education found that [one in five youth](#) are at risk of not graduating or already disconnected from education and employment, the legislature will now require the state’s data system to submit annual reports on disconnected youth in Connecticut.

The provision is wrapped into [House Bill 5437](#), a large education package that also takes steps to address school climate and place restrictions on the number of days schools can place students on in or out of school suspensions, among other measures.

House Republican Leader Vincent Candelora of North Branford said the data collection component was “definitely a big highlight” for Republicans.

“For us what was important is a lot of the educational reform bills, for ECS (Education Cost Sharing), for creating a more fair funding stream for our communities, but also starting the pathway of data collection and to begin trying to engage getting our youth reconnected to the classroom,” Candelora said.

Lawmakers also passed [Senate Bill 327](#), a proposal that will establish a task force to study the effects of hate speech and bullying on children’s mental wellbeing, physical health and academic achievement.

[House Bill 5436](#) simplifies the certification process for teachers in the state, among other wide-ranging changes.

Charlene Russell-Tucker, the commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Education, said the certification regulations were last updated in 1998.

“We are extremely pleased with the passage of H.B. 5436 and believe this is a giant step in the right direction for modernizing our certification laws, breaking down barriers, and recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce,” Russell-Tucker said in a statement Thursday.

Russell-Tucker said the creation of the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board “will bring the expertise of skilled and veteran educators, together with the State Board of Education, to continuously develop standards and proposals resulting in long-term, meaningful change.”

‘Line of duty’ deaths

This session, state lawmakers passed legislation to [expand the definition of a “line of duty” death](#) and extend more benefits to the families of fallen officers.

[House Bill 5279](#) grants police, fire and emergency medical service chiefs the authority to declare that that an officer, firefighter or EMS personnel died in the line of duty “if the death was caused by a cardiac event, stroke, or pulmonary embolism within 24 hours after ... a shift or training.” For some surviving families, the broadened definition will unlock access to cash benefits, tuition waivers, health insurance and pension benefits.

[Senate Bill 341](#) codifies a “Fallen Officer Fund” under the office of the state comptroller to provide “a lump sum death benefit totaling \$100,000 to a surviving family member or beneficiary of a police officer who was killed in the line of duty or sustained injuries that were the direct and proximate cause of the officer’s death.”

It also allows family members to maintain coverage under the late officer’s health insurance policy for up to five years after the officer’s death.

Candelora said the legislation was an important initiative for the Republican caucus, which pushed for the creation of the fund last year.

“The Fallen Officer’s Fund ... now will extend health care benefits to families where an officer is killed on duty,” Candelora said. “I was pleased to see that go through with the comptroller also pushing that agenda and working to keep that bill moving.”

Most of the 2,000 bills CT lawmakers proposed in 2024 failed. Here are the highlights

Christopher Keating

While the [2024 legislative session](#) was marked with successes in passing the [state’s fiscal plan](#) and [bonding package](#), the session was also notable for its failures.

With about 2,000 bills proposed this year, far more measures failed than passed. More than 600 bills were passed by various committees this year, but legislators knew that many of them lacked enough support in the full legislature as they raced to meet a state constitutional deadline that closed the session on May 8.

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When the session finally ended, 254 measures had been [passed by both chambers](#), ranging from complicated bills to the nominations of judges.

Making progress on some issues, legislators said, was difficult in a short, three-month session in an election year. They pledged to come back again next year when new legislators will occupy some seats after the November election.

Among the bills that failed when the session ended last week:

Artificial intelligence

On the cutting edge of technology, a high-profile bill to regulate artificial intelligence failed after Gov. Ned Lamont said publicly that he would oppose the measure. His remarks short-circuited the bill, prompting leaders in the state House of Representatives to avoid debating because it would have been a waste of valuable time in the final days if Lamont was going to veto the bill anyway.

Lamont feared that too much regulation might scare entrepreneurial companies away from Connecticut and did not want the state to take a go-it-alone strategy on a first-in-the-nation bill in a fast-moving market.

“How much do you regulate the startup industries in a place like AI, where it is just so brand new?” Lamont asked reporters. “Do you want 50 states doing their own thing or is maybe that not the right way? I talked to the governor of Colorado, and they didn’t go for it, either, at least in my understanding. Whatever you do, you don’t want one state to do it. You want this done on a much broader basis.”

Relying partially on his own personal experience in creating a cable television company in the 1980s, Lamont said he feared too much regulations might backfire.

“I’m in the startup world. That’s sort of the place where I live,” Lamont said, adding that he received feedback on the issue. “A lot of them said, all other things being equal, if it’s more likely that I get sued in Connecticut than I do in Georgia, maybe I’ll start my company in Georgia.”

Known as Senate Bill 2, the measure had been a high priority for Senate Democrats, who are expected to raise the issue again next year.

Electric cars

Even before the session started, one of the top issues was electric cars. Lamont pushed strongly for the state to meet California’s emissions standards, which would mean that all new cars sold in Connecticut after 2035 would be all-electric or hybrid.

The issue had such support that some wanted a special session before the regular session, which never happened. In the end, all proposals were rejected, including a special, 40-member commission that would have studied the issue.

Asked what might change the public's views on the environment, the 70-year-old Lamont responded, "Young people. Guys my age say, 'Look, the environment's important, but it's a little expensive, and I've got other priorities. China is not doing it, so why should I?' Those are all the arguments you've heard. I think it's costing the taxpayers every day in terms of flooding and resiliency. You saw a lot of that last summer."

Climate change

Although designated as a high priority for House Democrats, a bill on climate change was not debated in the Senate as Republicans staged long filibusters on several bills on the session's final day.

Democrats hailed the multifaceted bill for taking steps like expanding solar canopies in parking lots and creating a task force to study electric transmission that would include offshore wind. Known as House Bill 5004, the measure offered incentives like tax credits and business fee waivers, along with fostering training in green jobs, helping municipalities, encouraging water and air health, and supporting energy-saving grid enhancements. It also included incentives for alternative energy like solar power and electric heat pumps.

But Republicans blasted the 52-page legislation as the "Green Monster" and questioned how the state would pay for subsidies for expensive electric heat pumps and other items. They also questioned the overall outcome if the United States closed pollution-spewing coal plants at the same time that China and India continued running their plants at full steam.

"It's a big victory," Senate Republican leader Stephen Harding Jr. said of the bill's demise. "Republicans have been warning that this bill, while well-intentioned, would give unfettered authority to an unelected official: the commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. It would enable the DEEP commissioner to implement basically whatever she deems fit to meet certain carbon emissions. That could mean new taxes and new government programs that Republicans would object to, but would have no say over."

Lori Brown, executive director of the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters and a longtime lobbyist at the state Capitol, countered, "The failure to pass climate legislation is a severe blow to Connecticut's environmental future. ... This inaction will have lasting consequences, and put us farther behind in reaching our state's climate goals."

Chinese-made drones

Despite a strong push from Senate Democrats, time expired before the House could pass a consumer protection bill that would have prohibited cities and towns from buying drones made in China and Russia. The concern is that sophisticated drones that cost more than \$12,000 could take pictures of critical infrastructure like electrical grids and send them back to China, as well as being able to plug into a town's computer system and potentially spread viruses.

The issue, contained in Senate Bill 3, split lawmakers largely along party lines with Democrats in favor of the provision and Republicans against. In Congress, where lawmakers remained deadlocked on most issues, legislators passed a law last year that bans the use of foreign drones for the military and the U.S. government.

The Connecticut state police have already said they will stop using the Chinese-made drones, lawmakers said.

First responders, including police departments statewide, have already spent an estimated \$1 million to \$2 million on sophisticated drones, but they will eventually be replaced because the average lifespan is three to five years, officials said.

Many in the general public, Democrats said, are not fully aware of the problem that many of the drones are currently being purchased from an arm of the Chinese military.

A problem, lawmakers said, is that the Chinese-made drones get purchased because they are generally cheaper, but Democrats countered that \$3 million was being set aside in the annual bond package to help towns buy the drones.

Republican initiatives

Since Republicans are in the minority in both chambers, their ideas often get blocked and sometimes do not even get a hearing.

House Republican leader Vincent Candelora of North Branford said two initiatives in particular that failed were increasing funding for special education costs and improving the criminal justice system after changes were made following the high-profile death of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis.

“Trying to get consent searches returned for our police officers is a big issue,” Candelora told The Courant in an interview. “It speaks to the issue of our roads not even being safe, let alone the crime that we see with car thefts. We need to do a better job in this state in improving law enforcement in terms of giving them the tools that are necessary to do their job. ... I was not happy to see that police officers still cannot pull people over when they’re smoking pot or when they smell pot. When it comes to criminal justice reform, the legislature gets an F.”

Democrats, however, have consistently defended the changes that were made in the comprehensive police accountability law that was signed by Lamont in July 2020.

Another failure in the Republican view is the legislature did not do enough this year to hold down electricity rates for cash-strapped consumers as bills are expected to increase in July. As part of their energy initiatives, they say the Public Utility Regulatory Authority should become more independent by being broken off from the state environmental protection department after being merged into the same department under then-Gov. Dannel P. Malloy.

When asked after the session by The Courant, Lamont said that he was not immediately appointing two more members to the PURA board, which can legally have five instead of the current three.

“The governor is ignoring the law,” Candelora said. “I think that’s the bigger issue. If you wanted three, then advocate that the law be changed back to three. But what has happened is we have a governor that refuses to make the appointments so we can have a discussion about the way PURA is running.”

Abortion rights

Democrats sought a constitutional amendment to enshrine abortion rights into the state constitution because they fear that conservative justices on the U.S. Supreme Court could overturn a series of rights in addition to abortion.

But changing the constitution is a difficult, years-long process that eventually must be approved by the voters in a statewide referendum.

The conservative Family Institute hailed the defeat, saying, “Beating this bill was a priority of the Connecticut March for Life and a big win.”

Car tax

For more than 30 years, governors and legislators have been unable to eliminate Connecticut’s unpopular car tax.

The problem is that cities and towns collect \$1 billion per year from the tax, causing mayors and first selectmen to say their budgets would have huge holes without proper reimbursements from the state. Lawmakers cannot agree on how to raise \$1 billion in other taxes to cover the shortfall or cut spending by a similar amount.

Despite working with a 22-member task force for months, Sen. MD Rahman, a freshman Democrat from Manchester, was unable to reach a compromise on the best way to eliminate the tax.

In a final attempt, Rahman pushed for allowing towns the option to eliminate the car tax by increasing their assessments on real estate from the traditional 70% in order to cover the shortfalls that would be phased in over five years.

Small business health care

Chris DiPentima, the chief executive officer of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, said one of the year’s biggest failures concerns health care costs for small businesses.

“For the second consecutive session, lawmakers were presented with bipartisan, transformational legislation that would change the lives of hundreds of thousands of small business employees,” he said. “It’s not news that the small group health insurance market is broken — reinforced by the departure of yet another carrier this week — with small businesses and their employees battling rising costs and shrinking options. There was a meaningful solution on the table, and it is incredibly frustrating that the bill failed to even receive a committee vote.”

Tipped wages

With the restaurant industry largely back on its feet after the coronavirus pandemic, lawmakers battled over a proposal to increase the minimum wage for workers who receive tips.

Connecticut has a two-tiered system where about 70,000 tipped workers currently receive a reduced minimum wage because their tips boost their overall compensation beyond the minimum wage.

But the labor committee voted to gradually eliminate that system over three years and pay workers the regular minimum wage that is currently \$15.69 per hour in Connecticut. The federal minimum wage remains at only \$7.25 per hour, and workers argue that Connecticut needs increased wages as a high-cost state.

The Connecticut Restaurant Association, an influential lobbying group at the Capitol, opposed the measure while saying that servers and bartenders like the current system the way that it is. The association said that a survey showed that “the average server in Connecticut makes \$33 per hour,” and the average bartender makes \$38 per hour.

