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Hartford Courant

Storm costs add up to multi-millions for CT utilities. Here's a look, and why it costs customers, too

BY STEPHEN UNDERWOOD | FEBRUARY 27 2:08 PM EST

The recent wintry mix of snow and ice brought the first significant storm for Connecticut's utility companies this year, as hundreds of utility workers scrambled to return power to thousands of customers.

The storm, which brought a dangerous mix of snow, ice and rain, knocked out power to nearly 30,000 customers at its height, with the majority of outages reported in Fairfield and New Haven Counties, according to outage maps.

United Illuminating and Eversource, the state's two largest electric providers, each brought in hundreds of out-of-state linesman to restore power and help in the cleanup effort.

U.I., a subsidiary of Avangrid, said it deployed nearly 200 line workers and vegetation management personnel to work around the clock to restore power.

Eversource said it deployed hundreds of its "troubleshooters" or local linesman to help restore power.

While storms may be an inconvenience to customers experiencing outages, they can come at hefty initial price tags for utility companies. The last few years have seen relatively mild storms, with few large impact events with over 100,000 customers affected, according to a spokesperson for Eversource.

But even smaller storm costs can pile up quickly and increase rates for customers over time.

"I wouldn't want to pin down a number, but that was an expensive storm. We will probably be north of \$10 million getting all those customers back," said Steve Sullivan, president of Connecticut electric operations for Eversource. "The other way to look at it is we have 1.3 million customers in Connecticut, and it's a range of \$10 (cost) per customer to respond to a storm like that."

Sullivan said Eversource had nine storms that required an emergency response plan, or ERP, last year and one so far this year. Eversource activates an ERP based on weather severity and internal calculations of how many customers may lose power based on wind gusts. In total, the electric company responded to around 48 storm events last year that involved extensive planning and preparing — and responding to storm-related outages — but did not always rise to the level of declaring an ERP.

"I've been in this business for 30 years now and the storms just come in a little more frequent and little stronger than they did a few decades ago," Sullivan said. "In terms of large events, we had one last year in the summer when a vicious line of thunderstorms came in late June and knocked out power to almost 95,000 customers. Most of the storms don't rise to a major level, but still require a significant response. We didn't declare an ERP for last week's storm," Sullivan said.

Instead of bringing in outside contractors and linesman, Eversource relies on a team of around 120 "troubleshooters" for smaller storms. The troubleshooters are in-state lineworkers who are part of the company's regular contingent of workers responding to outages and issues during both storms and non-storm days, according to the company. If a storm does meet the criteria for an ERP to be activated, the company will then call up out-of-state contractors and linesman, which can be more expensive.

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“All utilities bring in outside contractors during major storm events,” Sullivan said. “The vast majority of them come from out of state and even if they are in-state you’re moving them around, so you don’t want them to drive far distances in hazardous conditions. So that means putting them up in hotel rooms and feeding them breakfast, lunch, and dinner. That’s standard across the industry. But, yes, we’re talking big costs.”

Cost to customers

Those costs can pile up quickly as the average storm can consume over 800 man hours of work restoring power to customers. In 2023, Eversource presented invoices totaling \$634 million to regulators for storm responses between 2018 and 2021, according to the company.

In total, the residential ratepayers would bear the cost of \$634 million, averaging around an extra \$5 per month per customer over a six-year period, Sullivan said.

Two storms were responsible for more than half of the excess cost. In August 2020, Hurricane Isaias swept through Connecticut, leaving behind a price tag of \$232 million. A year later, on Sept. 1, 2021, Hurricane Ida resulted in restoration costs of \$139 million for Eversource. Several other smaller storms during that period also carried price tags in the millions including several strong wind and rain events in 2020 and 2021, according to Eversource.

“We filed in December 2023 for 36 storms that ran from 2018 through 2021 and it was over a half of billion dollars,” Sullivan said. “Normally we expect a quick turnaround on these things but we’re looking at hearings coming up in September. Now we’re more than 18 months later and those costs are still pending. Since then, we added to that filing for storms in 2022 and 2023. If you add those together you’re getting close to a billion dollars.”

A spokesperson with United Illuminating, the state’s other largest utility provider, said that storm costs can add up quickly over time but are considered a regulatory asset. Utility companies usually factor in storm costs to rate cases before a regulating agency when presenting evidence for an increase in the rate charge. Regulatory assets are costs that a public utility can defer to its balance sheet instead of its income statement. The costs are generally used to smooth out rate recoveries and match revenues and expenses.

U.I., which has a much smaller footprint in the state, serves southwestern Connecticut including the city of New Haven. A spokesperson with the utility company said that storm impacts make up much less of their overall rate case than Eversource, simply because of their much smaller customer base. But unlike Eversource, U.I. has to rely more often on out-of-state contractors to clean up storm damage and restore power to its customers since they rely on fewer linesman. U.I. has around 100 linesman in Connecticut, the company said.

“We’re estimating the recent storm will cost around \$4 million,” said Chuck Eves, vice president of electric operations at United Illuminating.

“Fundamentally, major storms the size of Isaias in 2020, creates about 40,000 to 50,000 hours of work for us. To put that in context, I have 100 line workers here, so we can do 800 hours in a regular day of line work,” Eves said. “So that’s 50 times what we can do. So generally we bring in five to six times the resources and work two shifts a day. That brings the math down to a five or six day event to restore power and that has a certain cost associated with it.”

Between 2017 and 2022, U.I. said that they had a total storm cost of just over \$40 million. The most expensive storm was Isaias with a nearly \$14 million price tag. In 2022, the company requested a new customer rate with the state's regulating agency, with an annual amortization expense of just over \$5 million to offset storm costs based on the five-year period.

However, U.I.'s request was denied by the regulating authority and reduced to \$3.2 million per year, according to Eves.

Eves said that the state's old infrastructure and tree conditions contribute to pricey cleanup efforts after storms. He said that wind itself is largely not a factor in storm events, it's the trees that fall on lines that do the most damage. Roads with little tree cover like the Berlin Turnpike require less cleanup than roads with thick tree canopy.

"The need for us to be prepared and respond immediately to these events requires a level of cost," Eves said. "Including with the tree conditions the way they are and the enormous manpower needed, they drive the high cost. Storms require us to pull lineworkers out of their daily lives for several days at a time. You have to incentive them to come and work 17 hours a day in some miserable conditions to get the lights back on."

CT Insider

Highly paid coaches, millions in OT and other takeaways from CT state employee salary data

BY ALEX PUTTERMAN, VICTORIA STAVISH | FEBRUARY 28

Connecticut spent about \$5.8 billion in payroll in 2024, up about 7% from the prior year, state numbers show.

CT Insider analyzed pay data for tens of thousands of state employees across dozens of agencies, from basketball coaches to police officers to state legislators.

UConn athletics coaches top the list

As has been the case for years, Connecticut's highest paid state employees were basketball coaches.

UConn men's hoops coach Dan Hurley, whose team won its second straight national title in 2024, earned about \$6.8 million, nearly twice as much as any other state employee. Hurley earned several bonuses based on his team's performance, increasing his pay, and also was signed to an extension a few months later as the Los Angeles Lakers courted the Huskies coach. Next was UConn women's coach Geno Auriemma, who made \$3.5 million. Auriemma also signed an extension in 2024.

UConn football coach Jim Mora was also near the top of the list, ranking fourth among all state employees with earnings just shy of \$2 million, while athletic director David Benedict was eighth, earning about \$1.3 million. UConn men's assistant coaches Kimani Young (\$1.1 million) and Luke Murray (\$893,000) cracked the top 15 as well.

Doctors, surgeons come next

Connecticut's other highest paid state employees are mostly high-ranking doctors at UConn Health.

After Hurley and Auriemma comes Dr. Isaac Moss, chair of orthopaedic surgery (\$2.2 million), with Dr. Hao Feng, director of laser surgery and cosmetic dermatology (\$1.7 million) not far behind. Both Moss and Feng also ranked among the state's five highest paid public employees in 2023.

Altogether, 21 of the 30 highest paid state employees worked for UConn Health.

Stephanie Reitz, a UConn spokesperson, said pay for top physicians "is driven by national and regional markets along with the experience and skill set of each individual." She noted that many of those faculty members brought in millions in clinical revenue for the university.

