

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - FEB. 23, 2024

SENATE DEMOCRATS OUTLINE 2024 SESSION PRIORITIES: In a series of press conferences held throughout the week, Senate Democrats, led by Senate President Looney, Senate Majority Leader Duff, and Chairs of the respective committees of cognizance outlined their caucus' priority bills to include:

- [SB 1 - An Act Concerning the Health and Safety of Connecticut Residents](#) - Public Health Chair Senator Anwar and Vice Chair Representative Marx spoke about the increasing rate of violence against home healthcare workers noting that 65% of healthcare staff have experienced verbal abuse, 44% physical abuse, 6% sexual abuse and more tragically, 2 deaths last year. The "aircraft carrier" bill looks to: (1) provide comprehensive STEP therapy strategies for individuals experiencing first episodes of psychosis; (2) create a framework for health care systems to have resiliency when dealing with cyber-attacks; (3) create a NASH (nonalcoholic steatohepatitis) task force to address those individuals with the disease; (4) provide that cat scans for cardiac diseases are covered; (5) provide transparency and risk communication with individuals, families and communities/neighborhoods where home healthcare workers perform their duties; (6) provide workforce training specific to home healthcare workers; (7) enlist technology to keep workers safe; (8) provide grants for smaller home healthcare facilities; (9) address payment reform on escort work; and (10) develop a pilot program to explore ACT (assertive community treatment) multi-disciplined teams.
- [SB 2 - An Act Concerning Artificial Intelligence](#) - General Law Committee Chair Senator Maroney praised the work of the legislature in 2023 but noted there is much work still to be done to protect the public from the harmful unintentional consequences of artificial intelligence ("AI"). He believes that leveraging AI in the medical and healthcare industries would yield positive benefits "as AI has great potential to assist in removing menial tasks so that we can enjoy more quality human life" he said. He also noted that while the ten-year projection forecasts over 85 million jobs being lost to AI, 97 million jobs will be created because of it. The bill would: (1) make it illegal to share nonconsensual images generated by AI; (2) adopt legislation recently passed in Michigan and Minnesota regulating the use of AI in political ads during an election cycle; (3) address algorithm discrimination; (4) require testing on generative AI; and (5) create a CT Citizens AI academy which will train the workforce on how to use AI.
- [SB 3 - An Act Concerning Consumer Protection](#) - Majority Leader Duff expressed his satisfaction with legislation passed last year where consumer protection is concerned and looks to continue further developing/establishing programs providing digital equity for all residents. Bill highlights include: (1) the elimination of junk fees on consumer invoices that did not go through proper channels; (2) net neutrality - treating all data on the internet equally; (3) right to repair -would require electronics and appliance manufacturers to provide owners and independent repair businesses with fair access to service information/affordable replacement parts allowing the consumer the ability to fix their own equipment; (4) regulating smart devices with built in microphones to prevent eavesdropping; (5) adopting proration billing practices for digital streaming services; and (6) enhancing security by banning state and municipal offices from purchasing/using drones manufactured in China.
- [SB 4 - An Act Concerning Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Deviance](#) - Government Administration & Elections Chair/Judiciary Committee Vice Chair Senator Flexer expressed growing concern with U.S. Supreme Court decisions rolling back laws that were established to protect women's reproductive health; provide equality to same sex couples and transgendered

persons. She also praised the work of the legislature during the 2023 session for victims of domestic violence. SB 4 looks to build on those efforts by: (1) expanding the initiatives to provide legal assistance for individuals seeking restraining orders; (2) addressing "cyberflashing"; (3) banning nondisclosure agreements when settling a sexual harassment case; and (4) amending the state's constitution to protect women's access to full spectrum reproductive health care.

- [SB 5 - An Act Concerning School Resources](#) - Education Committee Chair Senator McCrory also praised the legislature for its work last session proving \$150M toward Education Cost Sharing, however said more work needed to be done where special education funding was concerned. The proposed bill: (1) establishes a taskforce, working with school districts, to develop a program reducing special education costs; (2) provides that all children in the Baby Bond program be automatically enrolled in the Care 4 Kids program at birth; (3) aligns state law with federal law to provide AI training to protect student privacy; (4) expands a pilot program for responsible social media usage/digital literacy; and (5) ensures that building blueprints in schools are consistent with the blueprints of first responders.
- [SB 6 - An Act Concerning Housing](#) - Housing Committee Chair Senator Moore spoke to the dire need for more affordable/accessible housing for residents in the state noting there is a significant lack of affordable housing in suburbs where there is much resistance to building and a rapid conversion of existing housing into Air BNB type rentals which removes housing off the market. The bill: (1) seeks \$20M in appropriations to fund shelters thus reducing the incidence of homelessness; (2) looks to apply just cause eviction standards universally (currently applies to seniors/disabled only); (3) increases Housing Choice Programs (Section 8) to access all housing markets - value of assistance vouchers would be adjusted by zip code; (4) appropriates \$25M into the General Fund for rental assistance programs administered by the Department of Housing; (5) increases the state conveyance tax by 1% where the sale of a building is by an institution; (6) establishes a 10% tax credit for the conversion of commercial property to residential housing in certain demographics; and (7) cuts the sales tax to 3% on the purchase of goods used to build affordable housing.
- [SB 7 - An Act Concerning Connecticut Paid Sick Days](#) - Senate President Looney explained the bill provides for an expansion of the paid sick days program, looking to lower the threshold so that every worker within the state is covered with paid sick days. The bill would provide that businesses with 1 or more employees offer sick time at the accrual rate of 1 hour of sick leave for every 30 hours worked (1,200 hours worked annually would yield 5 full paid sick days). The employee would become eligible to use their sick time 100 days after employment commences. The Labor and Public Employees Committee held a public hearing on SB 7 and other proposed paid sick day legislation on Thursday.
- [SB 8 - An Act Concerning Drug Affordability](#) - Human Services Chair Senator Lesser remarked that while the state has had some successes in lowering the cost of prescription drugs, affordability remains a constant battle. The bill looks to: (1) bring in safe affordable prescription drugs from Canada (with prior federal government approval); (2) work with hospitals and nonprofit manufacturers to identify drug shortages; (3) piggyback off the federal government's negotiation of prescription drug prices and pass on lower drug costs saving to residents of any age/relief to Medicaid program; (4) create a prescription drug advisory board; and (5) lower cost of insulin coming on the market/provide insulin coverage on all insurance plans.

Copies of the press releases can be found here: [Senate Dems. Presser on SBs 2, 3 and 6](#); [Senate Dems. Presser of SBs 1, 7 and 8](#); [Senate Dems. Presser on SBs 4 and 5](#)

SENATOR KELLY REPLACED AS SENATE REPUBLICAN MINORITY LEADER: Senator Kevin Kelly, after four years of serving as the Republican Minority Leader in the Senate, was unexpectedly replaced by Senator Stephen Harding last Friday. Both Senators vowed to work together to advance the values of their caucus with Senator Harding saying, "As leader, I will make sure our caucus remains unified and focused on standing up for all people, offering solutions and showing a better path forward."

COMMITTEE ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS: Committees continued to hold meetings and public hearings this week moving forward concepts to be raised as bills in areas concerning the expansion of Husky benefits to individuals under 19; energy concepts including biofuels, utility shutoffs and energy efficiency fundings/programs; early childhood development disorders; and telehealth.

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE - AGENCY BUDGET PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS: The Appropriations Committee began holding meetings on the Governor's Proposed FY 25 Budget Adjustments this week. State agency presentations and public hearings are scheduled to run through February 26. A detailed schedule can be found [here](#).