Connecticut would not have been the first to change the system. Seven other states, from California, Oregon, Washington and Nevada to Minnesota, Montana and Alaska, and places like Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Flagstaff, Arizona have passed the phaseout of the subminimum wage.

Drunken driving at .05

Despite a spate of wrong-way crashes and high-profile accidents, lawmakers were unable to change the state law to make it easier for police to arrest motorists by reducing the threshold for drunken driving charges.

Utah remains the only state where the blood alcohol level threshold is .05%, compared to .08% in Connecticut and all surrounding states.

The measure was part of a broader plan to reduce the fatalities on Connecticut roads. Legislators were stunned at 366 deaths on the roads in 2022 — about one per day. The statistics show that 2022 was the worst year on Connecticut roads since 1989. While fatalities dipped to 323 last year, officials fear that the state could break another record this year.

Four people were killed in a wrong-way crash at about 1:45 a.m. Thursday on the Merritt Parkway in Stratford. So far this year, 11 people have died in wrong-way crashes on the highways, which is more than the total of seven for the entire year in 2023.

CT Mirror

Democrats nominate a ‘joyful’ Chris Murphy to third term

May 11, 2024
Mark Pazniokas

U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy accepted an uncontested Democratic nomination for a third term Saturday, celebrating his status as a newly baptized bipartisan dealmaker in a divided Washington, while declaring Donald J. Trump a threat to American exceptionalism as a multicultural democracy.

On a glide path to what is expected to be an uneventful reelection in a blue state, Murphy told 1,400 delegates at the Democratic State Convention at Mohegan Sun in Uncasville to think broadly about what is at stake as Trump practices a polarizing brand of politics in trying to recapture the White House.

“Donald Trump wants to end our democracy as we know it,” Murphy said. “Even worse, he wants to convince Americans that our multiculturalism or inclusivity is a danger, not a defining strength of our nation. This isn’t overblown hyperbole, he’s got a detailed plan to destroy the rule of law and turn us against each other. We were born in this time, in this place to stop him.”

His 18-minute acceptance speech was an exercise in balance.

He was eager to attack the Republican presumptive presidential nominee, a defendant in a hush-money trial involving an alleged affair with a porn star, while aspiring to build on a new role as a Democrat who can do business with Republican senators on gun control and immigration reform..

“I know that it feels a little soul draining to live in a political moment where the news is filled with porn-star hush money and puppy assassinations,” Murphy said. “But I feel joyful every day because I have a job where I get to go to work every day engaged in the work of preserving and improving the greatest country that has ever existed. And part of the reason that I feel joy is because I have seen democracy work. I have seen President Joe Biden make it work.”

Under Biden, Congress passed a gun bill filed by Murphy that, while falling short of the universal background checks Connecticut requires, requires a stricter scrutiny of gun purchasers by young buyers, funds violence intervention programs, and makes straw purchases of firearms a federal offense.

Chris Murphy takes the stage on May 11 to accept his party’s nomination for a third term. Applauding behind him is U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal. Credit: Mark Pazniokas

Murphy praised the Democratic president for passing an infrastructure and climate bill that was beyond the reach of Trump. But he stepped lightly in addressing an international crisis that is causing domestic challenges for Biden and other Democrats.

The senator acknowledged both the horrors of the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel, as well the resulting Israeli attack on Gaza that has claimed more than 34,000 civilian lives, as well as those of terrorists.

“We are all still feeling the devastating pain of the attacks in Israel on October 7,” Murphy said. “But I fundamentally just do not believe that we have to make a choice between wanting accountability for those attacks and accepting thousands of innocent people having to die in Gaza as a consequence.”

The delegates gathered for a brisk three-hour convention applauded.

Gov. Ned Lamont, Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, state Sen. Mae Flexer and others addressed the convention, sounding themes certain to be played over the summer and fall, most notably the erosion of abortion rights by a Supreme Court dominated by Republican appointees.

U.S. Rep. Jahana Hayes, a Democrat who holds Murphy's old seat in the 5th Congressional District, was one of the featured speakers, a reflection of running in the most competitive district. Murphy expects to spend significant time in the district.

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, who was elected to Congress in 2006, the same year as Murphy, said the convention Saturday was the first Democratic nominating convention for U.S. Senate in his eastern Connecticut district.

Once the wunderkind of Connecticut politics, Murphy is standing for reelection as a 50-year-old, still the youngest member of the delegation. (Hayes is 51.)

His 12 years in the Senate is by far the longest stop in a peripatetic career: Elected to the state House at age 25, the state Senate at 29, the U.S. House at 33 and the U.S. Senate at 39. The junior senator has settled into middle age, albeit in a Senate where the median age is 65.

Four years ago, an admiring 10,000-word profile in Vox pronounced him "Senator of State, recounting his rise as a progressive voice in foreign policy and the significance of his time traveling with John McCain to Ukraine in defiance of Russia. It all but begged him to play the long game as a senator.

On Saturday, he sounded very much like a politician who has settled on a political home and role — the bipartisan dealmaker.

"That's a relatively new role for me, but one that I think I'm good at, and one that I hope to continue in my third term," Murphy told reporters before his acceptance speech.

Murphy brokered passage of the first significant gun safety law in 30 years and the crafting of a border security and immigration deal, only to see the latter undone in a Republican-controlled House at the insistence of Trump.

"I was proud to negotiate the immigration compromise, the most significant bipartisan border security bill in 40 years," Murphy said. "It didn't ultimately get across the finish line. But I hope to be somebody in my third term in the Senate that is looked upon as a dealmaker, as somebody who stands up for his convictions, but can find a unique way to bring Republicans and Democrats together."

On the convention stage, Murphy's new role was recognized by Blumenthal, the state's senior senator. "Chris Murphy gets things done," Blumenthal said, noting that the immigration bill was set for passage "if Donald Trump hadn't torpedoed it."

Murphy arrived early for the convention, an anachronism in an era of campaigns dominated by television, social media and micro-targeting. The conventions are reunions for the political, opportunities to network and catch up. Murphy happily mingled, posing with delegates for selfies.

"The Democratic Party is a community," Murphy said. "So part of this is just your friends, seeing friends, sharing ideas, recommitting ourselves to being Democrats and being vocal and active in an era where a lot of people are sitting on the sidelines."

It was not quite, however, a place where everyone knew his name.

He entered the exhibition hall in the vast casino complex unadorned by credentials around his neck, and a young woman employed by the casino challenged whether he was authorized to attend.

He smiled and assured her he would be welcomed.

CT forests taking more CO2 out of the air than residences produce

May 10, 2024

Jose Luis Martinez

While statewide greenhouse gas emissions were up in 2021 and 2022, slowing down the state's goal of reducing them by 2030, Mother Nature has been working to limit the amount of GHGs in the air.

Natural and working lands — forests, woods, grass, shrubs, crops, wetlands, rangelands and urban green spaces — removed a net 6.3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMT CO₂e) from the atmosphere in 2021. For comparison, residential and commercial GHG emission levels that year were 5.8 and 4 MMT CO₂e, respectively. The transportation sector was the largest sector in terms of emissions, according to federal data.

The natural and working lands sector does have its own emissions too, but it was minimal at just 0.1 MMT CO₂e. With the amount of carbon stored by forests and trees across the state at 6.445 MMT CO₂e, which could vary with deforestation or tree-planting, the net removal of CO₂ equivalent from these lands was 6.3 MMT.

Net removal levels from this sector in 2021 are up from a low of 5.9 MMT CO₂e decades ago, but they remain largely unchanged, according to a state report released last month.

It's the first time since 2009 that the state's Department of Energy & Environmental Protection included this "carbon sequestration" estimate from natural and working lands in its annual inventory of greenhouse gas emissions.

Data from this sector is not part of DEEP's findings regarding progress towards their 2030 goal. Instead, it's included as a first step in reporting this sector's data in their inventory as directed by a 2021 executive order from Gov. Ned Lamont. While DEEP is working on its own methodology to account for state carbon sequestration in future inventories, this year the estimate they included is based on data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which differs from the state inventory since they may use different accounting approaches, methods and data from states. The rest of the emissions data in the state report is based on the state's methodology.

Connecticut joins most states across the country in seeing a percent decrease in net total emissions after taking into account net CO₂ equivalent removal from the natural and working lands sector. At a 16% decrease, Connecticut ranks 15th nationally. Maine, Mississippi and Vermont took the top three spots, all experiencing decreases in net emissions higher than 70% when considering the net CO₂ equivalent removal from natural and working lands. Meanwhile, a handful of states saw an increase in their net total emissions. For example, Montana experienced a 19% increase due to its forests experiencing fires and decay, which have turned them from carbon sinks to net emitters of GHGs, according to Montana state documents.

CT passes K-12 education bills aimed at improving teaching environment

May 10, 2024

Jessika Harkay

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated several education issues that have plagued classrooms for years: a teaching shortage, student disciplinary issues and a lack of student engagement.

These issues have become top priorities for lawmakers in recent years, and educators hope the passage of two omnibus education bills through the state legislature will push schools a few steps closer to a more sustainable teaching environment.

“There’s many good things we’re doing here,” said Education Committee Ranking Member Sen. Eric Berthel, R-Watertown. “There’s a lot of good work from the Education Committee — a combination of bills that all had public hearings — and all had wide support out of the committee.”

House Bill 5436, an act concerning educator certification, teachers, paraeducators and mandated reporter requirements, and House Bill 5437, an act concerning education mandate relief, school discipline and disconnected youth, now head to Gov. Ned Lamont’s desk to be signed into law.

Both pieces of legislation passed through the senate without much opposition, with H.B. 5436 as part of a late night consent agenda, and the passage of H.B. 5437 coming after a 30-minute discussion and question-and-answer session between Berthel and committee co-chair Sen. Doug McCrory, D-Hartford. But regardless of these efforts, teachers across the state say bigger changes are yet to come.

“While the legislature took several small steps to improve the teaching profession, there was no bold action that will address the significant problems facing public education,” said Kate Dias, the president of the Connecticut Education Association, the largest teacher’s union in the state, adding that the legislature “refused to make the financial commitments needed to address the ongoing teacher shortage crisis and did nothing to improve recruitment or retention, increase starting salaries or acknowledge the pandemic sacrifices made by out teachers.”

Teacher certification, mandated reporting

House Bill 5436 garnered strong support throughout the 2024 legislative session, with several advocates saying changes to the teacher certification model were a long time coming. The process hasn’t been changed since 1998.

The bill not only simplifies the pathway toward professional status by eliminating a step in the existing three-tiered system but also makes it easier for educators to teach at different grade levels.

“This is a giant step in the right direction for modernizing our certification laws, breaking down barriers and recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce,” Education Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker said.

“This bill represents considerable consensus across varied stakeholder groups —including the CT Innovation Cohort, the Connecticut Educator Certification Council, state officials, district administrators, teachers, advocates, business leaders, and the higher education community — who have all come together to modernize our teacher pipeline for the benefit of Connecticut students,” said the New Teacher Track, a coalition of educators and advocacy groups.

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Currently, teachers must obtain their initial certification, which is valid for three years, then obtain a provisional certificate that's valid for eight years. Teachers can apply for their professional certificate after the provisional certificate and after "30 school months of successful appropriate experience in a Connecticut public or approved nonpublic school under the provisional educator certificate" and additional course requirements, according to the state Department of Education.

The new legislation extends the validation of an initial certificate to 10 years and would essentially remove the provisional certificate tier by July 2025, allowing a teacher to qualify for professional status after completing at least 50 school months of teaching, a teacher education and mentoring program and either hold a master's degree in the subject or completed an alternative pathway approved by the state.

An initial certificate can now be issued to anyone who successfully completed an educator preparation program approved by the state Board of Education, is an educator from another state and meets state requirements, or "presents a combination of education and experience that the state board determines is the equivalent of the education and experience required," according to language in the bill.

The legislation also has opened the door to make the pathway easier for school support staff and paraeducators to become certified teachers.

Rep. Jeff Currey, D-East Hartford, co-chair of the Education Committee, argued that streamlining the state's teacher certification system will help address shortfalls in the workforce following the COVID-19 pandemic as well fostering a more diverse pool of educators.

"I am glad my legislative colleagues unanimously recognized this need for simplification and increased accessibility to teacher certification — especially in the districts that would most benefit from it," Currey said in a written statement to The Connecticut Mirror.

Other changes in House Bill 5436 include an expansion to the grades that elementary school educators can teach, where instead of being limited to first through sixth grade, teachers can also educate children in pre-K and kindergarten. Educators with qualifications for seventh through 12th grade could also teach students as young as fourth grade under language in the bill.

To maintain these new standards and develop further improvements, the legislation also created the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board, which will "be responsible for modernizing and aligning educator preparation and certification to ensure that policies are optimized to attract and retain effective and diverse professionals for employment in the state's public schools."

The board will be made up of four public school teachers, three representatives from an educator preparation program approved by the state Board of Education, three local administrators, a representative from the Increasing Educator Diversity Policy Oversight Council and the education and early childhood commissioners.

The group will "have the authority to develop standards and proposals for regulations and legislation relating to educator preparation and certification," the bill said. "This board will bring the expertise of skilled and veteran educators, together with the State Board of Education, to continuously develop standards and proposals resulting in long-term, meaningful change," Russell-Tucker said. "HB 5436 gives us the path forward."

House Bill 5436 expanded the Aspiring Educators Diversity Scholarship Program in hopes of recruiting diverse students from alliance districts into the teaching profession.

Another proposal intended to recruit and retain more diverse educators would have raised the starting salaries to \$60,000 for educators and \$45,000 for paraeducators. Despite passing out of the Education Committee, the proposal ultimately died and was stripped from the final bill.

“With a growing state surplus, this was the perfect time to provide the funding and supports that would allow our education system and students to thrive,” Dias said. “Instead, the lack of action will continue to add to the dismantling of our public education system, promote dissatisfaction and further drive teachers out of the profession they love.”

The bill would also change mandated reporting requirements for teachers. Lawmakers said many teachers are calling the state’s Department of Children and Families to make reports out of fear of losing their jobs even if they are unsure rather than because they believe kids are being abused or neglected.

Educators place about 40% of calls to DCF’s Careline, and only a small percentage of those are substantiated reports, Currey said. The bill would add in “good faith” language to mandated reporter requirements, meaning that teachers will only have to call DCF if they believe there is abuse or neglect.

It also allows them to ask questions before calling DCF — for example, if a child comes to school with a bruised knee, the teacher can ask what happened. If the child says they fell off their bike, and the teacher believes them, they don’t have to report the incident.

School discipline

House Bill 5437 touched on several aspects of school safety and discipline, including decreasing the number of days a child can be suspended, developing standards in regards to school climate surveys and a section addressing and requiring new annual data on disconnected youth.

Effective this July, for young learners between kindergarten and second grade, out-of-school suspensions will be capped at five days, a decrease from current legislation that allows up to 10 days.

The bill changes existing language that describes a child’s behavior as “violent or sexual in nature that endangers persons” to “causes physical harm” and will furthermore require school administrations to provide K-2 students “trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate services that align with any behavioral intervention plan, individualized education program, or Section 504 plan when the student returns to school immediately after the suspension and consider whether to convene a planning and placement team meeting to evaluate whether the student may need special education or related services.”

This legislation also limits in-school suspensions to five days, instead of 10, for all students.

“I’ll just say from experience being an educator, when we do suspend a child ... many [of those] students need extra support. These children are the ones who need academic support more than any, and keeping them out of school for 10 days, we just felt that as just a little too much,” McCrory said. “We want to make sure the proper supports are in place for that child to be successful when they get back into our schools.”

House Bill 5437 also continues to build on work from last year regarding school climate standards and will require standards for a school climate survey and improvement plan.

“The Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative ... has numerous responsibilities related to fostering a positive school climate, including developing a statewide school climate survey and a model positive school climate policy,” the bill reads. “For the survey, the standards

must address collecting diversity, equity, and inclusion data and how to reduce disparities in data collection between school districts.”

The bill also builds on a report released last year that concluded that more than 63,000 young adults were disconnected and 56,000 students in Connecticut were at risk between 2021 and 2022.

The bill requires the Connecticut Preschool through Twenty and Workforce Information Network, also known as P20 WIN, “to develop a plan to establish a statewide data intermediary to provide technical support, create data-sharing agreements, and build and maintain the infrastructure needed to share data between nonprofit organizations serving disconnected youth.”

Currey pointed to the need for more statewide collaboration in creating greater need for youth engagement in schools.

“HB 5436 and HB 5437 are positive public policy steps toward that increased engagement,” Currey said.

CT News Junkie

New England Utilities Plan ‘Transformational’ Data Platform To Make It Easier To Calculate Energy Savings

May 13, 2024

Annie Ropeik for Energy News Network

A group of New England utilities plans to seek federal funding for a regional energy data platform that would make it easier for consumers and contractors to estimate potential savings from efficiency upgrades or new electric technologies.

Clean energy advocates see this kind of service as key to supporting the rollout of Inflation Reduction Act rebates and, more broadly, to controlling costs and demand on a lower-carbon power grid.

Energy providers Unitil, Eversource, and Liberty Utilities are working with several subsidiaries and state groups and agencies to propose the new data platform to the U.S. Department of Energy’s Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) grant program, created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Their \$29 million data hub concept, with half the funding requested from the Department of Energy, builds off a similar state-level platform that’s been in the works in New Hampshire since 2019. Proponents say federal funding is needed in part to encourage that state’s regulators to give final approval for the project.

Launched over the next four years, the regional data hub would provide standardized access to “very minute usage information” for millions of gas and electric customers and third-party service providers in New Hampshire, Connecticut, Maine, and Massachusetts, according to Unitil.

“With this data more readily available, customers could better understand their energy consumption, which would help them make decisions about energy conservation steps they may want to take at home or in the workplace,” Unitil said in a statement. “For instance, the information could be used to obtain a

price quote from a rooftop solar provider, a competitive supplier to receive a price estimate, or a storage provider to determine the appropriate size of behind-the-meter battery storage.”

‘An Incredibly Silly Manual Process’

Multi-utility data platforms currently exist in Texas and New York, both states with unified electric grids, proponents said — but in New England and many other places, customers’ data access is inconsistent.

In a concept paper on their data hub proposal filed with the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission earlier this year, the Northeast utilities say costs for efficiency projects and clean energy upgrades, known as distributed energy resources or DERs, can be inflated by the “idiosyncratic processes” and “bespoke electronic interfaces” needed to work with each customer’s data.

“Today, DER providers pay as much as \$300,000 annually for screen-scraping programs to extract customer electric data from bill PDFs, while others install monitoring packages with their solar and storage applications that are functionally duplicative of the utility’s advanced meters, driving up costs by \$15,000 or more per installation,” the proposal says.

To estimate cost savings in a quote for rooftop solar, for example, a homeowner may have to provide a year’s worth of paper or electronic bills for their prospective installer to compile and analyze by hand — an “incredibly silly manual process,” said Sam Evans-Brown, the executive director of Clean Energy New Hampshire, a nonprofit that’s participating in the regional data hub proposal.

“And that’s just the single homeowner level — think about a multi-family housing project, where you have forty, fifty, a hundred units, each with their own electric bill,” he said. “It’s just a total nightmare.” An automated system would access customers’ data on demand in a standardized format and could spit out expected project savings at essentially the push of a button, he said. Contractors he’s spoken with, he said, call this approach “transformational for the way that we interact with customers.”

The data hub could also support energy dashboards, especially for environmental justice areas, to help visualize progress toward climate targets with a goal of “reducing the energy burden for historically disadvantaged communities,” said Eversource spokesperson Sarah Paduano in a statement.

“By breaking down the walls of historically utility-housed and owned data, Unitol believes this would remove a significant barrier for a variety of stakeholders that would be able to leverage the data in a meaningful way and towards advancing an equitable clean energy transition,” Unitol’s statement said.

Data For A More Responsive Grid

Estimated savings from individual energy projects aren’t just nice to have, said Michael Murray, president of Mission Data Coalition, another nonprofit working on the hub project — they are often required. Certain Inflation Reduction Act rebates are only offered to projects that can prove at least a 20% energy savings.

“The legislation was really intended to be the first sort of fusion between making an efficiency project a smart grid asset,” Murray said. “It’s no longer just, ‘efficiency is in its own silo and all you care about is annual energy savings.’ The question is, how does it become interactive and part of a ‘virtual power plant’ kind of concept?”

Better data on individual projects could help customers access savings from new rate designs that incentivize less usage at times of peak demand, the proposal says, improving resilience and lowering costs on a more variable, renewables-powered grid.

“Energy data is increasingly going to become the currency of a modern grid,” said Evans-Brown. “It’s really difficult to manage our peaks if you have no idea where they’re coming from, like what’s causing them all the way down to the consumer level.”

Without standardized, streamlined access to energy data, Murray said, contractors trying to work with IRA rebates in states that choose to offer them will face a costly and time-consuming burden of iterating individualized manual processes thousands of times.

“(The IRA) is going to touch millions of American homes. Each one of these is multiple data requests and processing. And so we need to figure out a way to do it in a streamlined way,” he said. Otherwise, “all that federal money gets drained into stupid overhead as opposed to actually delivering value for people.”

Not every New England state or utility is participating in the grant proposal. Connecticut-based Avangrid, with subsidiaries like Central Maine Power or CMP, is one that declined to join.

CMP received a \$30 million GRIP grant in the program’s first round last year for technology to reduce the frequency and impact of power outages, and plans to seek additional GRIP funding on its own this year.

“Our decision for round two was to focus on reliability and load capacity grid improvement projects in Maine, particularly those that impact disadvantaged communities,” said spokesperson Jon Breed in a statement. “We are aware of the concept of the Regional Joint Utility Energy Data Hub and will be monitoring the performance of the program if it receives funding.”

For Murray, the long-term goal is a data platform that covers the entire territory of ISO-New England, the six states’ regional grid manager. He said utilities — and their customers — that don’t get on board, if the project moves forward, could risk becoming siloed and left behind in older systems.

“The whole industry is moving towards an automated system, which New Hampshire is building,” he said. “That’s where we ultimately need to go.”

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Turning Food Waste Into Renewable Energy And More

May 13, 2024
Brian Scott-Smith

THOMPSON, CT – The New London County Farm Bureau is spearheading a renewable energy campaign to convince the state of Connecticut to look at on-farm anaerobic digesters as a way to convert food waste into energy, as well as other benefits for the state’s farmers and the environment.

Farm Bureau member Kevin Blacker said the state has a costly problem on its hands – thousands of tons of food waste are generated every year in Connecticut, and it's not being put to good use.

“The incinerator in Hartford was shut down,” Blacker said. “Disposing of garbage is going to become very expensive. But removing food waste is a way to reduce that cost. And that food waste can then be sent to these on-farm anaerobic digesters where it provides a host of benefits to farms.”

Blacker says some of the benefits are the farm can create its own fertilizer.

Engine house at Fort Hil Farms

“So that reduces the farm's fertilizer bill,” Blacker said. “It's an additional revenue stream because farms are able to charge a tipping fee for waste brought to them and giving them additional income. And there's also two other byproducts of this process. One is inexpensive electricity, which makes the farm more competitive, because they get this real inexpensive electricity. And there's a byproduct of heat, which they can use to heat buildings.”

It's a situation that isn't lost on Dave Aldrich, Head of Southeastern Connecticut Regional Resources Recovery Authority (SCRRA). The authority manages the waste and recycling for 12 municipalities in New London County, covering around 250,000 people.

“We generate about 130 to 135,000 tons of municipal solid waste every year,” Aldrich said. “We estimate that probably 25% of that is, food waste.”

Aldrich said because the state decided to close all municipal landfills for environmental reasons 30 years ago, Connecticut has been shipping around 850,000 tons of waste out of state annually, and the cost continues to rise.