The school's six highest paid physicians, Reitz said, generated almost \$34 million in revenue in 2023, nearly four times their salary.

"This revenue is critical to UConn Health, since about 60 percent of its revenues comes from its clinical operation, and state support accounts about 12 percent," she said in an email.

Rehired university employee near top of list

The highest paid state employee who is neither a coach nor a UConn Health faculty member? Central Connecticut State University administrator Christopher Dukes, with about \$837,000 in total compensation in 2024.

Dukes was fired in 2018 after allegedly participating in an armed standoff involving police and his ex-wife, then rehired last year after the Connecticut Supreme Court upheld an arbitrator's ruling that the state had lacked "just cause" to dismiss him. Upon being rehired, he received about six years worth of back-pay, leading to his elevated spot on the list of highly paid state employees.

A spokesperson for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system said Dukes' base annual salary is \$150,449.

UConn accounts for the largest chunk of the state payroll

As is typically the case, UConn had the largest total payroll of any state agency, paying its employees about \$735 million total.

UConn Health ranked second, at nearly \$626 million, followed by the Department of Correction (\$557 million), the Judicial Branch (\$385 million) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (\$371 million).

Connecticut spent about \$5.8 billion in payroll in 2024.

UConn employees account for the biggest chunk of the payroll, with coaches, doctors and surgeons claiming the largest salaries.

Small agencies such as the Council on Environmental Quality, Psychiatric Security Review Board and the Connecticut Port Authority had the lowest payrolls.

Officers, nurses earn hundreds of thousands in overtime payments

For the second straight year, state trooper Bruce LaChance recorded more than \$300,000 in overtime payments, more than any other state employee.

LaChance was one of 355 state employees to earn six figures in overtime in 2024. Of that total, about half worked for the state police, while another quarter worked for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. LaChance did not return a request for comment.

As state police overtime has ballooned in recent years, critics have described the number of hours worked — and wages accrued — as seemingly "excessive."

In a statement, DESPP commissioner Ronnell Higgins said the agency records large amounts of overtime due to recruiting challenges that have resulted in 200 current vacancies. Still, the department has reduced overtime by 7.5% so far this year, he said.

"We are committed to reducing overtime costs, but we also have overtime needs in the field and on the road," Higgins said. "We must make sure patrols are adequately staffed and that all investigations receive the resources they need."

In an email, a DMHAS spokesperson attributed that agency's large sums of overtime on a national shortage of psychiatrists, which has "created intense competition for recruitment, requiring DMHAS to maximize available resources to maintain 24/7 health care facilities and meet the needs of our clients."

Department of Correction works the most OT

The agency with the most overtime, however, was the Department of Correction, which accounted for about 29% of the state's total overtime payments, about the same as in 2023. In total, DOC employees incurred more than \$110 million in overtime payments in 2024.

Five departments made up 80% of all overtime payments

Of the 355 state employees who made more than six figures in 2024, half worked for the state police, which is under the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection.

DMHAS (\$62 million) and DESPP (\$60 million) were the agencies with the next most overtime. In total, the state paid about \$376 million in overtime in 2024.

Top official salaries

Gov. Ned Lamont, who is independently wealthy, did not take a salary in 2024, state data shows.

Other top elected officials, of course, do get paid for their work. The state's other constitutional officers — Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, Attorney General William Tong, Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas and Comptroller Sean Scanlon — each earned \$189,483.12 last year.

State Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney made \$65,197.96 and Speaker of the House Matt Ritter took home \$56,499.96 for their part-time roles.

As for other big-name officials, UConn President Radenka Maric earned \$810,238.93, while embattled CSCU president Terrence Cheng made \$451,202.75.

CT Mirror

CT bill would ensure unhoused aren't punished for sleeping outside

BY GINNY MONK | FEBRUARY 27 4:41 PM

Lawmakers were asked Thursday to protect the unhoused population in Connecticut, who advocates worried might be ticketed or arrested following a Supreme Court decision last summer allowing towns to pass and enforce ordinances that prevent people from sleeping outside.

The Housing Committee heard public testimony on House Bill 7033, which would prohibit municipalities from penalizing people for conducting “life sustaining activities,” such as sleeping, eating and storing personal belongings, in public spaces. There are exceptions if there is adequate indoor shelter offered that includes transportation to the shelter for the person and their belongings or if people are impeding traffic.

The bill positions Connecticut to join a national movement of states and cities that are trying to protect people experiencing homelessness, particularly under a presidential administration many say could be harmful to the unhoused.

Homelessness has been on the rise in Connecticut for the past few years, which experts say is a result of rising rents and lack of affordable housing. The latest data from the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness showed that there were more than 5,000 people experiencing homelessness, and about 900 of those are living outside.

“What’s the alternative? Where do you put these people? It’s not like these people asked to be homeless,” said Michael Cutler, who lives outside in New Haven, in an interview. Cutler is a member of the advocacy group U-ACT and has been unhoused for the past three years.

He said he doesn’t go into a shelter because they’re often overcrowded and noisy. It’s hard to get privacy or a good night’s sleep, he said. Instead, he opts to try to find a covered place and stay warm in a sleeping bag.

“No person should have to go through that,” he said.

Connecticut’s shelter system is strained, and shelters often have to turn people away because the beds are full. Congregate shelter settings are also difficult for people who may have to leave their possessions behind, have pets or want to stay with their spouse.

The bill is a response to a summer Supreme Court decision that ruled in an Oregon case that towns can pass and enforce ordinances that prevent people from sleeping outside. Over the past couple of years, Connecticut has also had high-profile sweeps of homeless encampments, which some supporters of the bill say they hope will end if the measure passes.

“We’re people,” said Alexis Terry, who found housing a few months ago after a stint of homelessness in New Haven. “We’re complex human beings with complex emotions and it’s a shame that we have to keep humanizing ourselves.”

With its current language, proponents say that the measure will limit sweeps of homeless encampments. But Housing Committee ranking member Rep. Antonio Felipe, D-Bridgeport, said lawmakers would adjust the bill to ensure that it protected people seeking shelter and doesn’t enable people to create encampments.

This measure, or some version of it, has been a priority for Felipe since the Supreme Court decision came down last year.

“This is a blatant example of kicking people while they’re down,” Felipe said at the time. “It’s not like these people chose to be unhoused. It’s not like these people chose to be in the situation they’re in. These people are struggling mightily, and the housing market is hard.”

Some city officials have opposed the bill, saying it inhibits municipalities’ ability to keep public space clean, safe and usable for everyone.

“Public space is public for everyone,” said New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker in an interview. “... The goal is to connect people to housing, and we’ve worked very, very hard to do that.”

He said the city has outreach workers who visit encampments and try to help people find another place to go before clearing encampments. He also said that the camps often have human waste, trash and unsafe heating methods.

“One of the things I want to talk about is also the alternatives to this bill that I think could work is to actually appropriate more funds for more shelters and beds and as well as provide wraparound services, support services,” said Brian O’Connor, director of public policy and advocacy at the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. “I think that’s a better approach.”

Sarah Fox, chief executive officer at the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, said more resources are needed to help the population. Encampments are a complicated issue, she said, and the goal is not to villainize anyone.

Advocates have asked for \$33.5 million in the state budget, although it’s not clear how much they’ll receive. Elicker has testified in support of that additional funding.

Josh Michtom, a Hartford city council member, said that while more resources are needed, he wants lawmakers to think of the bill as a response to a humanitarian issue.

“This is not an ‘either, or.’ It’s a ‘both, and,’” Michtom said in public testimony. “We can’t criminalize human beings who are truly at the lowest point, at the point of greatest struggle, probably in their lives.”

In the Oregon case that inspired Connecticut’s law, a woman named Gloria Johnson was punished for camping in a park although she said there weren’t any adequate options for shelter.

In its first major ruling on homelessness in decades, the Supreme Court ruled that the ordinance was enforceable in a 6-3 decision. The decision has sparked a national movement.

Other states such as Virginia, Illinois, Massachusetts and Maryland have introduced similar bills. The National Homelessness Law Center has advocated for passage of model legislation called the “Gloria Johnson” act that’s similar to Connecticut’s, said Jesse Rabinowitz, the center’s communications director.

“We will never be able to arrest our way out of homelessness,” Rabinowitz said. He said about 150 cities have passed ordinances that would allow people experiencing homelessness to be arrested or cited for doing things such as sleeping outside.

This often leads to fines they can’t pay or arrest records that make it harder to find housing.

Advocates say they haven’t heard many similar reports of arrests or fines in Connecticut, but that the bill is in part preventative.

Rabinowitz said his group is among those working to see a bill similar to Connecticut's introduced at the federal level.

Sarah Gallagher, a Hamden town council member, is among those working with Rabinowitz. In January, Hamden passed an ordinance declaring housing as a human right.

The town has recently opened a warming center and is working to find ways to house people experiencing homelessness, Gallagher said.

"People experiencing homelessness have the same rights as everybody else," Gallagher said.

Bill would allow 'baby boxes' for parents to relinquish infants

BY LAURA TILLMAN | FEBRUARY 27 4:58 PM

A bill that would allow for the installation of so-called "baby boxes" — temperature-controlled chambers with bassinets, installed in the exterior walls of places like hospitals where mothers can anonymously relinquish their infants — could unleash a slew of safety, legal and ethical issues in a state where infant abandonment is exceedingly rare.

The bill has sparked concern from the Office of the Child Advocate and others. Existing laws already allow parents to give up infants anonymously in Connecticut.

"I think people are looking at this because they want to make a difference and prevent babies from dying. We all want that. We just need to do that in a way that is safe for babies and moms," said Acting Child Advocate Christina Ghio.

Once a baby is left in the box device, alerts are sent to staff and to 911 dispatch centers. In Connecticut, the boxes are being considered for hospital emergency rooms, and if the bill passes, the installation of the boxes would be voluntary.

Advocates of baby boxes say that the bill would create a safe alternative for parents to drop off newborns anonymously for those who don't want face-to-face contact with hospital staff. It's an option they believe could save lives and protect babies from abuse and neglect.

Erica Maver, a nurse, testified to the Committee on Children that the boxes are well-thought-out devices that incorporate a crisis line and medical information. They would come at no cost to hospitals or taxpayers because they are paid for through donations. Maver has fundraised for a baby box to be installed in Connecticut, according to her Instagram page. If successful, Connecticut would be the first state in New England to have a baby box.

But opponents of the bill have concerns about the implications of baby boxes for mother and child. For one, the boxes are made by only one company in the U.S., Safe Haven Baby Boxes, and are unregulated, which some argued could lead to unforeseen safety issues in the event of a blackout or technological problem. A baby was recently found dead in a baby box in a church in Italy, where a priest said he never received a notification linked to his cellphone, though that box was not made by Safe Haven Baby Boxes.

Safe Haven Baby Boxes are concentrated in the Midwest. Indiana, the home state of Safe Haven Baby Box CEO Monica Kelsey, an anti-abortion activist, has more than 100 of the boxes.

Opponents of the bill also say Connecticut's existing "safe haven" laws already provide a way for parents to drop off infants 30 days or younger to a hospital emergency room anonymously without facing any legal repercussions, and that the boxes would not capture additional babies but rather encourage parents to leave the baby in a box instead of benefitting from a "warm handoff" between a parent and member of hospital staff.

They say that handing a baby off to a medical professional offers the possibility that parents will avail themselves of resources like medical treatment, social and economic supports and counseling that may make the difference between permanent separation and the possibility of reunification, or may make the process of permanently relinquishing a baby less traumatic for both parent and child.

They also worry that a mother may unwittingly break the law by placing an infant older than 30 days into one of the boxes.

Dr. Clara Lewis, a professor at Dartmouth College and the author of "American Infanticide: Sexism, Science, and the Politics of Sympathy," told the Committee on Children that women at risk of neonaticide are not capable of transporting themselves to the box. She also raised the concern that a mother may have her baby taken from her and placed in the box, thereby concealing a crime.

"If the mother is a victim of human trafficking the baby could be placed in the box without her knowledge, therefore causing further harm to her. Other examples would include an attempt to cover up incest or rape," she told lawmakers.

Lori Bruce, the Associate Director of the Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics at the Yale School of Medicine, has studied the issue of baby boxes around the world and in other U.S. states for years, particularly since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. She was surprised to see the movement for them to come to Connecticut, where there is no evidence that infant abandonment is on the rise, and said she thinks the bill reflects a nationwide desire to help families in distress. But, Bruce says, there is little evidence to support the need for baby boxes here.

According to the OCA, which receives all critical incident reports about child abuse and neglect and all reports of the unexplained deaths of children, there is no reason to think Connecticut's safe haven laws aren't working as intended.

Since 2020, only one case of abandonment, in which a premature infant was left on the hood of a car in Mansfield and survived, was captured after multiple revisions of OCA data, Ghio said. Fifty-seven children have been relinquished under under safe haven laws in Connecticut since 2001, according to public testimony to the Committee on Children.

During that testimony, proponents of the bill echoed the idea that babies are being abandoned in Connecticut and that these cases may not make the news. Dr. Elizabeth Simonetti, a pharmacist, said that she supports the boxes because of concerns that babies are being abandoned in dumpsters.

"The reason we don't hear about them is because if we find them, they are not alive," she said.

But the OCA and the Department of Children and Families said that perception does not reflect their data.

"I've been responsible for the state care line for a long time, and I haven't had that experience," said Michael Williams, the Deputy Commissioner of the Department Children and Families. "Thank God we

have the safe haven laws and parents can drop a newborn off at a hospital and walk away. We see that maybe one to two times a year.”

Ghio, the Acting Child Advocate, said her office has concerns about the safety of the devices and whether, given the data that the OCA reviewed, there are other risky scenarios affecting newborn safety that could be addressed and would ultimately prevent infant fatalities.

For example, in its data, the OCA found three instances of minors who gave birth at home without help to a baby that died.

“I don’t know that the availability of this device would have changed anything for those girls,” Ghio said. Those deaths also raise the question of whether the existence of a baby box might discourage mothers from entering the hospital at all — even when they are in labor — ultimately leading to more deaths during unassisted home births. “I worry about any messaging that suggests that giving birth at home alone is a viable alternative. It’s not safe for young girls to do that.”

CT legislators mull requiring homemaker companion worker training

BY JENNA CARLESSO | FEBRUARY 28 7:30 AM

Lawmakers want to impose new training requirements for workers at homemaker companion agencies, which have ballooned in number over the last decade as more people choose to age at home, but remain largely unregulated.

Members of the Aging Committee have raised a bill that would require these home care workers to complete training on first aid, reporting of abuse and neglect, maintaining a safe environment and other issues upon joining an agency and then every two years afterward. The aides help clients with tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and errands.

The Aging Committee will hold a public hearing on the measure Friday at 9:30 a.m. in the state’s Legislative Office Building.

“These workers are coming into people’s homes, and we need to make sure we have people we can trust and who are trained to help our most vulnerable population,” said Sen. Jan Hochadel, D-Meriden, co-chair of the committee.

“Everybody would like to age at home, that’s where they’re most comfortable. They want the end of their life to mirror what their whole life has been, and we have to make it easier for that to happen.”

Under the bill, new employees at homemaker companion agencies would have to complete at least 10 hours of training on cardiopulmonary resuscitation, first aid, maintenance of a clean and safe environment — including best practices related to dressing, bathing and toileting assistance — identification and reporting of abuse and neglect, and identification and reporting of changes in a client’s condition and service needs. Workers helping people with Alzheimer’s or dementia would have to complete additional training on providing non-medical services to this population.

The measure also requires people already employed in the industry to undergo continued training on those issues at least once every two years. A list of qualifying programs would be drafted by leaders at the Department of Consumer Protection with input from other offices, including the public health and social services departments.

Upon the completion of any training, each homemaker companion agency and worker would have to fill out a form attesting that the employee finished the training and submit the form to the consumer protection department.

“We want a well-trained workforce,” Hochadel said. “We want the best services we can provide.”

Employees currently go through training on mandatory reporting and sexual harassment, and those who work with people in Medicaid waiver programs must complete special training through the state. But other types of instruction are optional.

Tracy Wodatch, president of the Association for Health Care at Home, said homemaker companion agency leaders support the proposed training requirements, but they worry about the added cost. The bill as written does not include state funding for the training. Some of those costs would likely be passed on to the clients, she said.

Wodatch also encouraged lawmakers to add language allowing the training to transfer among agencies. So, if a person is employed by multiple home care agencies, they wouldn't have to repeat training at each company.

“It doesn't really account for portability of the training, which we need to make sure is included, because some [aides] work for three and four different agencies,” she said. “We need to make sure, if they're trained at one, that should be carried over to all the others they are hired to work at.”

Wodatch said she hopes homemaker companion groups have a voice in the final draft of the bill.

“There needs to be more training. It needs to be consistent, and there needs to be some standards and best practices,” she said. “But having them lay it out in a bill like this, versus us coming to the table and working with them on what the content of the training should include — we just want to be able to work with them on this.”

The Connecticut Mirror reported in 2023 that the state's growing home care industry was operating with little oversight. In 2012, there were 380 registered homemaker companion agencies. By 2022, the number had swelled to more than 900.

Despite that, the industry still operates with little regulation. Unlike nursing home employees and home health aides, who must be licensed by the state Department of Public Health, there is no licensing process for homemaker companion workers. Instead, those agencies must register annually with the consumer protection department.

Managers at the companies are required to conduct criminal background checks on prospective employees but aren't required to share that information with the state, which does not track who works at the agencies.

CT Mirror reviewed more than 75 complaints against homemaker companion agencies filed with the consumer protection department between 2018 and 2020 and discovered at least half a dozen cases in which homemaker companion agency employees were arrested for allegedly stealing from their clients, more than a dozen findings by DCP investigators of agencies that routinely mis-advertised the services they provided, and seven complaints of clients being left alone for hours at a time.

Many of the DCP investigations led to small fines of less than \$5,000 or an employee being fired. Agency officials acknowledged the department had never denied a homemaker companion business' registration and had never revoked a business' registration following an investigation.

A recent report produced by the state's Office of Policy and Management includes recommendations on training and training standards for homemaker companion agencies.

"They're working with vulnerable populations," said Rep. Jane Garibay, D-Windsor, co-chair of the Aging Committee. "Sometimes with very complicated issues like Alzheimer's, how will [employees] know that a person with Alzheimer's can get violent? What do you do? ... We have found that many times, people aren't trying to be mean or do a bad job – they don't have the training."

CT' spending cap battle was years in the making

BY KEITH M. PHANEUF | FEBRUARY 28 5:00 AM

The showdown between Gov. Ned Lamont and the General Assembly over the budgetary spending cap seemingly sprang up in the last two weeks around a growing crisis in special education.

But the seeds of that conflict were planted at least four years ago when officials, flush with federal COVID grants and record-setting surpluses, began dedicating hundreds of millions annually to circumvent the cap.

And now, with pandemic aid nearly exhausted and Congress weighing cuts that could take hundreds of millions more in federal aid away from Connecticut, state officials' efforts to re-embrace the cap is coming at the worst possible time for many politicians.

"We can criticize what's going on at the federal level, but I think Connecticut is being forced to reconcile with its bloated government," said House Minority Leader Vincent J. Candelora, R-North Branford.

"It's not just one category that's touched by an austere budget" and at risk of deep cuts unless the cap dilemma is addressed, countered Sen. Cathy Osten, D-Sprague, co-chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee. "It's every single category."

Did CT misuse emergency COVID aid?

At first glance, Connecticut isn't in that much trouble with the cap, which keeps roughly three-quarters of the current \$26 billion budget in line with household income and inflation. The remaining areas — payments on bonded debt, certain pension contributions, federal funds spent by state agencies, and programs ordered by courts or the federal government — are exempt.

Lamont warned legislators about one week ago that cost overruns and agency overspending have Connecticut on pace to close the fiscal year \$61.5 million above the cap.

Legislators responded last week, in overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion, to order another \$40 million in emergency spending to address a special education funding crisis in local schools. Lamont, who hinted he would veto the appropriation next week, told business leaders in January that the spending cap is "sacrosanct."

Still, the potential overage is only one quarter of 1% of the General Fund.

The larger problem involves the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

The \$27 billion plan Lamont offered on Feb. 5 falls a razor-thin \$1.8 million under the cap, despite leaving higher education and social services with hundreds of millions less and delaying any extra special education aid until 2027.

The common thread running through the spending cap woes of this year and next is \$2.8 billion in emergency federal pandemic grants.

Through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Congress awarded Connecticut that money with few strings. It could be used for almost any program, excluding large-scale tax reductions, and already was exempt from the cap under existing state rules.

Besides arriving one year after COVID struck the state, the timing of these ARPA dollars was perfect for another reason.

A series of other state savings programs created in 2017 to complement the spending cap was beginning to generate massive surpluses, raising concerns among some that too many tax dollars were being leached from education, health care, town aid and other core programs.

Over the past seven years, those surpluses have averaged \$1.8 billion and represent 8% to 9% of the General Fund.

But even as the spending cap and other so-called “fiscal guardrails” were extracting huge sums from programs, legislators and Lamont used cap-exempt ARPA dollars to put much of that money back.

According to the governor’s budget office, an average of \$703 million in ARPA funds has been allocated annually over the past four years. More than half of those funds went to ongoing efforts including higher education, early childhood development and children’s mental health, K-12 school air quality, student meals and school-based health centers, nonprofit social service providers, and services for crime victims and people experiencing homelessness.

And a second accounting maneuver helped state officials work even further around the cap.

Because Connecticut was running up record-setting surpluses, legislators and the governor chose to transfer some of those unspent dollars forward from one fiscal year to the next.

And because those “carry-forward” dollars technically were appropriated in a prior year, they didn’t count against cap limits in the subsequent year, when they were actually spent.

According to state budget records, the governor and legislature have ordered an average of \$259 million in “carry-forwards” per year since 2022.

But now, Connecticut has exhausted its ARPA funds. And with more than a dozen state agencies struggling with overspending this year, options for “carry-forwards” are limited.

The spending cap has plagued CT officials for decades. So, with hundreds of millions of cap-workaround dollars off the books, state officials’ choices are either to comply with the spending limit or revise it, replacing vanishing ARPA and “carry-forward” dollars with more traditional state funds.

Neither would be easy politically.

The Hartford-based Yankee Institute, a conservative public policy group, is urging officials to abide strictly by the spending cap. It believes Connecticut can save big dollars by cutting human services programs for undocumented residents and freezing wages for state employees.

Carol Platt Liebau, the group's president, said delaying necessary spending cuts only leads to greater pain.

"Voters understand that the longer we push this choice down the road, the more we face the prospect of having tougher choices," she said, adding that eventually translates into "massive" tax increases and service cuts.

Chris Collibee, the administration's budget spokesman, said, "Gov. Lamont has been clear that the constitutional spending cap is an important limitation on state budgeting."

Lamont has warned that adherence to the cap is particularly important now, given that President Donald J. Trump and the new Congress are proceeding with plans to cut Medicaid and other programs that send huge dollars to the states. Connecticut receives more than \$6 billion in Medicaid alone from Washington each year. A cut of even 4% would translate into hundreds of millions in lost revenue.

"If an exigent situation presents itself that requires consideration of whether to exceed the spending cap, the governor will engage the public and the legislature," Collibee added.

But no one in state government has felt safe doing that for almost two decades.

The spending cap was enacted in statute in 1991, and voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment one year later making the cap a necessity.

But from the late 1990s through 2007, Republican Govs. John G. Rowland and M. Jodi Rell would team with Democratic-controlled legislatures to legally exceed the cap seven times.

This requires a three-fifths vote of the legislature and the governor's written permission.

But after the Great Recession and a sluggish recovery contributed to three major tax hikes between 2009 and 2015, tolerance for openly exceeding the cap vanished.

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, who inherited a record-setting deficit from Rell and who approved two of the three big tax increases during that period, also sparred with the cap.

And while he never asked lawmakers to surpass the limit, he also sought to circumvent it at times.

For example, he redirected tens of millions owed to charter schools to cities and towns, which then gave the money right back to the charters. But because it had touched the accounts of "distressed" municipalities — and because aid to poor communities was cap-exempt at the time — the spending was allowed.

Malloy and legislators also revised cap exemptions in 2015 to exclude certain pension contributions.

And Lamont, even with his vocal support for the spending cap, signed ARPA allocation measures that pumped hundreds of millions of temporary cap-exempt dollars into ongoing programs.

His new budget also recommends creating a \$300 million endowment, also outside of the cap, to expand child care and early childhood development initiatives.

And while minority Republicans in the legislature insist they support strict adherence to the cap, they took a different approach this week. The GOP overwhelmingly backed the extra \$40 million in spending for special education and tried, unsuccessfully, to boost it to \$108 million.

“That was a political statement that we made to the Democrats,” Candelora said, adding that since the majority already was pushing past the cap, Republicans figured it was time to give local schools all the funding they sought.

Several Democrats suggested it was evidence that the GOP struggles with the cap as much as does the rest of state government.

Has CT learned from its past fiscal mistakes?

There are some policy groups that have suggested it’s time for Connecticut take a fresh look at its budget limit.

Connecticut Voices for Children and a second group composed of The Connecticut Project and researchers from Yale University’s Tobin Center for Economic Policy have offered suggestions in recent months.

Currently, the system takes the prior year’s spending and applies a growth factor: inflation or increases in household income, whichever is larger. But rather than just counting the prior year’s spending, researchers on both studies asked, why not also consider the spending that might have been?

In some years, legislators don’t spend the full amount allowed under the cap system. Under those circumstances, this allowable growth is forfeited, rather than built into the system and carried forward into future years.

In 2016, the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities told a legislative panel that Connecticut’s spending cap growth formula ignores a big chunk of household income in one of the richest states in the nation.

In most years, growth in allowable spending is driven by increases in household income in Connecticut.

But the existing system doesn’t consider earnings from capital gains — a huge omission. With a huge financial services sector and its proximity to Wall Street, Connecticut gains billions of tax dollars annually from investment earnings.

Analysts say the state income tax — the single-largest source of revenue in Connecticut’s budget — will generate \$12.2 billion this fiscal year. And 27% or almost \$3.3 billion of that comes from quarterly tax receipts, most of which involve capital gains and other investment earnings.

“Sometimes the cap can be too onerous,” House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, told The Connecticut Mirror this week.

And though he didn’t suggest any specific reforms, the speaker said suggestions that state officials haven’t learned from the mistakes of prior decades aren’t based in fact.

Since 2017, officials have built a \$212 million rainy day fund into a record-setting \$4.1 billion reserve equal to 18% of annual operating expenses, one of the largest in the nation. Over the same period, another \$8.6 billion in surpluses has been deposited into the pension funds.

“The fiscal success of the state in the last eight years is a credit to both the legislature and the governor,” he said. “It has involved discipline.”

To those who suggest officials can’t be trusted even to review the spending cap and other budget controls without risking Connecticut’s fiscal stability, Ritter added, some “people are scared of their political shadows.”

CT News Junkie

Democratic Leaders Renew Push For Child Tax Credit

BY JAMIL RAGLAND | FEBRUARY 27 4:45 AM

HARTFORD, CT – Democratic leaders joined with the United Way and families to launch a renewed push to establish a refundable child tax credit in Connecticut during a news conference at the Legislative Office Building on Wednesday.

Two related bills are before the General Assembly this session. Senate Bill 740 would provide \$150 per child, for up to three children, for the tax year beginning Jan. 1, 2025, and would scale up to a potential \$600 per child over the next three years. Individuals earning more than \$160,000 or married couples filing jointly earning more than \$200,000 would have the amount they receive from the tax credit adjusted downward. House Bill 5986 would immediately provide \$600 per child for up to three children. Individuals earning over \$100,000 and couples earning over \$200,000 would not be eligible for the tax credit under HB 5986.

“The child tax credit, as we know, is something that has extraordinary empowerment potential and as we saw when the federal child tax credit was briefly in existence a few years ago during the pandemic, it can be transformative,” said Senate President Martin Looney, D-New Haven. “If you combine a child tax credit with the state earned income tax credit, which we already have, it can really work miracles to raise families out of poverty and it will really make our state income tax finally achieve the level of progressivity that we’ve been working toward for more than 30 years.”

Speaker of the House Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, also spoke about the impact of the short-lived federal child tax credit on American families. He noted that it led to the single largest decrease in childhood poverty in the history of the United States, and that those kinds of investments by the government in families were critical.

“I think what you can see from the executive and the legislative branch, and we have bipartisan support here today, is people feel more strongly than ever that the state needs to do more to help our families,” said Ritter. “I’ve been working very closely with [Rep. Maria Horn, D-Salisbury], who [co-chairs] our Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. She’s looking at all these things, and she’s got lots to balance and lots to consider. But sometimes, the credits that we provide as government are not seen, and are not felt where we want them to. The beauty of the child tax credit, and we did it a few years ago here in Connecticut, is we mailed checks to families.”

Mayra Duarte lives in Stamford, Connecticut with her three children, ages 6, 12, and 17. She says the tax credit would be a big help for her family.

“I work as many hours as I can at a local coffee shop, but it’s still hard to cover everything my family needs, especially the clothes, shoes, and the food,” she said. “I’m grateful for the support we get from family, friends, and organizations, but what I really need is just a little extra money to buy new clothes for my kids or pay for a class field trip. I can take an extra shift to cover those clothes, but that also means less time with my kids.”

Rep. Antonio Felipe, D-Bridgeport, said that he’d heard from constituents that recent jumps in the cost of utilities and food were making it difficult to make ends meet.

Felipe also talked about how the benefits of the child tax credit extend beyond the immediate economic relief it provides to families. Using data from the Connecticut Nonprofit Child Tax Credit Coalition and the United Way, Felipe said that every dollar of a child tax credit can put \$1.38 into the local economy.

Rep. Kate Farrar, D-West Hartford, said it’s the legislature’s responsibility to make sure that every child has a chance at thriving.

“And that’s where the child tax credit is a proven measure that can make sure that we are making the choice here in Connecticut, that families can not only make ends meet, but that they can ensure that their families can provide for the future of their children,” Farrar said.

In testimony during a meeting of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee later in the day, House Minority Leader Vincent Candelora, R-North Branford, supported the idea of providing relief to Connecticut residents with families, but he offered a different solution besides the refundable child tax credit.

“Our caucus has been pushing for a child tax deduction,” he said. “And the reason being, if you look at the earned tax credit, we are already giving families of four, families of three, families of two, a graduated rebate. So we already have a system for the [Earned Income Tax Credit] that recognizes the families that are in poverty. What we don’t recognize in the state of Connecticut is the working poor. A child tax deduction would recognize that. Our surrounding states all have that, and it would be an offset to the income tax that you earn as opposed to essentially a welfare benefit. So I would just say we should be redirecting ourselves and staying focused on the earned income tax credit.”

Advocates Support Bill To Expand Medicaid Coverage To Medically Necessary Diapers For Children

BY JAMIL RAGLAND | FEBRUARY 28 5:00 AM

HARTFORD, CT – During public testimony before the Human Services Committee on Thursday, a wide range of legislators, advocates, and citizens expressed their support for a bill that would expand Medicaid coverage of diapers for some infants and toddlers.

House Bill 6397 would allow the Connecticut’s Social Services commissioner to amend the Medicaid state plan to extend coverage for diapers to children from birth to age three for those deemed to have a “medical necessity” for diapers.

As the law stands now, according to a member of the board of directors for The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, Medicaid covers the cost of diapers for people over three years of age if they have medical necessity for things like incontinence or other medical conditions.

According to the bill, the provision of diapers is a “medical necessity” when used to “prevent or ameliorate (1) severe and persistent diaper dermatitis, urinary tract infection or other disease of the skin related to inadequate diaper hygiene, or (2) another health condition, including, but not limited to, a developmental, psychiatric or neurological condition, that results in an unusual need to void or delayed developmentally appropriate toileting behavior.”

Rep. Aundre Bumgardner, D-Groton, one of the co-sponsors of the bill, said that supporting the cause of providing diapers to those in need was important to him.

“This issue is deeply personal to me,” Bumgardner said. “My grandfather was a pediatrician at the submarine base in Groton, and throughout his career, he emphasized the critical importance of addressing infants and toddlers’ health needs. He understood firsthand the challenges families face when trying to provide the best care for their children and the stark health disparities that persist in our communities.”

Bumgardner then shared information from the Connecticut Hospital Association’s (CHA) Diaper Connections report, showing that diaper insecurity is an issue for nearly one in two families in Connecticut, up from one in three before the pandemic. He also said that diaper prices have increased by 22% since 2018.

“Expanding Medicaid to cover medically necessary diapers is a common sense, pro-family and pro-economy solution,” he said.

Dr. Selina Osei, director of Health Equity and Community Engagement for the CHA, explained that when families are diaper insecure, they must leave their children in soiled diapers longer than they should, which can lead to a range of health problems.

“Diaper insecurity can increase the frequency of common skin conditions like diaper rash and fungal infections like candidiasis that are the underlying causes of urinary tract infections, the most common bacterial infection related to inadequate diaper hygiene,” Osei said during her testimony.

She said several studies have also found that diaper insecurity is the number one risk factor for postpartum depression in new mothers.

“Yes, maintaining proper diaper hygiene, including frequent diaper changes and proper cleaning can help prevent the diaper-related skin conditions, but what this proposed bill aims to do is to really target those for whom coverage is medically necessary and will reduce unnecessary health care utilization,” Osei said. “So by passing this bill, we hope to achieve the prevention of diaper-related skin conditions and avoidable hospital visits due to more severe conditions like acute kidney injuries that happen because of frequent UTIs.”

Nathaniel Aroian, a student studying for a degree in social work, said that although he has no children, he can relate to the stress parents feel trying to care for their own.

“I know what it feels like to be exhausted and still not be able to pay the bills,” Aroian said. “When I think about the future that I want my children to grow up in, it’s in a state that helps people when they need it. It’s a state that supports the American dream that we’ve all been sold. But the cost of living is

too high. The barriers that families face just to meet basic needs are overwhelming. Diapers are not a luxury. They're a basic health necessity, yet thousands of Connecticut families are forced to choose between buying diapers, paying for food, rent, or utilities. Parents right now have to make a decision between diapers for their kids or dinner tonight."

Janet Stolfi Alfano, CEO of The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, also testified.

"We've been doing this work for 20 years," she said. "We know that we are just scratching the surface of need that exists. If we think about folks who qualify for Medicaid who have young children, roughly from zero to three based on the DSS data portal, it's a little bit under 70,000 children. We're serving a little over 6,000 children. We know this bill is only talking about supporting those who have a specific medical need, which I think is a wonderful place to start, and will bring parity to how Medicaid coverage exists for older children with special health care needs as well as adults who have incontinence needs who are covered under Medicaid."

While Human Services Committee members were supportive of the bill, they balked at the price tag associated with providing medically necessary diapers, which the Department of Social Services estimated at \$31 million.

Stolfi Alfano explained that the state would only be responsible for \$16 million, as the rest of the money would come from federal sources.

"[\$16 million] is a lot of money," she said. "What we are saying is that we feel like the infants and toddlers in the state are worth it, and that we should do what we can to help prevent further health complications, especially at such a critical time. We are already covering these items for people of different ages, and we want that same care to be taken for our infants and toddlers as well."

Advocates also spoke in support of increasing state funding for The Diaper Bank of Connecticut from \$750,000 annually to \$5 million.

Legislators And Advocates Discuss Urgent Need To Support Childcare Workforce

BY MIA PALAZZO | FEBRUARY 27 12:15 PM

HARTFORD, CT – Advocates, parents, providers, and lawmakers gathered Thursday at the Legislative Building to urge lawmakers to increase funding for child care services as the Committee on Children holds public hearings on budget allocations.

During their news conference, advocates introduced the Workforce Child Care Bill (Senate Bill 1369), which has a goal of capping child care costs at 7% of a household's income.

The bill, supported by the Child Care for CT coalition, seeks to ease the financial burden on families while stabilizing the state's child care workforce through higher wages for providers. Advocates said the bill will create a sustainable funding source through a small charge on Connecticut employers, ensuring long-term stability for child care programs.

"We need to break down the systemic barriers that are keeping families in poverty," said Rep. Corey Paris, a Stamford Democrat who co-chairs the Committee on Children.

Paris said that without substantial reforms, the cost of child care will continue to force parents out of the workforce, exacerbating economic disparities across the state.

According to the CBIA, Connecticut parents spend an average of 27% of their annual income on child care, making it one of the most expensive states in the country for working families. This high cost has contributed to a labor shortage, with about 73,000 job vacancies across various sectors as parents struggle to balance employment with child care responsibilities.

“The price of child care rivals that of a college education or monthly rent,” said Corlays Santana, a policy and program associate with the Connecticut Project, a nonprofit social change think tank.

Santana noted that affordable child care is essential for families as well as the state’s economic health, as affordable and available child care enables parents to remain in the workforce and contribute to the economy.

In addition to the Workforce Child Care Bill, several other legislative proposals seek to improve the accessibility and affordability of child care.

Paris said House Bills 6899 and 5003, and Senate Bill 6, are intended to expand financial assistance programs and increase support for child care providers to prevent closures and improve wages for workers in the sector.

HB 6903 includes a pilot program to disseminate essential child care and financial assistance information to expecting parents, ensuring families have access to resources before their child is born.

Sen. Ceci Maher, a Wilton Democrat who serves as the Senate co-chair of the Committee on Children, stressed that child care reform is also crucial for addressing the state’s youth mental health crisis. She pointed to HB 6951, which would expand behavioral health services and ensure children receive timely and appropriate care.

“For years, we have seen a growing mental health crisis among our youth,” Maher said. “Ensuring access to affordable child care is a key piece of this puzzle.”

Asked by an attendee how these proposals fit into the state’s financial plan, Paris explained that Gov. Ned Lamont has shown a commitment to supporting families through initiatives such as universal pre-K and expanded school meal programs. Advocates believe their child care proposals align with the governor’s broader goals and should be prioritized in the budget.

“The governor has spoken about increasing childcare funding, and we see this as an immediate need,” Maher added. “We cannot afford to wait. Families need relief now.”

New Haven Independent

Elicker, Garrett Split On Homeless Bill

BY ZACHARY GROZ | FEBRUARY 27 6:44 PM

HARTFORD — New Haven and Hamden might be neighbors on a map, but at a Thursday hearing at the state Capitol, the two municipalities were far apart as their Democratic mayors presented dueling testimonies about a state bill on homelessness.

Hamden’s Lauren Garrett threw her support behind the proposal, which would bolster a homeless person’s ability to sleep on public land without fear of penalty.

New Haven's Justin Elicker, meanwhile, came down hard on the bill, which he warned would allow for permanent encampments.

Garrett and Elicker went toe-to-toe on that proposed bill during a public hearing hosted by the Connecticut General Assembly's Housing Committee in Hartford.

The proposal is called Raised House Bill (H.B.) 7033: An Act Prohibiting A Municipality From Imposing Any Penalty On Homeless Persons For Performing Life-Sustaining Activities On Public Land. Hamden Democratic State Rep. Laurie Sweet is a co-sponsor of the measure, which is still in the early phase of drafting and revision.

If passed as written, it would bar Connecticut's 169 cities and towns from passing any law or taking any action that would infringe upon a homeless person's right to engage in "life-sustaining activities" on public land without discrimination based on housing status.

The three-page bill defines "life-sustaining activities" as anything involving "moving, resting, sitting, standing, lying down, sleeping, protecting oneself from the elements, eating, drinking and storing such personal property as needed to safely shelter oneself." The text contemplates decriminalizing these activities when they don't obstruct foot or car traffic and when "sufficient adequate alternative indoor space" isn't immediately available.

Connecticut lawmakers are considering the measure at a time when homelessness has skyrocketed in cities across the country in the midst of overlapping national crises downstream of the Covid pandemic, involving the impacts of wide-spread increased cost of living, mental health struggles, and substance abuse issues.

The legislative effort has also picked up steam in the wake of last summer's U.S. Supreme Court 6 – 3 decision in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, after which cities across the country regained expansive powers to impose civil and criminal penalties on homeless people and sweep encampments.

All the while, city and state government have removed a number of encampments across New Haven in recent years, often on the grounds that they represent a threat to public health and safety, or in response to neighbor concerns about unsightliness and infringement on shared use of public land.

On Thursday, Garrett and Hamden Legislative Council Member Sarah Gallagher linked their support for the bill to a desire to brace for the effects of the post-Grants Pass legal world and other "devastating economic policies coming out of Washington."

They more directly tied S.B. 7033 to a resolution adopted earlier this year by the Hamden Legislative Council that declared housing a "human right" and that committed to scrapping "costly and counter-productive enforcement of civil and criminal penalties."

"This resolution includes a commitment to avoid criminal or civil penalties for those experiencing homelessness," Garrett said. "No one should be criminalized for being poor or homeless [...] Arresting this population we are trying to help would only cause distrust and refusal of the services we are trying to provide, like finding housing, mental health supports, and meeting people's basic needs."

Gallagher added that, boosted by one-time federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, Hamden is now working with New Haven and the Coordinated Access Network to deliver wraparound homelessness services and other related resources in the metro area.

Elicker followed Gallagher’s testimony — and offered a very different take on the bill.

He stressed that New Haven’s government agencies and eight shelters have been shouldering the service needs of people coming in from surrounding municipalities. He claimed that the bill as written would tie the city’s hands.

Elicker said that the city already does not impose criminal penalties and fines on its homeless population — though last October city police did make seven arrests of organizers with U-ACT (Unhoused Activists Community Team) who had set up tents on the Green as part of a broader protest of encampment sweeps. Six of those arrestees were not homeless, and the group had set up the encampment-turned-occupation as an act of direct civil disobedience.

“Our outreach workers work very hard to provide solutions for those who are currently unhoused prior to removing tents,” Elicker said on Thursday. “But H.B. 7033 would effectively allow a single person to occupy public land that is meant to be available to all of the public and for themselves to set up camp anywhere on city or state land there indefinitely.”

Without substantial revision, Elicker said the measure should be “rejected.” In response, Monroe Republican State Rep. Tony Scott said that the committee, led by Democratic Bridgeport State Rep. Antonio Felipe, is “pretty much in alignment” with Elicker’s concerns about the “wording” of the bill. He suggested the bill would be redrafted in the coming weeks to prohibit the building of “permanent structures” on public land.

AI Regulation Battle Comes To Capitol

BY ZACHARY GROZ | FEBRUARY 26 6:35 PM

HARTFORD — “When is it too late?”

So asked state AFL-CIO President Ed Hawthorne Wednesday during a public hearing on the explosion of artificial intelligence (AI) systems out in the wild and the path to reigning them in in Connecticut.

There’s a lot of good that AI can do, he said, but not without a steady hand to guide it. Letting the technology proliferate unchecked poses risks — mass firings, discriminatory hiring, and data harvesting, to name a few — that the state’s “most vulnerable” just can’t afford.

Hawthorne offered that testimony at the State Capitol in Hartford while speaking up in support of Senate Bill (S.B.) No. 2: An Act Concerning Artificial Intelligence. That’s the wide-ranging proposal introduced by New Haven State Sen. and President Pro Tem Martin Looney alongside dozens of his Democratic colleagues. The bill represents one of the upper chamber’s top priorities this legislative session.

The bill was the subject of an hours-long hearing Wednesday as hosted by the state legislature’s General Law Committee, which is chaired by New Haven State Rep. Roland Lemar.

Supporters of the bill, like Hawthorne, argued that there’s no time for state legislators to sit back and wait for a regulation-allergic Trump administration or Congress to act. For years, D.C. lawmakers have failed to pass comprehensive legislation on AI, the bill’s boosters argued, and so now it’s time for Hartford to step in.

“AI is here and it’s advancing at great speed,” said Hawthorne, “and we need to make sure consumers and workers don’t get railroaded by failing to enact reasonable regulations.”

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Critics of the bill, like state economic development Commissioner Dan O’Keefe, countered that the proposal as written constitutes regulatory overreach. They said it would unduly limit AI’s transformative potential for process improvement and economic growth.

“Rather than being a state that welcomes innovation,” O’Keefe said about this bill, “we become the only state in the region that resists it.”

S.B. 2 itself outlines new disclosure rules for “high-risk” uses of AI, like image generation and “consequential decisions” affecting employment, education, lending and credit, housing, legal and government services, and healthcare. If passed, it would lead to the implementation of new enforcement protocols for breaches of those rules, to be carried out by the state Attorney General.

It also proposes the creation of a number of new government bodies to smooth workforce disruptions and provide training in AI systems, including a “Connecticut Technology Advisory Board” and a “Connecticut AI Academy.”

The bill follows a slew of AI laws targeting discrimination, displacement, and data use passed in four other states — California, Utah, Colorado, and Illinois — last year.

The proposal has sparked pushback from industry and the governor, who early in the last legislative session threatened to veto a similar bill, which died in the state House.

"Do Not Hide Behind The Guise Of Innovation"

Wednesday’s General Law Committee public hearing dove deep into the mechanics of the AI regulation bill.

Over the course of the morning and into the early afternoon, the committee heard or received written testimony from nearly 50 labor, technology, and business leaders on the proposal, giving the committee’s 22 members an opportunity to absorb comments in support and opposition before finalizing the text of the bill for referral to the assembly’s legal and fiscal research offices.

The hearing made one thing clear above all: Not everyone’s going to be pleased with this bill. The ACLU of Connecticut, for example, had worked with the committee years ago to draft another AI law — Public Act 23 – 16 — which created a working group to study the technology. At the S.B. No. 2 hearing, the group’s executive director David McGuire commended the committee for taking the next step in regulating AI. Still, he said, the current text provides “overly broad exemptions for certain companies and technologies, limiting oversight.”

McGuire pointed in particular to a “loophole” in the bill allowing companies to deny any appeal of an automated decision if it’s not in the “best interest of the consumer.” The bill does not specify what “best interest” means, aside from providing one example, relevant for AI systems in healthcare: “any instance in which any delay might pose a risk to the life or safety of the consumer.” The ambiguity, McGuire said, “could allow companies to deny appeals arbitrarily.”

Representatives from the state’s healthcare industry don’t see it that way. The bill, according to Yale New Haven Health RN Jacqueline Blake, would make many of the hospital system’s AI applications “impossible and prevent the use of innovation to improve healthcare.” AI systems that the hospital has deployed, or hopes to in the future, like “optimiz[ing] patient scheduling” to reduce “no shows,” medication management algorithms, “predictive technologies” to guard against the misuse of

prescription drugs, and “patient data analysis,” could be taken offline if the bill goes forward as drafted, she said.

According to state Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Dan O’Keefe — who leads the agency, which, under the current version of the law, would be in charge of spearheading a “regulatory sandbox” on AI policy for state offices — the bill imperils the state’s capacity to innovate and compete with its neighbors.

O’Keefe appeared at Wednesday’s hearing remotely from India, where he and Gov. Lamont are touring with the state’s venture fund Connecticut Innovations (CI). He urged the committee to back a bill proposed by the governor, Senate Bill No. 1249, which would inject capital funding for AI projects through CI, release “AI-ready datasets” compiled by agencies, and create a similar “regulatory sandbox,” instead.

In response to this and other testimony pushing the committee to walk back the S.B. No. 2 AI rules and regs and adopt a lighter touch or “wait and see” approach, the AFL-CIO’s Hawthorne did not mince words. “It is essential that we do not hide behind the guise of innovation to allow corporate developers and profiteers to increase economic inequality, curtail our rights, and undermine our democracy,” he said.

Middletown Press

What Duracell's exit says about Connecticut's ability to keep and attract big companies

BY PAUL SCHOTT | FEBRUARY 28

Duracell has decided to move its research-and-development headquarters out of Connecticut from Bethel to Atlanta, Georgia. It is a decision that is being scrutinized not only in the northern Fairfield County town, but also across the state.

The battery maker is the latest of several prominent companies in recent years to decide to move a hub in Connecticut to another state. Each of those relocations has stoked worries among elected officials and business leaders that pressures such as the cost of doing business and worker shortages have made the state inhospitable to businesses. But a number of relocations to Connecticut during the same time frame have shown that the state can still be an attractive location for many large companies.

“Whenever an event like this happens, it’s a reminder that we have to ask why the company is leaving,” Chris DiPentima, CEO and president of the Connecticut Business & Industry Association, said this week. “It usually comes down to cost or workforce.”

Conspicuous departures

Duracell has not made anyone available for an interview with CT Insider since the decision to relocate the R&D headquarters was announced last week. But a company spokesperson shared a written statement this week that summarized the reasons for the move out of Bethel, where it has had a presence since the mid-1970s.

“Our decision to move was driven by the desire for better proximity to our manufacturing sites, along with the appeal of the universities in the Atlanta/Georgia area, which made the location ideal for local recruitment,” the statement said. The company’s operations in Georgia include a distribution center in

the Atlanta suburb of Fairburn and a manufacturing facility in the city of LaGrange, near the Georgia-Alabama line.

State legislators' reaction to Duracell's announcement was mixed. The three Republican lawmakers who represent Bethel in the state General Assembly — Sens. Eric Berthel and Tony Hwang, and Rep. Martin Focello — asserted that the relocation was driven by the high costs of doing business in Connecticut. They expressed particular concern about electricity costs and property taxes.

“Any private enterprise looking to make money must surely consider its bottom-line costs. This is a company that has invested tens of millions of dollars in our region and our residents for half a century, and I'm sure it did not take this decision lightly,” Berthel said in a written statement. “This is yet another red flag regarding Connecticut's business climate. I encourage the majority to join all legislative Republicans in taking steps to reverse this troubling course.”

State Rep. Raghiv Allie-Brennan, the sole Democratic member of Bethel's delegation in the state legislature, disagreed with his Republican counterparts. He said in his own statement that, “this was not a rejection of Connecticut's policies but rather an internal business decision.”

Allie-Brennan added in his statement that Duracell had qualified for a property tax break of \$870,000 from the Georgia state government related to the relocation of the R&D HQ. In its statement, Duracell indicated that it has received state funding in Georgia, but it did not disclose the amount.

“While Duracell is grateful for the incentives that Georgia has provided since we established our manufacturing sites in the state, the local tax incentives were not a deciding factor in our move to Atlanta,” the statement added.

A spokesperson for the Georgia Department of Economic Development declined to comment on state funding for the company.

Duracell officials declined to specify how many Bethel-based employees would move to Atlanta or provide a current head count for the Bethel operations. An attorney for Duracell told town officials in March 2023 that the company had about 100 to 150 employees based at its hub at 14 Research Drive, which is part of Berkshire Corporate Park.

Based on recent conversations with Duracell officials, town leaders in Bethel are hopeful that a number of employees who work remotely will stay in Connecticut after the R&D move is completed.

“They reassured us that a lot of people are here and staying here,” Bethel First Selectman Dan Carter said last week.

The departure of Duracell, which has indicated that it will keep the Bethel R&D center open until 2027, will follow several other prominent corporate departures from Connecticut that have been carried out or announced in recent years.

In January 2023, toy maker Lego announced that it would relocate its main U.S. offices from Enfield to Boston. At that point, Lego had about 740 employees in Enfield, which had been its U.S. base since 1975.

“Boston is ranked one of the best cities in the world to attract and retain talent,” Skip Kodak, Lego's Americas president, said in a statement in January 2023. “This, along with its world-class academic

institutions, skilled workforce and great quality of life makes it an ideal location for our U.S. head office.”

A Lego spokesperson confirmed this week that the company still plans to complete the move by the end of 2026.

In September 2023, Frontier Communications announced that it would move its headquarters from Norwalk to Dallas, Texas.

Also in 2023, The Campbell’s Co., announced that it would close its offices in Norwalk — a longtime hub for its snacks division, which includes Pepperidge Farm — as part of a consolidation of the snacks business into the company’s headquarters in Camden, New Jersey. The company informed Connecticut state officials in the summer of 2023 that “approximately” 44 employees, most of whom chose not to relocate, would be laid off.

The Norwalk offices shuttered at the end of last year, a Campbell’s spokesperson said this week. Campbell's still operates in Connecticut, through its bakery in Bloomfield, where more than 375 employees are based.

In the past 10 years, the most-scrutinized corporate exit from the state has been General Electric’s relocation in 2016 of its headquarters from Fairfield to Boston. The conglomerate’s move ended a stay of more than 40 years in Fairfield.

“Massachusetts spends more on research and development than any other region in the world, and Boston attracts a diverse, technologically fluent workforce focused on solving challenges for the world,” Jeff Immelt, GE’s then-CEO, said in January 2016.

The uprooting of the headquarters tarnished Connecticut’s economic reputation because GE was the largest company headquartered in the state. It ranked No. 11 in the 2016 edition of the Fortune 500 list of the largest U.S. corporations.

But the jobs loss from the move was limited. GE laid off about 100 employees and transferred about 200 employees to Boston, compared with an in-state head count of about 5,700 when it announced the relocation.

GE operations that stayed in Connecticut included remnants of its GE Capital business. The year before, GE completed the spinoff of GE Capital’s North American retail finance business into its own publicly traded company, the Stamford-based Synchrony.

The remainder of GE has been split into three new publicly traded companies in the past couple of years. One of those firms, GE Aerospace, has offices at The Towers complex in Norwalk, where GE Capital was based.

Soon after GE’s move, Connecticut faced the prospect of losing another Fortune 500 firm, Aetna. The health insurer, which was acquired in 2018 by an even larger Fortune 500 company, CVS Health, had explored relocating its headquarters from Hartford to Manhattan, but it ended up staying put.

Shortly before CVS completed its acquisition of Aetna, the latter committed to keeping its main offices in Connecticut for another 10 years. But CVS/Aetna’s future in the state’s capital city has been clouded by more than 1,200 layoffs affecting positions connected to the Hartford offices that have been carried out or announced in the past year and a half.

Notable arrivals

While Connecticut has grappled with some significant corporate departures in the recent years, it has also attracted a number of large companies.

During Ned Lamont's six years as governor, the biggest corporate recruit has been tobacco producer Philip Morris International, which opened in late 2022 its main offices in Stamford, after relocating from Manhattan.

The 2024 edition of the Fortune 500 included PMI and 14 other Connecticut-headquartered companies. The Connecticut-based companies' 3% share of last year's Fortune 500 firms exceeds the state's approximately 1% portion of the U.S. population.

In 2021, the year that PMI announced it would move to Connecticut, Lamont's administration announced several other corporate moves. They included the relocation of manufacturing-and-technology company ITT's headquarters from White Plains, New York to Stamford; the move of cryptocurrency conglomerate Digital Currency Group's headquarters from Manhattan to Stamford; and financial-technology firm iCapital's expansion to the state, with an office opening in Greenwich.

In the past few years, the state has attracted several other fintech firms. New arrivals from other industries have included Full Stack Modular, a company that designs and constructs high-rise buildings, which announced in 2023 that it would relocate its headquarters from Brooklyn, New York to Hamden.

The companies that have moved their headquarters to Connecticut in the past few years have cumulatively pledged to create hundreds of jobs in the state.

During Malloy's 2011-2019 tenure as governor, the state landed several prominent recruits through the First Five Plus program, which provided state funding to help companies relocate to or expand in Connecticut. Among the First Five Plus participants' milestones in the 2010s, Spectrum-services provider Charter Communications relocated its main offices from St. Louis, Missouri, to Stamford; consumer-goods multinational Henkel moved a regional headquarters from Scottsdale, Arizona, to Stamford; NBC Sports opened its headquarters in Stamford; Amazon opened its first facilities in Connecticut; and Bengaluru, India-headquartered IT firm Infosys expanded to Connecticut by opening a hub in Hartford.

Amid the corporate comings and goings of the past decade, Connecticut has struggled with jobs growth. At the end of last year, the state still had fewer payroll jobs than it did at its all-time peak in March 2008. That predicament reflects headwinds, such as low population growth since the Great Recession and post-pandemic worker shortages.

Some leaders in the business community, such as the CBIA's DiPentima, take solace in the stabilization of the state government's finances in the past few years. They add, however, that there is still much more that the state legislature and Lamont's administration can do to make the state more business-friendly — particularly by tackling the state's high costs of living and doing business.

"We're not going through budget deficits and tax hikes in that vicious cycle we saw from 2008 to 2018," DiPentima said. "That gives me hope that there is some competitiveness in Connecticut. We just need to not take that for granted, and we need to look in the mirror and work on those things that are driving up our costs."

NBC 12 CT

CT bill would protect unhoused from being punished for sleeping outdoors

BY FRANK RECCHIA | FEBRUARY 27 10:13 PM

Hearings in Hartford chaired by State Rep. