



House Bill 5003

**AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND
WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE STATE**

Testimony of the Department of Administrative Services

Labor and Public Employees Committee

March 3, 2026

Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Weir, and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. I am Michelle Gilman, Commissioner of the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on various sections in **House Bill 5003: An Act Concerning Workforce Development and Working Conditions in the State.**

DAS, including the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), is pleased to support **Sections 16-19** of the bill, as it aims to help with the recruitment and retention of firefighters by creating meaningful incentives, including tuition waivers for undergraduate and graduate programs at CT State Community College, the Connecticut State University System, and the University of Connecticut, as well as a mortgage assistance program administered by the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority.

The fire service is an incredibly diverse profession, and by strengthening firefighter recruitment and retention at all levels, we strengthen the entire fire service ecosystem, not just the entry point. For example, some firefighters go on to become fire inspectors - professionals who enforce fire and life-safety codes, conduct inspections of buildings and fire protection systems, and work with property owners to correct hazards before a tragedy strikes. Others may serve as fire marshals -



investigating fires, determining origin and cause, and ensuring accountability and code compliance across our communities.

All of these pathways are facing challenges in recruitment and retention, and **Sections 16-19** will help continue building a fire service workforce that not only responds to fire suppression and emergencies but also works every day to prevent such occurrences.

We also support the concept of **Sections 25-29**. For background, DAS, through OSFM, provides regulatory oversight of the state demolition and crane safety codes, including licensing of operators and contractors and inspection of crane installations and use.

DAS supports the concept of **Sections 25-29**, which aims to strengthen public safety and promote accountability in the state's crane and hoisting operations. The bill will also provide DAS with additional tools to verify operator credentials, enter worksites to ensure compliance, and issue stop work orders when unsafe or negligent conditions are identified. We appreciate the additional tools this bill provides the department to ensure the safety of workers and the community at large.

DAS anticipates that the requirements outlined in the proposal can be met within existing resources. We are happy to continue discussions and collaboration with the committee and the bill's proponents to resolve any technical concerns in the draft language and any other areas that need further discussion.

We do have concerns, however, regarding Sections **1-2 and 30**.

Section 1 of the bill will have a significant fiscal impact on the State's Workers' Compensation (WC) program, as it is essentially expanding the ability for any healthcare worker who is assaulted to be eligible for 100% benefits. At the present time, 100% benefits are carved



out under Section 5-142 of the WC Statutes, and, as it relates to healthcare professionals, DMHAS employees are the only ones covered (unless the assault is inmate-related). Expanding comparable protections to a broad definition of “health care provider” would increase exposure to full wage-replacement benefits.

We are also concerned that it appears to require the employer to pay for assault-related expenses even where a claim is denied under the WC Act. A denial under WC is not arbitrary. It reflects that a determination was made that the injury did not arise out of and in the scope of employment, lacked sufficient evidence to support a causal nexus to work, or otherwise failed to meet the statutory compensability standard. We are concerned with the precedent this would set.

Section 2 appears to allow an employee to bring a civil action in Superior Court. Currently, if the claim is accepted by WC, that is an exclusive remedy, and the employee cannot sue their employer. We are also concerned about this change.

Section 30 establishes an incentive for school districts to receive reimbursement if a certain school building project is for a technical education space. Implementing specific reimbursement rates for certain projects, rather than using the annually determined rates based on municipal grand list data, complicates the efficient administration of the program.

We urge the Committee to explore alternative approaches to support increased technical education space that do not impose financial or administrative burdens on the current school building project grant program.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the Committee leadership on these topics throughout the legislative session.