Touring Fort Hill Farms

Business leaders and officials from local and state agencies listen as they tour Fort Hill Farms in Thompson to get a look at the anaerobic digester. Credit: Brian Scott-Smith / CTNewsJunkie
He says they're also looking at other ways to deal with food waste – like large scale composting in the region – but sees the benefits of having additional digesters on farms as well, as there is no single solution that will be able to deal with all the waste the state is producing.

Kies LaVack and her husband, Jared, own Fort Hill Farms in Thompson, in the northeastern corner of the state, and together with a company called Ag-Grid have the state's first anaerobic digester on their farm. The digester is creating heat and electricity from cow manure produced by their dairy herd, as well as liquid waste that is being brought to the farm from local haulers.

LaVack and her husband decided to try the digester after they heard about Ag-Grid's other projects in the US and the company was looking for a smaller scale farm to test its technology.

Cows eating hay

Cows at Fort Hill Farms in Thompson supply the manure that powers the anaerobic digester, creating methane for energy, heat, and other byproducts. Credit: Brian Scott-Smith / CTNewsJunkie
Ag-Grid Founder and CEO Rashi Akki admits the technology they are using isn't new.

“So it's not like we were pioneers. I mean, this is an age-old technology. There is nothing new about it,” Akki said. “It's just that it takes a lot of dollars to get to that business model where we could actually fund it.”

Akki says the cost of a digester starts around \$5 million, but she says the long-term benefits are the savings it creates for the farmer as well as the community.

“What you see here is sort of like an integrated system where cows eat their food, they poop. We take their poop, and we take everybody’s waste from within 25 to 30 to 40 miles around here,” Akki said. “We blend it together. We produce methane, the gas side, and that methane produces energy. And the liquid side, we then apply it onto the land because we are still capturing all that nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus.”

Akki explains the energy production side to the process is the extra benefit, as even the small system on the LaVack’s farm is producing half a megawatt of electricity every hour from the digester process, more than the farm needs, which means they are selling the excess energy to the local energy provider, which makes money for the farm but also provides consistent energy to the local grid.

Engine house at Fort Hil Farms

In a year, the digester produces enough energy to power around 500 homes and Akki says their system is creating energy all the time.

“When we talk about how can we get renewable energy we need to have multiple places producing energy, and solar and wind are good, but this is 24/7,” Akki said. “Cows poop all day long and food waste goes into it. This produces electricity.”

Solar and wind are dependent on the elements, meaning they fluctuate in their energy production, which in turn means energy transmission and distribution companies have to build extra redundancy into their systems to compensate for when solar and wind generate less electricity. Akki says this is something their system doesn’t suffer from.

Although the digester’s pricetag isn’t cheap, the technology, says Akki, shows that by scaling up it becomes more affordable and unlike other renewable energies has multiple benefits. Akki says the digester systems can take all types of solid waste once they’re set up, it’s just a case of getting the waste to the various locations.

Blacker and Akki say that’s where they need help from the state of Connecticut. They are hoping that that residential and commercial food waste will be sent to these types of projects and others, instead of out of state, so that the state’s waste can work for us instead of against us.

Waterbury Republican

Legislative standoff looms over hospital oversight reforms in Connecticut

BY PAUL HUGHES REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN May 12, 2024

HARTFORD — A showdown over hospital oversight reforms is looming between state legislators, Gov. Ned Lamont and the hospital industry.

Ambitious and robust reform agendas that legislators and Lamont pursued largely faltered in the legislative session that concluded Wednesday. Legislation that passed mostly proposed more reporting requirements and added some more financial oversight.

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Top state lawmakers in both parties said after the disappointing outcomes of the 2024 session that the General Assembly needs to take over the lead on regulatory reform because the executive branch and the hospital industry are frustrating progress on needed and meaningful changes.

Some of the bigger reform proposals that failed sought to overhaul and expedite the approval process for changes in hospital ownership and services, regulate private equity ownership of hospitals, and increase the state Office of Health Strategy's authority to monitor and control the cost of health care delivery through state-set benchmarks and other means.

Reflecting on the modest legislative accomplishments and notable defeats, Lamont attributed the tempering of hospital oversight reforms to the lobbying clout of the hospital industry.

“My thoughts are that hospitals are quite influential within the halls of the state Capitol,” he said.

But the Connecticut Hospital Association, while highlighting the defeat of bills the industry opposed as bad for health care providers and patients for its members, also pointed to a few disappointments for hospitals.

One of the chief ones was the failure of legislation revamping and expediting Certificate of Need program for approving transfers of ownership and certain other major changes that health providers propose, including adding or discontinuing medical services.

The hospital industry has long complained the CON process takes too long. The industry lobbied this year to set hard deadlines and mandate default approvals for missing them.

Some of the failed proposed reforms were born out of frustrations over the 16-month review to approve Yale New Haven Health's proposed acquisition of Waterbury Hospital, Manchester Memorial Hospital and Rockville General Hospital in Vernon from Prospect Medical Holdings Inc. The \$435 million sale is now in jeopardy after Yale sued Prospect 10 weeks after receiving its long-awaited state approval seeking to get out of the deal or renegotiate.

House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, said on the legislative session's final day that legislators need to assemble a reform agenda independent from the executive branch and the hospital industry.

“It will need to be legislatively led because there is just a lack of trust perhaps in the executive branch and the CHA and the hospitals,” he said. “Sometimes the executive branch is good leading on an issue and kind of riding for us giving expertise from different departments. I think this one has to be legislatively led.”

House Minority Leader Vincent J. Candelora, R-North Branford, said he sees no alternative. He said he has no confidence in the Office of Health Strategy and its executive director, Dr. Deidre S. Gifford.

“I think we have a real problem with the Office of Health Strategy, quite honestly,” he said.

Lamont said Gifford continues to have his full confidence and support.

“Let me just say that Deidre Gifford is an incredibly important asset for us,” he said.

Ritter said the relationship between the legislature and the Office of Health Strategy is strained. He also said legislators are getting mixed messages from state regulators and the hospital industry.

“I can just tell you every meeting I have with a hospital, and you meet with all of them, forget CHA, just the individual hospitals, it starts with we disagree with OHS, and you meet with OHS and they say it is not a big deal, and that has been the last two years,” he said.

Ritter said Democratic and Republican leaders of the Public Health Committee need to take the rest of the year to craft a reform package for the 2025 legislative session apart from the executive branch and the hospital industry.

“That is not picking on people. There is just not a good relationship now,” he said.

Lamont said he believes his administration has re-established and maintained good relations with the hospital industry after the confrontations during the preceding administration of Gov. Dannel P. Malloy. But there remain differences and conflicting agendas, as the 2024 legislative session demonstrated.

A newly elected Lamont and the Connecticut Hospital Association negotiated a seven-year agreement in 2019 to settle to \$4 billion in potential legal claims over a tax on hospitals that was part of a complicated plan to secure more federal Medicaid reimbursement funds for the state and the hospitals. .

“Hey, I came in the office the hospitals and the state government weren’t even talking to each other. All they were doing was suing each other. We got that behind us,” Lamont said. “We worked together hand-in-glove during COVID. We work together pretty closely now. That means sometimes we disagree. I have different responsibilities.”

The CHA said the industry group has worked well with the governor and legislature on complex and challenging issues, and hospitals are eager to continue the collaboration.

Tick and mosquito populations surge in Connecticut, heightening disease risk

BY BRIGITTE RUTHMAN REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN May 12, 2024 160 0

This undated file photo provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows a blacklegged tick, also known as a deer tick, a carrier of Lyme disease. They’re crawling and flying on the heels of a relatively mild winter and a wet spring – a plentiful crop of ticks and mosquitoes carrying a growing list of diseases that put humans and animals at risk.

And even though malaria isn’t yet included, scientists now say the warming climate is an invitation.

Expect to do battle with pin-head size ticks adept at hiding in pet and human hair, clothing and skin folds in search of a blood feast during each phase of a year’s life cycle from larvae to nymph and adult.

Three species of ticks carry Lyme disease, Babesia, Ehrlichiosis, Anaplasmosis, tularemia and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

“Expect one of the highest if not the highest year in recent history for tick activity,” said Goudarz Molaei, a research scientist who has been studying tick and mosquito vectors of human pathogens at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven. “If you look at the previous years of high tick populations in 2021 and 2017, they were also associated with mild weather without the sub zero temperatures that can put a dent in the population.”

Lately, and as evidenced by submissions to the state's Active Tick Surveillance Program, the creepy crawlers have been active year round without going dormant, Molaei said

According to data collected by the state's Department of Public Health, the incidence of Lyme disease is declining, but Molaei believes that numbers may just be a reflection of the irregularity in reporting. Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne disease contracted during the months of June, July and August while ticks are in the nymph stage. Nearly half a million Americans contract it annually and the number is rising, according to the CDC.

"We are seeing more ticks and more ticks carrying diseases but a decline in tick submissions for testing suggests a desensitization to Lyme disease," Molaei said.

The increasing number of ticks is also linked to an increase in the small rodent population that hosts a first blood meal and exposure to diseases. Rodents like mice have fed well on two years of good acorn and hickory crops.

Mosquito borne malaria, confirmed last year in Maryland and also found in Florida and Washington, D.C., are spread by infected mosquitoes that have bitten a human carrying the malaria parasite. Flu like symptoms occur 7-30 days following exposure.

"It can happen if someone has been overseas and returns carrying the malaria parasite," Molaei said. "When that person is bitten the mosquito then transmits it biting others."

The potential then exists for widespread illness as the frequency of local transmissions increase, a situation not experienced here in decades.

"It has already happened in Maryland, Florida, Texas, Arkansas and Washington, D.C." Molaei said.

So far, all of the malaria cases detected in Connecticut were determined to have been contracted overseas.

No human cases of West Nile virus, the most common mosquito-borne disease, have been reported yet this year. Since 2000, 184 cases have been reported including four fatalities. Last summer the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station detected the virus in 25 towns.

The best remedy, Molaei said, is awareness and preventive measures such as tucking in clothing in tall grass and forest edges where ticks lurk. Quick removal of an attached tick significantly lessens the risk of disease infection. Sprays containing the chemical DEET remains the most effective repellent.

Hearst CT Media

CT lawmakers made some changes after Bridgeport absentee controversy. Other reforms were ignored

By JOHN MORITZ

HARTFORD — Just months after a mayoral election in Bridgeport became fodder for a [national debate over election security](#), Connecticut lawmakers on Wednesday gave final passage to a series of reforms intended to clean up some of the worst abuses that have been alleged in recent political campaigns.

Some skeptics, however, say the changes do not go far enough.

The bipartisan legislation, [H.B. 5498](#), included a slew of provisions bolstering election security, including a shorter time period for campaigns to make mass requests for absentee ballot applications and mandatory video surveillance of drop boxes. Additionally, it aims to expedite referrals of suspected instances of fraud to prosecutors, along with other technical changes to the ways of casting and counting ballots.

The bill passed both chambers without a single dissenting vote on its way to Gov. Ned Lamont, a Democrat who is expected to sign it.

In the final days of the legislative session, however, Republicans lamented the lack of movement on more aggressive measures that they argued were necessary to stop the recurring issues that have dogged elections in Bridgeport.

Their proposals included a bill to impose a mandatory minimum one-year jail sentence for election crimes that was [spiked by Democrats](#) in the Judiciary Committee last week, as well as repeated calls to end campaigns' ability to "harvest" ballots by mailing voters unsolicited ballot applications, and then keeping track of which voters turn them in.

Beyond policy changes, lawmakers declined to send more money to bolster the staff at the State Elections Enforcement Commission, which has [struggled to manage its current caseload](#), according to executive director Michael J. Brandi.

"There are always groups of folks who are happy with what we have done, and then there are folks who are like we could have done more," said House Majority Leader Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford. "I think we know that because we are forced to compromise on things all the time."

The push to address election security this year began following an incident last September in which a Bridgeport city employee and supporter of Mayor Joe Ganim [was filmed](#) appearing to illegally stuff ballots into an election drop box. As a result of the ensuing scandal and a related lawsuit, Ganim's narrow primary victory over challenger John Gomes was thrown out in court, resulting in a do-over election that Ganim [ultimately won in February](#).

It was hardly the first time that an election in Bridgeport was plagued with absentee ballot fraud. Similar allegations involving supporters of Ganim's 2019 mayoral campaign resulted in a [referral to prosecutors last August](#), though no charges have been filed.

Ganim has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing or knowledge of his supporter's actions. In response to the September video, he called for lawmakers to [completely ban the use of ballot drop boxes](#) — a suggestion that also went unheeded by Democrats.

"We still do not have any significant changes in policy in this state regardless of all the news coverage and the attention surrounding the Bridgeport fiasco," said state Sen. Rob Sampson, R-Wolcott, a top Republican on the legislative committee with oversight of elections law.

As Democrats rushed to push the election security bill through the Senate ahead of Wednesday night's deadline, Sampson delayed the process with a series of five amendments to resurrect the proposed mandatory one-year jail sentences for election crimes, end the unsolicited mailing of ballot applications, increase post-election audits and require signature verification and photo IDs for absentee ballots.

Democrats beat back each of the amendments in quick succession.

Speaking to reporters the following morning, Gov. Lamont said he was satisfied with the efforts by the legislature to respond to the Bridgeport scandal. Lamont was also dismissive of requests for additional staff and resources at SEEC, saying the commission needs to adjust its approach to investigating fraud. "They bring a lot of charges for people who don't have a receipt for a ham sandwich," Lamont said. "I'd like them to pay special attention to big issues, and I think Bridgeport is at the top of my list."

A spokesman for SEEC did not respond to requests for comment on Thursday.

In testimony submitted to lawmakers earlier this year, Brandi, the commission's director, was broadly supportive of the reforms proposed by Democratic lawmakers, in addition to the mandatory minimum sentences proposed by Republicans.

Brandi also came out in support of [a bill](#) that would have moved campaign finance reports for municipal officials onto an online filing system operated by SEEC, however the legislation faced some Republican opposition and ultimately died in the House.

CT bill to ban Chinese and Russian-made drones crashed in the final hours of the legislative session

By KEN DIXON

HARTFORD — As the hours dwindled on the last day of the General Assembly's short session Wednesday night, a [bill to ban Chinese](#) and Russian-made drones crashed and burned. In its death spiral, it took with it a variety of accompanying legislation, including provisions that [state businesses](#) opposed, lawmakers said.

The legislation, with the title Senate Bill 3 indicating it was a priority to Democrats, was approved in the Senate on May 3 in a 26-10 vote, with two Republicans joining the 24-member Democratic majority. But it hit the House floor very late on the last day of the 13-week legislative session, when any slowdown could result in a bill being pulled off the floor in order to open up debate for other pressing pieces of legislation.

After more than two hours of debate, during which Republicans asked first that the bill get referred to the Energy & Technology Committee before offering an amendment to strike sections on consumer price disclosures, digital security measures and penalties under the state's unfair trade practices law, House Majority Leader Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, stood and ordered that the bill be "passed temporarily," which on the last night of the legislative session, spelled doom for the proposal.

"Originally, S.B. 3 was a terrible bill in committee and the redrafting didn't make it better," state Rep. David Rutigliano of Trumbull, a ranking Republican on the General Law Committee, recalled on Friday. The bill was proposed on the house floor by state Rep. Mike D'Agostino, D-Hamden, co-chairman of the committee, who stressed at the start of the debate that the proposal had been radically redrafted since the start of the session in February. "It's really been watered-down," D'Agostino told the House chamber Wednesday night.

The bill, which contained items under the purview of the Department of Consumer Protection, would have created a study of current [internet neutrality](#) to provide consistent consumer rates and mandatory fee disclosures, including total prices. "I think we can all get behind the idea that when a consumer is offered a price it should be the full price that they expect to pay," D'Agostino said.

In the middle of the debate, Rutigliano noticed that the eventual study would be forwarded to the legislative Energy Committee and he made a motion to immediately send the bill there because that committee had not yet reviewed it. A roll call vote went against Republicans and the debate continued. After huddles among legislative leaders and committee chairmen, including Speaker of the House Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, the debate went ahead, briefly, until Rojas grounded the bill.

State Rep. Steve Stafstrom, D-Bridgeport, who joined in the debate on the Republican amendment as the co-chairman of the law-writing Judiciary Committee on Friday morning said that the legislation was a priority for Senate Democrats. "The Republicans were clearly filibustering it and we were trying to find a path for the bill because I thought it would do important things," Stafstrom said. "It kind of freaks me out that drones, essentially made by Chinese military contractors, are being used by police in Connecticut."

The sections of the bill on drone sales would've put time limits on the purchase of Chinese- or Russian-made drones by cities and towns, in line with the state Department of Emergency Services and Public

Protection's plans to stop buying them by Oct. 1 of this year. The bill included a \$3 million pool of grant money to help towns and cities purchase new compliant drones after the statewide ban would've taken effect on Oct. 1, 2025. Existing drones could be used until October 2027 under the bill, and afterwards municipalities could have still retained them until 2034, after communicating with DESPP.

Police and fire officials from throughout the state had been wary of the bill, because of the lack of drone manufacturers outside of the Russian Federation and China.

"Keep in mind, alright, that our government has already said that the manufacture of these drones — the people that your police departments are buying them from — is an arm of the Chinese military,"

D'Agostino said. "We're not just talking about the pictures that these drones take. We're talking about these things are plugged into your docking stations, plugged into your (police departments), infrastructure and computer systems," said D'Agostino. [Two towns in rural](#) Texas were recently hacked by suspected Russian agents, and proponents worry that even more could be targeted as a result of municipal drones.

Another section of the failed bill would have required dealers in cameras and computers to provide opt-outs for provisions that consumer photos might be shared, something that D'Agostino said is already occurring. Another piece of the bill would be a "right to repair" instructions to consumers who request them. Companies could also be protected from releasing trade secrets, and a final section would've required towns and cities to have ".gov" at the end of their website addresses by 2026.

Stafstrom noted that during the last few days of a legislative session, particularly when bills that passed in one chamber await action in another, leaders have to make priorities and watch the clock as midnight on the last night inches closer. "I have several Judiciary Committee bills that died (Wednesday) including the legislation on [State Police data](#) collection and [street takeovers that](#) did not get through the Senate," Stafstrom said. "Any time at the end of a legislative session, it gets frantic."

Rutigliano said Friday that opposition to the bill remained from big corporations, including ESPN and Apple. "The sections on junk fees was not clear," he said of the language in the bill. "If it was well-drafted we could have done it weeks ago. They knew they had problems with the bill. We'll revisit it again next year, but it was turned into a monster."

Lottery for CT e-bike program being considered to help with flood of applications

By ALEXANDER SOULE

Even in the hills north of Stamford, Julie Gabay knows not every rider needs the extra kick today's electric bikes provide on steeper inclines. And the Pacific Cycling & Triathlon owner notes plenty of local riders do not require [any extra monetary oomph to handle the steeper prices](#) for many e-bike models.

But with a new package of state e-bike incentives in the works as riding season arrives in Connecticut, Gabay is the first to say the state needs to do a better job of [enrolling dealers and applicants in the program](#). And it remains an open question whether some would-be buyers are delaying purchases in the hopes of hitting the jackpot that resulted in nearly 80 people getting a free e-bike last year, with their vouchers covering the full cost of the models they purchased.

Connecticut awarded nearly 470 vouchers last summer [toward the purchase of e-bikes](#), under the [Connecticut Electric Bicycle Incentive Program](#). Earlier this year, the governing board for the Connecticut Hydrogen and Electric Automobile Purchase Rebate program indicated it could switch to a lottery system for a follow-up incentive program this year.

In meeting materials, the board acknowledged the program's first-come, first-served design posed a "problem" as nearly 6,400 residents applied for incentive vouchers set at either \$500 or \$1,500 toward the purchase of eligible models priced below \$3,000. The amount of the vouchers was dependent on the resident's annual income.

On average, buyers paid \$250 out of pocket for a new e-bike. About one of every 10 vouchers were never redeemed by applicants, leaving the board to consider how to carry those funds over into this year's purchase window.

The state created the Connecticut Electric Bicycle Incentive Program both as a way to reduce vehicular pollution — voucher recipients had to commit to using e-bikes in place of their cars for commuting or errands — and to help people who might not be able to afford e-bikes otherwise. A quarter of those approved for vouchers reported income of at least \$100,000 a year, but qualified for the program because they lived in "environmental justice" communities where highways or power plants have resulted in higher levels of pollution, or who live in neighborhoods labeled as "distressed" economically. Incentive programs have for the most part been runaway hits in the states and cities where they have been offered, including in Rhode Island which paused its application intake process last month after funds were exhausted for a rebate program, while promising to open up the application window anew by June.

Connecticut Electric Bicycle Incentive Program beneficiaries reported using their bikes in place of cars for nearly 54,000 miles in the aggregate, with three of every four saying they used their bikes for errands, and close to half for commuting. More than half of respondents indicated they would not have purchased an e-bike last year without the incentives, according to a survey by the California-based Center for Sustainable Energy, which administered the program on an outsourced basis.

The survey did not include the thousands of people who did not receive vouchers. Some who applied last year for Connecticut vouchers expressed confusion over the process in social media posts, with bike shops likewise having difficulty trying to figure things out on the fly.

For her part, Pacific Cycling & Triathlon co-owner Julie Gabay said the incentive program is a great idea in concept, but was a "debacle" in practice in the first go-around, with too small a window for people to apply and many of the better e-bike models not included in the program. A number of bike industry stalwarts never applied for inclusion on the list, including legendary brand Cannondale based in Wilton under parent company Pon Holdings.

"They never reached out to us, in the beginning," Gabay said. "If you're going to have an e-bike program, then reach out out to e-bike dealers — especially the people that make them."

Other dealers cited a "rush of vouchers" as a challenge to inventories and company cash flow. In a November forum to collect feedback on the program, they asked the state to create a dedicated hotline for assistance with any issues. But they expressed satisfaction with payment timelines otherwise, and cited the preference for June or July as the best window to run the program.

CHEAPR's board and the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection have yet to give any public indication of timing for this year's program, but has indicated it is again considering a 10-day window for people to apply.

"The demand for program funds exceeded the initial e-bike program budget that DEEP identified, so we increased the first year of funding from \$500,000 to \$750,000 to respond to the exceptional demand," DEEP spokesperson Paul Copleman said. "We're now working to improve the structure of the vouchers to better achieve the program's equity and environmental justice goals. We're aiming to roll out the vouchers sometime this year."

Last year, no manufacturer benefited more than Aventon, whose dealers sold nearly 300 e-bikes under the program, a third of them being its "Level.2 Commuter Bike" models that were listed this week for just under \$1,700 on the Brea, Calif.-based company's website. Aventon lists 10 Connecticut dealers including The Cutting Edge in Berlin, which led all dealers statewide for bikes sold under the 2023 incentive program.

In a petition last year by a coalition of urban mobility and environmental advocates including the New Haven Coalition for Active Transportation, suggestions included increasing the price cap on qualifying models to \$5,000, and lowering the incentive to \$400 or \$1,200 to allow more people to benefit. The petition also asked for low-income households to be at the front of the line for any incentives.

Multiple state legislatures are considering new e-bike incentives, including the New York State Assembly whose bill would offer an "instant rebate" of half off for e-bike purchases, priced at \$2,200 or

less. In April, Colorado became the first state to receive an instant tax credit toward the purchase, though retailers have to enroll for their bikes to be eligible under the program.

And under the proposed Electric Bicycle Incentive Kickstart for the Environment Act, the federal government would offer a 30-percent tax credit of up to \$1,500 on the purchase of new e-bikes.

With or without the incentives, e-bikes have juiced sales for bike shops. In Stamford, Pacific Cycling & Triathlon sold 18 e-bikes in one fell swoop last year to a Greenwich company that planned to gift them to employees. At [a new parking garage for the Stewart B. McKinney Transportation Center](#) in downtown Stamford, the Connecticut Department of Transportation included 50 charging stations for e-bikes.

Among the newest e-bikes in Gabay's showroom is the Globe Haul model by Specialized, far heavier than a standard bike and with smaller wheels but packing big enough muscle to haul a trailer. The price is well above last year's incentive cap, as the case with many similarly designed "cargo bikes" that have been hot commodities the past several years for those who pedal to work.

"That thing's a tank," Gabay said. "It's a perfect commuter bike."

CT preschools face long wait lists, staffing, curriculum changes to handle new kindergarten cutoff

By JESSICA SIMMS

Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer's daughter turns 5 on Sept. 18, so she will just miss [the new age cutoff](#) — Sept. 1 — to be able to enter kindergarten next school year.

Originally, [Connecticut's age cutoff was Jan. 1](#), so kids who turned 5 by that date could enter kindergarten even at the age of 4.

Meyer, director of the medical-legal partnership at Yale Child Study Center, said to enroll her daughter into kindergarten, she would have to submit a waiver to her school district, which is something she personally chose not to do. Instead, she's opting for another year of preschool.

Meyer isn't alone.

With only a year to implement the cutoff change, parents have been scrambling to find preschools for kids who would have been eligible for kindergarten come September — and the money to pay for it.

And popular preschools that routinely had waitlists need to make choices about youngsters already in their classes versus opening up spots for their siblings or new families.

And preschools already struggling with staffing shortages are in competition for teachers while trying to expand to fill a need that may only last a year.

While Meyer's suggested solution of holding off the change for a year — "Give the child care settings some time to regroup and get their staffing together, which we know is at an insane shortage. Give them some time to get it together" — isn't possible, parents and preschools are doing their best to deal with reality.

Meyer, for instance, immediately started searching for a new preschool that had open spaces for next school year.

"She was not on any preschool list for a couple of weeks until I could try to figure it out," Meyer said.

"We already missed the deadline for her own preschool. So this is what people are facing."

Already spiking

Some Connecticut preschool leaders said enrollment at their programs is already spiking for next school year, a similar situation [Connecticut private schools are facing](#).

Chelsea Dianis, enrollment manager and co-owner of Little Friends in Greenwich, said the kindergarten age cutoff has "restructured our entire classroom roster for next year."

"It definitely gave us less space to offer families on our waitlist for sure," she added. Right now, Dianis said Little Friends has a waitlist of close to 400 families for an average wait of about two years.

"It's definitely gone up," Dianis said. "Typically for the last five years, we have had a waitlist of at least a year."

Maryashie Deren, executive director of Chabad Gan of Greenwich Preschool, said she is actively looking for ways to accommodate more students, partially because more young families are showing interest in sending their child to her school but partially because the new kindergarten age cutoff is impacting how many kids will be able to move on to kindergarten next school year.

"In general, we see an incredible influx of young families in our preschool," Deren said. "And our toddlers, 2s, 3s and pre-K all have a waiting list for September.

"We're working with the town on how to expand our program even for this September so that we can take the children that are on the waiting list because they have family, friends who come to our school," Deren said. "So they really appreciate our curriculum."

For some families, the minute their child is able to enter the public school system "is the light at the end of the tunnel in terms of the amount of money that they're paying to send their child to preschool or to a daycare center," said Charlie Malone, executive director of Leila Day Nurseries in New Haven.

Malone said he knows of two families at Leila Day who are affected by the new kindergarten age cutoff; their child was originally going to be eligible to enter kindergarten with the Jan. 1 cutoff but now their child will be too young.

The solution may be to keep the children in the school, he said. Leila Day has a kindergarten program and the two families were offered a spot in their kindergarten class.

Malone said he anticipates "more people will be wanting to or needing or having to send their child who is not 5 by Sept. 1 to our Leila Day kindergarten."

But since some parents may be looking for a way to be continue with their initial plans of sending their kid to public school next school year, Malone said he let the families know that most districts are offering a waiver option — something he said has been confusing parents, since each district has its own policies about letting near-5-year-olds into kindergarten under a waiver.

And expanding Leila Day's programs comes with a cost, which somebody has to bear.

Much of the funding for Leila Day comes through the School Readiness Preschool Grant Program, which "funds spaces for children ages 3, 4 and 5 who aren't yet eligible for kindergarten," [according to the program's website](#).

To qualify, at least 60 percent of the children enrolled must be at or below 75 percent of the state median income, the website states.

"We need to be able to get that School Readiness funding for those kids and we're not in an ideal position to ask for that given that our timeline to ask for that funding doesn't correspond with the New Haven Public Schools' timeline when they make their decisions about who's going to get in (to kindergarten) and who won't," Malone said.

'It's about kindergarten readiness'

At Little Friends, Dianis said the staff suggests children who have later birthdays to "red shirt" — postpone entering kindergarten until the year after the child is age-eligible.

"It's about kindergarten readiness and social and emotional maturity," Dianis said.

Dianis said about 10 families at Little Friends were affected by the new kindergarten age cutoff. Out of the 10 families, Dianis said one family is choosing to send their child to kindergarten next year.

"They're a first week of September birthday, so I mean that's obviously way different than a November or December birthday," Dianis said.

Linda Herman, director of Connecticut Friends School in Wilton, said she also had many families who are opting to give their child an extra year of preschool before having them enter kindergarten.

"They were actually happy to have that extra year. ... They may be worried about kindergarten being academic and their child is not ready for it, just to have that extra year of play," Herman said.

At Connecticut Friends School, Herman said she had to open up another class to support older 4-year-olds and find a new staff member.

She said was fortunate to be able to find a teacher to address the capacity needs.

"I hired this amazing woman. ... I was just lucky," Herman said.

Kelly Brennan, owner of See Us Grow, which has locations in Wallingford and Branford, said the new kindergarten cutoff will also impact staffing at her school because "if children aren't leaving that we thought were, we will have to make sure that we have obviously appropriate staff to maintain ratios." Brennan said her schools are adding an additional class so students don't stay in a class longer than a year. Along with that, she said the way students progress to another class level may also change because of how the new cutoff is impacting how kids move on to kindergarten.

"Children that we may have generally moved up to another classroom ... we might be holding back a little because we don't want them in that same classroom for two years repeating the information," Brennan said. "So just trying to figure out scheduling, detailing and making sure everybody is kind of where they're supposed to be."

Connecticut Thanksgiving football legislation brings questions, concerns, support for games

By MICHAEL FORNABAIO and SCOTT ERICSON

Fans of Thanksgiving [high school football](#) got a literal vote of support this week in Hartford, a few sentences buried deep within a [state bonding bill](#) that awaits Gov. Ned Lamont's signature.

Those sentences left one of the bill's indirect targets with more questions, including why Thanksgiving football needed legislative protection, and why now that changes appeared not to be going anywhere.

"Pork barrel without the pork" is how Al Carbone, SCC commissioner and frontman for the [Connecticut High School Football Alliance](#), which schedules interleague games for most of the state's teams, described it. "So out of place."

The football part comes almost two-thirds of the way through the [254-page bill](#), starting 4,562 lines in. The section has various requirements of boards of education: to maintain good schools, provide an appropriate learning environment, provide for transportation when "reasonable and desirable," and require children 5-18 to attend school.

After two pages of that comes that boards "shall not delegate the authority to schedule interscholastic football games on Thanksgiving Day to any nonprofit organization or other entity that is otherwise responsible for governing interscholastic athletics in this state and shall not adopt a policy or prohibition against the scheduling of an interscholastic football game on Thanksgiving Day."

Sen. John Fonfara, D-Hartford and co-chair of the Senate Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, told [Hearst Connecticut Media](#) that he inserted that bit after speaking with fans and others who were concerned about the future of Thanksgiving rivalries.

That stemmed from an [Alliance proposal](#) six months ago that would have scheduled teams' seasons within their CIAC class, giving better teams tougher schedules. It also floated the idea of starting the season earlier, beginning the playoffs after nine regular-season games, playing championship games on Thanksgiving weekend and using Columbus Day as a day to play rivalry games. [Reaction](#) came fast and mostly against even the thought of losing that day.

"For city schools in general, Thanksgiving is something all the players look forward to," Stamford coach Donny Panapada said Thursday. "For a lot of inner-city kids, the Thanksgiving game might be all they are looking forward to all season. If that rivalry game is in October, some kids on some of those teams then do not have anything to look forward to at the end of the season.

"It would still be a big game, but it would be much different. It is a big community event with alumni and college kids home. It really is a great tradition.

Still, as Carbone noted, Thanksgiving isn't a universal game day. There were 37 games on Thanksgiving Day 2023 and another 13 the night before, plus seven on Tuesday.

There were 138 programs in 2023.

“What about the schools that play Wednesday night?” Carbone said. “West Hartford plays the Saturday before (to end Hall's and Conard's regular seasons).”

CIAC executive director Glenn Lungarini pointed out in a text that some schools have policies avoiding holidays as game or practice days to preserve family time.

Hillhouse's Elijah McClain smiles as he walks up to receive his offensive player of the game trophy following his team's Thanksgiving football game victory over city rival Wilbur Cross at Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven, Conn., on Thursday, November 23, 2023. Brian A. Pounds/Hearst Connecticut Media

“Unfortunately, this bill now unnecessarily creates conflicts for those schools,” Lungarini said. He would have liked a public hearing to discuss the matter, or even to have heard about it in a timely enough manner to clear up what he said was misinformation and unnecessary language.

The CIAC isn't mentioned by name anywhere in the bill, but it does appear in the [Office of Legislative Research](#)'s bill analysis, which says the CIAC schedules games now. The CIAC was quick to correct that.

“CIAC member schools create their own regular-season schedules, including the date of rivalry and Thanksgiving football games, and we do not foresee any change in that process unless the schools themselves elect to change,” Lungarini said.

And that does not seem imminent.

The CIAC surveyed football coaches, athletic directors and principals after the 2023 season, asking about their interest in having “a centralized group of representatives from each league in the state” take over scheduling “within CIAC divisions.” CIAC associate executive director Gregg Simon, the liaison to its football committee, stressed in an email in March that this was a survey, not a vote.

The survey got 323 responses, Simon said, 126 athletic directors, 113 coaches and 84 principals. The principals said no by the widest margin, 64-36%. Coaches were narrower, 52-48%. Athletic directors leaned no 56-44%.

“Based on these results, the CIAC Football Committee voted not to make this proposal an official CIAC proposal,” Simon wrote in March.

The [Alliance](#) as it is schedules games involving teams from six of the state's eight conferences, 100 games in all in 2024. The Pequot League and Naugatuck Valley League don't take part. (Carbone suggested legislation to get them into the fold.)

While scheduling was at the heart of the proposal, Thanksgiving is still getting most of the oxygen.

“Whenever I talk to old players who played for us, they always talk about Thanksgiving against Southington,” Cheshire coach Don Drust said. “They talk about it for years beyond high school. It is so important to alumni and so many people in both towns. The game draws a big crowd and it means a lot. “I do not have blinders on,” he added, “and I am not opposed to change, but I know that Thanksgiving football means a lot to the kids here at Cheshire. I do not think change is bad and it would still be a rivalry, but it would be different not being played on Thanksgiving.”

Hartford Business Journal

CT revives long-dormant banking charter to woo fintech companies

By Harriet Jones, Hartford Business Journal contributor

When Banking Circle US opened its new Stamford headquarters in February, it was no small coup for the state's Department of Banking, welcoming the first new bank in Connecticut in a decade.

But it's one that the department hopes to repeat in short order, according to **Commissioner Jorge Perez**, who says he's fielding new inquiries every week from financial technology companies interested in what the state has to offer.

“Some of these companies have thousands of employees. The economic impact to the state is going to be unbelievable,” Perez said in a recent interview.

The game changer for the Land of Steady Habits is a new banking charter — or rather the repurposing of an old one that’s lain dormant on the department’s books for two decades.

When it was first written back in the 1990s it was called an uninsured bank charter — intended for institutions that wanted to offer some financial services but would not take federally insured deposits from the general public. The only company that ever used it back then, according to the department, was UPS.

But the seemingly obsolete tool caught the attention of Perez not long after he took over as commissioner in 2015, a time when the fintech industry could not have been hotter.

“Even though our primary role is to be a regulator and examiner and make sure that people follow the law,” he said, “part of the strategic plan was increased economic opportunities through charter and licensing innovations.”

And as the industry began to mature, Perez says, it was also looking to engage with regulators like him. “Some of those fintech companies started to realize that it’d be in their best interest if they were regulated because it gave consumers and other people some comfort level that they wouldn’t have if there was no regulation,” he said.

Enter the uninsured bank charter. Its existence doesn’t make Connecticut wholly unique — several states, including Wyoming, Georgia, Nebraska and Vermont, are using novel charters or other regulatory innovations to woo fintechs — but Perez says he believes Connecticut’s is one of the most apt.

So far, four fintechs — Banking Circle US, Numisma Bank (formerly Currency Reserve Bank), TNB USA Inc. and Moneycorp Bank US — have formally applied for the charter, Perez said, while others have expressed interest.

The process of obtaining and holding the charter includes third-party review, capital requirements, regular examination and compliance with Bank Secrecy Act or money laundering laws.

Favorable geography

The other huge factor in Connecticut’s favor when attracting fintechs is its proximity to New York.

“As a startup it’s important to keep the costs down,” said **Kjeld Olson, CEO of Banking Circle US**. “So, having an office in Stamford will give us access to talent, but also keep our cost at a decent level.” Banking Circle US is an independent sister company of the Luxembourg-based Banking Circle, which has been in business since 2013. Its technology supports real-time, global clearing and settlement for payment services and foreign exchange.

“We are not targeting consumers, the retail business,” Olson said. “And that’s why this license, from Connecticut, was a perfect match for us.”

Their clients are payment service providers, non-bank financial institutions, or medium-sized banks that need to make domestic or cross-border payments.

Banking Circle US sees its role as smoothing the process of global trade and contributing to the modernization of payment infrastructure.

“All of the banks in the U.S. right now are operating with largely outdated platforms,” said **Banking Circle’s Chief Compliance Officer Megan Silvia**. “Very few of them are cloud based, so it is another reason why we can operate so quickly — because it’s new technology from the ground up.”

Being regulated as a bank in Connecticut should also allow the company to operate in other states without additional paperwork, something Silvia says was a big draw.

Currently, Banking Circle has 25 employees in Stamford, but its plans are much bigger.

“If you look at our venture in Europe, we started with a handful of employees and now there’s 600 in the bank alone and 1,200 in the group,” Olson said. “And we have high expectations for our business model in the U.S. So, I would not be surprised that in a few years there will be several hundred employees.”

Master account

A state charter is one thing, but the bigger objective for fintechs is the coveted Federal Reserve master account, which would allow them to transfer money directly to other entities with master accounts, cutting out the need to use a third party for transactions.

In 2022, after a long debate, the Federal Reserve issued guidance for fintechs using novel charters like Connecticut’s that want to apply for a federal master account. But since those new guidelines were passed, no fintech that doesn’t already have a federal regulator has been issued a master account.

In February, right around the time Banking Circle was cutting the ribbon on its Stamford digs, TNB, another Connecticut fintech startup, was appealing the Fed’s denial of its master account application. Banking Circle is one of three fintech companies in Connecticut currently applying to the Federal Reserve for such an account. The Department of Banking says one of those three already has conditional approval, and it’s confident that Connecticut will be among the first states in the nation to host a state-regulated fintech approved for a federal master account.

For **Moneycorp CEO Velizar Tarashev**, potential federal membership is a key draw of the Connecticut charter.

His company offers international money transfer and online foreign exchange services.

“There is a lot of friction in correspondent banking and international payments at the moment,” he said. “What we’re trying to do is to eliminate that friction through creating direct payment-rail connections.”

Moneycorp was founded in London in 1979, and now has a global reach. It has bank licenses in Gibraltar and Brazil, and establishing one in the U.S. is central to its growth strategy.

Moneycorp is already licensed as a money transmitter in all 50 states, with a U.S. head office in Providence, Rhode Island. Tarashev says the company has been researching uninsured charters and other regulatory instruments for the better part of two years — he describes Connecticut’s charter as “unique.”

“It allows us to cover exactly the sector that we’re looking for,” he said.

The company has identified office space in Stamford where it expects to sign a lease within weeks. Initially it will locate between 20 and 30 employees there.

Regulatory creep

Bruce Adams is scrutinizing these developments from his seat as the **president of the Credit Union League of Connecticut**. And he has an insider perspective as a former state Department of Banking general counsel.

He says his concern over the evolution of the fintech industry is what he calls “regulatory creep.” “If we can use an uninsured bank charter right now to stimulate business and to give legitimacy to a legitimate business, I think that’s great,” he said. “But, I think we should probably, in the final analysis, reserve the charter for its traditional purpose.”

He would rather see the department create a wholly new regulatory instrument to cover fintechs. On the positive side, he thinks Connecticut’s aggressive stance does put it in a great position to be a leader on regulatory innovation.

“Frankly, now Connecticut has an opportunity to build its regulations on its real-world experience regulating a business like this,” he said.

It’s a job that Commissioner Perez is clearly relishing.

In fact, his office has been pushing the legislature to change the name of the charter from uninsured to innovation bank charter, a move Perez says better reflects its future potential.

With the increased interest, his staff is scrambling to keep up with inquiries — creating term sheets to make the charter application process clearer and more efficient. Perez says he expects his next challenge to be hiring and training enough people to keep up with the demand for this novel method of regulation.

“Nobody has anything compared to us that the feds feel very comfortable with,” he said. “We’re that much ahead of everybody else.”

Fintechs that applied for CT's uninsured bank charter:

- Banking Circle US
- Numisma Bank (formerly Currency Reserve Bank)
- TNB USA Inc.
- Moneycorp Bank US

Source: CT Dept. of Banking

Municipal development staff shortages offer upstart Vernon planning consultancy growth opportunities

[By David Krechevsky](#)

John Guskowski and **Michael D’Amato** are, among other designations, certified planners.

Guskowski has more than 20 years of planning experience, while D’Amato has more than 15.

But if you ask them about their three-year-old company, **Tyche Planning & Policy Group** in Vernon, they'll say they never planned to have their own business.

“To suggest that we had some business savvy that allowed us to laser in on this niche and that we could then create all this work, it was totally not that,” D’Amato said.

Instead, their company, which primarily serves as a planning and regulatory consultant for municipalities, was born from their preference to remain in a small, focused operation.

But that doesn’t mean they don’t have big clients. D’Amato, for example, was appointed in April to serve as zoning administrator for the city of Hartford, to help make up for the loss of Planning Director Erin Howard.

The cities of New Haven and Waterbury have also tapped Tyche’s services, which have been in demand amid a shortage of municipal planners and other officials responsible for moving new development projects through the local approval process.

Guszkowski, 50, and D’Amato, 34, previously worked for CME Associates, a Mansfield-based engineering firm that was acquired in January 2020 by CHA Consulting Inc., a larger full-service engineering consulting and construction management company.

“We went from a two-person planning team and a small firm to a two-person planning team and a very large firm,” D’Amato said. “From the beginning, it was very clear to us that the direction we were headed was very different from the direction the firm was headed. ... So, we knew it wasn’t a good fit.”

He and Guszkowski considered their options and “being on our own was, like, Plan D,” D’Amato said. They nonetheless agreed it was the best opportunity, so they negotiated an exit that let them retain their municipal clients.

“They weren’t thrilled to let that revenue walk out the door,” Guszkowski said of CHA Consulting. “But they also acknowledged that, out of a firm of 1,500 people, they had literally nobody else that could serve those clients. So, we came to an agreement.”

Tyche, like Nike

Since leaving CHA Consulting and forming Tyche on Jan. 11, 2021, the duo has increased their staff to six and now work with nearly 30 municipalities.

Guszkowski said it was a family member who suggested the company’s name, which refers to a Greek goddess and is pronounced like Nike.

“Tyche was responsible for the fate and fortune of cities,” he said. “We’re a community and urban planning firm. We thought it was appropriate. My kid was a Greek and Latin scholar in college and came up with the name.”

In addition to being a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), Guszkowski is accredited by the Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officers, U.S. Green Building Council and Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure.

He serves as a consulting town planner for the towns of Chester, Clinton, Deep River, Essex and Hampton, has served as economic development coordinator for Hebron and Willington, and as a planner

with the Capitol Region Council of Governments. He also has written planning documents and special studies for more than 20 cities and towns in the state.

D'Amato also is a member of AICP, and is certified as a Connecticut inland wetland agent and zoning enforcement officer. With Tyche, he serves as a consulting planner for towns that include Ashford, East Windsor and Tolland, and has assisted in drafting affordable housing plans, zoning and subdivision regulations, and plans of conservation and development updates.

Providing horsepower

D'Amato recently took on his new role in the city of Hartford as zoning administrator, giving him the authority to issue permits when project reviews occur, he said.

He's replacing Howard, who resigned April 26 to accept a position as director of the East Coast regional team for Grow America, a national nonprofit development organization.

D'Amato will serve in the role until a permanent planning director is hired.

Before her departure, Howard told the Hartford Planning & Zoning Commission that appointing D'Amato was part of her efforts to "set everyone up for success" after she left.

She explained that 95% of the applications received by the Hartford city planning department require only a staff review. "Only 5 percent come before the commission," she said, while adding that the staff "is young and has a strong need to have technical experience."

Tyche has provided consulting services to Hartford for more than a year, primarily doing plan reviews because a number of city staff positions are vacant.

"There was no one on staff that really had that expertise and comfort level," he said. "So, we stepped in because they had a lot of projects that were in the hopper and we were just providing that horsepower."

Tyche also provides Hartford staff training and consults on regulations, he said.

Filled a niche

D'Amato and Guskowski, who declined to disclose their annual revenues, said the services they offer depend on a municipality's needs.

"Sometimes you're doing a plan review for a development, sometimes you're answering an angry neighbor's complaint about someone's shed being too close to their side yard line," Guskowski said. "And sometimes you're coaching a new first selectman through the first couple of months in office when they have no idea what they're doing. ... We're there to help the town and do the job."

He added that Tyche filled this particular niche because of how difficult it is for communities to find skilled staff.

"The level of complexity of applications and stuff keeps getting ramped up," he said, and "we are the supply for a number of small towns to meet that demand."

As an example, he noted that he was hired by the town of Clinton to serve as its interim planner, "and it took them eight years to find a full-time person. So, interim can mean a lot of things."

D'Amato said that while smaller communities often don't need a certified professional planner for 40 hours a week, there are times that level of experience is necessary.

“When a developer shows up and says, ‘I need to build a 2 million-square-foot warehouse in your town,’ you still need that level of expertise for that small period of time,” he said. “So, just because the volume is different doesn't mean the expertise required for all the volume they do have is lower.”

Tyche does have some private industry clients, but working with so many different communities means the company has to be careful to avoid any conflicts of interest, D'Amato said.

“We don't necessarily have an ambition to become this big, lumbering organization with a huge staff,” D'Amato added. “If we became this group of 50 people that were covering all these contracts all over the state, we would become something that I think we're both happy to not be.”

NBC CT

Lawmakers say healthcare, hospital support will be a priority next session

By Susan Raff

Lawmakers say healthcare and support for hospitals will be a top priority in the next legislative session.

The comments from leaders, in the recent session's closing days, came in the wake of Yale New Haven Health suing to get out of its deal to buy Prospect Medical Holdings' three Connecticut hospitals.

“I know there might be a hesitancy to have, as the majority leader alluded to, the state step in on what is a private transaction, but it could very much have disastrous public,” Rep. Matt Ritter (D-Speaker) said about the possibility of Yale New Haven backing out.

He and other Democratic leaders said they'd back state support, if necessary, to close the deal.

Gov. Ned Lamont has been reluctant to offer any significant state funding to help close the deal. He did tell reporters Thursday that he'd be willing to facilitate talks.

“Do i get them into this office?” he said. “If we have to, we will. Right now, I need these guys to make a deal.”

Yale New Haven Health filed a lawsuit earlier this month to end its deal to buy Prospect's hospitals in Waterbury, Manchester, and Vernon.

The complaint accused Prospect of failing to pay rent or taxes, letting facilities deteriorate and driving away doctors and vendors.

The dispute also had lawmakers saying they plan to propose legislation focused on the financial health of hospitals.

Some of those efforts could include help, such as raising Medicaid reimbursement rates. Connecticut hospitals are only reimbursed for 62% of the cost to care for Medicaid recipients.

“You don’t have to be a math wizard to understand that you can’t keep providing care when you’re losing 38 cents of every dollar,” Connecticut Hospital Association Senior Vice President of Policy Paul Kidwell said.

But CHA is likely to push back on other efforts, such as regulations around the sale or merger of hospitals.

Hospitals must get approval through a process called Certificate of Need. CHA noted Yale New Haven had to wait over a year for approval to buy Prospect.

“It has to be a process that doesn’t take more than a year,” Kidwell said.

Approval is also needed for other changes, such as adding new units or reducing services or programs.

Lawmakers said the process is needed to ensure quality care, especially when private equity is involved. Prospect is the only for-profit hospital owner in Connecticut.

“If it’s primary purpose to try and extract money form the community, we need to protect citizens,” Sen. Saud Anwar (D-South Windsor), co-chairman of the Public Health Committee, said.

Lawmakers are worried the process could be complicated by Lamont’s relationship with the hospital industry. The two sides have been involved in strong disagreements, especially over efforts by the Office of Healthcare Strategies to control cost.

Ritter said there’s a “lack of trust” between the two sides. Republicans were especially critical of OHS Executive Director Diedre Gifford.

“That’s something I’ve never seen before – continually being moved from one agency to another and there continues to be problems that follow this commissioner,” Rep. Vincent Candelora (R-Minority Leader) said.

Lamont defended his OHS chief and his relationship with the hospitals.

“Hey, I came in the office – the hospitals and the state weren’t even talking to each other,” Lamont said. “All they were doing was suing each other.”

Kidwell agreed the two sides have a good relationship, despite the disagreements.

“That is very clear from – we worked very well together in COVID,” he said.

CT delegation, families to travel for first Puerto Rican parade in San Juan

Hundreds of Connecticut residents will touch down in San Juan, Puerto Rico to celebrate a historic moment next week.

“I am most excited to see everyone gathering for one cause, and supporting each other,” CICD President Sammy Vega said.

Next Saturday, May 18, the first-ever Puerto Rican parade will be held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It's part of a larger months-long initiative organized by Junte Boricua that aims to increase tourism on the island. The initiative has sparked much more.

"It became like a get together with families, they haven't seen each other for a long time, including my own," Junte Boricua Ambassador Sonia Alvelo said.

For former Hartford Fire Chief Edward Casares, it will be an opportunity to reconnect with family for the first time in over a decade. He is also celebrating his 48th wedding anniversary with his wife.

"It all comes together and what better place to be than where you came from, we are both from there, our families are both from there," Casares said.

Connecticut Institute for Community Development-Puerto Rican Parade Committee President Sammy Vega will participate in the parade, along other Connecticut parade committees like New Haven.

"I feel like it's something that is going to be in the history books," Vega said.

Vega, an attorney for Dressler Law, will also travel to two schools to celebrate the end of the school year.

"We are going to give out some gift cards, the last day of school is this week for them, so we are going to give some family vacation packages, we rented some bouncy houses, it's going to be a party, a celebration," Vega said.

Alvelo said the parade isn't just about celebrations. The festivities will help boost business on the island and help educate the next generation.

"I just want to make sure they remember something powerful in our culture, so they actually remember when I'm not here, oh my goodness, I have to continue this tradition," Alvelo said.

Ambassador and entrepreneur Kayelani Vasquez will be traveling with like-minded businesswomen. It's a moment she describes as a dream come true.

"So to be able to bring what I'm doing and a little piece of me, who Kayelani is, and being around such influential women who I look up to, such as Sonia, is an honor. I feel like I'm living my wildest dream," Junte Boricua Ambassador Kayelani Vasquez said.

More than 150 Connecticut residents are expected to attend the parade. Latin Financial sponsored the two Connecticut floats that will travel in the parade route.

Face the Facts: New law helps protect senior citizens in Conn.

In the coming months, we will see sweeping changes in how we protect senior citizens in Connecticut. Sen. Martha Marx (D- New London) joins Mike with a look at what the new law does to try to accomplish that. [Watch the interview here.](#)

Face the Facts: Breaking down wins and losses coming to the Conn. business community

The reviews from the legislative session are coming in from the groups and agency that lobby for their causes at the State Capitol. Chris DiPentima, president & CEO of the Connecticut Business and Industry

Association, weighs in on what he sees as the wins and losses for the business community. [Watch the interview here.](#)

WFSB

Dog racing is now officially banned in Connecticut

By Rob Polansky

A law that bans dog racing in Connecticut has been signed by the governor.

Gov. Ned Lamont announced on Thursday that he signed legislation that repeals state laws and regulations that made it legal for dog racetracks to operate in the state. It also enacts a new law prohibiting the sport in the state.

Lawmakers said that while there are no active dog racetracks in the state, it had still been happening for about 30 years. They cited the Plainfield Greyhound Park, which opened in 1976, and Shoreline Star Greyhound Park in Bridgeport, which opened in 1996. However, both facilities closed in 2005.

Animal protection advocates urged lawmakers and Lamont to enact a law that would prevent the racetracks from opening again in the future.

With the governor's signature, Connecticut becomes one of the last states in the country to ban dog racing.

"Dog racing is a cruel activity and it has no place in Connecticut," Lamont said. "It's mindboggling to think that at one time people considered this a legitimate sport, and I give credit to animal advocacy groups for their activism that has raised awareness about the abuse and extreme conditions these dogs face, leading to bans in nearly every state across the country. Signing this bill is an easy decision."

Legislative proponents on both sides of the aisle applauded the signing.

"I want to thank Governor Lamont for allowing Connecticut to join 46 other states that have banned dog racing," said Rep. Mike D'Agostino, a Democrat from Hamden. "While there has not been an active dog racetrack in the state since 2005, it is important that Connecticut state unequivocally that this practice will not return. And if nothing else, we have removed from the general statues pages and pages of unnecessary regulations that have not been needed for 20 years, and now will not be needed again."

"It took a bit longer than we hoped to get this important, commonsense bill passed but that effort was absolutely worth it knowing that from this day forward dogs in Connecticut will be safe from being forced to endure dangerous and inhumane treatment in the name of sport," said Rep. Nicole Klarides-Ditria, a Republican who represents Beacon Falls, Derby, Seymour and co-chair of the legislature's Animal Advocacy Caucus. "I appreciate and want to thank each and every colleague who joined our efforts to ban dog racing in Connecticut, especially Governor Lamont who has been committed to animal protection."

The law takes effect Oct. 1, 2024.

News 12

Power & Politics: Across the finish line – wrapping up the Connecticut legislative session

State lawmakers scrambled to push late bills across the finish line before the end of the legislative session in Hartford.

State Senate Minority Leader Stephen Harding joins Mark Sudol to discuss a busy week in Connecticut politics.

Also, state lawmakers approved a measure this week that will send \$370 million in expiring pandemic grant money to support higher education, child care and other services in the next fiscal year. The stabilization bill allowed lawmakers to avoid formally adjusting the budget adopted last year. Higher education is getting nearly half of all the funds. Terrence Cheng, chancellor of the Connecticut Colleges and Universities system, discusses the state of education in the state.

And workers are celebrating new legislation that would guarantee paid sick time – but business owners and some lawmakers are not on board just yet.

[Click here to watch the interviews.](#)

Got unpaid hospital bills? New state law keeps them off your credit report

By John Craven

A new state law could mean relief for 280,000 Connecticut residents struggling with medical debt.

Gov. Ned Lamont signed [a bill](#) on Thursday that keeps unpaid medical bills off your credit report.

\$20,000 IN DEBT

Jessica Elizondo, of Danbury, knows all about medical debt.

"My family incurred over \$20,000 in medical debt," she recently told state lawmakers.

Elizondo ended up with the massive bill – despite having health insurance – after a surprise trip to the emergency room. Five years later, her family is still paying it off.

"We called the collection agency to ask if we could defer payments up until we kind of got back on our feet," she said. "And we were told that we couldn't, or else our credit would be impacted."

RELIEF FROM CREDIT DAMAGE

Under the new law, medical providers (including dentists) can no longer report debts incurred after July 1 to credit agencies. Credit card bills do not qualify.

State Sen. Matt Lesser (D-Middletown), a cancer survivor, wrote the law.

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"I hear horror stories every day," he said. "I've had people who have lost their homes, who've had all kinds of bad things happen to them, just because they were in a car accident, because they had a cancer diagnosis."

Health care advocates said the law will especially benefit patients of color.

"This burden disproportionately impact Black and Hispanic communities, women and those with lower incomes," said acting state Health Care Advocate Sean King. "All of these constituents are hard-working, well-intentioned members of our communities – some may be family or close friends – who have every intention and desire to satisfy their debts."

New York and Colorado have already passed similar measures.

The new law means Elizondo no longer has to choose between her physical health and her financial health.

"Now, every time something happens, I'm worried," she said. "Should I go to an ER; should I go to an emergency clinic? You know, in fear of racking up more medical debt."

"SEVERE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES?"

The credit reporting industry warned that the new law could backfire.

"Any legislation which attempts to suppress the reporting of this information in its entirety could have severe unintended consequences," Sarah Otis, with the Consumer Data Industry Association, [wrote](#) lawmakers.

Credit agencies already exclude debts under \$500 and remove late payments as soon as they're paid off, CDIA said. But the group said that mandatory restrictions could lead to higher interest rates and less money available to borrow.

"Failure to include medical debt in its entirety means that credit reports are less accurate and therefore less reliable for scoring models," Otis wrote.

Lesser called it an unfounded scare tactic.

"I'm not surprised that the credit agencies didn't like a bill to cut them out," he said. "Medical debt is really not a good predictor of someone's overall financial condition or their ability to repay loans."

The Connecticut Hospital Association even supported the bill.

"We think this is a reasonable change to the statute and in line with current practice for most hospitals in Connecticut," CHA [testified](#). "Under current law, hospitals are permitted to report patient information to a credit rating agency only after a year has elapsed since the date the patient received a bill for service."

RELIEF FOR OLDER BILLS TOO

Got older health care bills? Relief could be on the way for you too.

Later this year, Connecticut plans to cancel \$650 million in [medical debt](#). Under a first-in-the-nation program, the state will pay a third party vendor \$6.5 million to assume the debt for pennies on the dollar.

People who owe money don't have to do anything. They'll be notified that their debt is paid off.

Lamont announced the details on ABC's "Good Morning America" in February.

"This is not something they did because they were spending too much money," he said. "This is something because they got hit with a medical emergency."

The money is coming from federal American Rescue Plan Act funds. Lamont originally pushed for about three times as much spending, which some legislators did not support.

FOX 61

Federal funding & fiscal guardrails | The Real Story

By Emma Wulforth

Democrat and Republican leaders detail the federal funding plan along with tension over the fiscal guardrails. [Click here to watch the interview](#) with House Speaker Matt Ritter & Senate Minority Leader Stephen Harding.

New laws & priorities for next year | The Real Story

By Emma Wulforth

Legislative leaders discuss passed proposals and what needs to be re-prioritized next session. [Click here to watch the interview in the House Chamber](#).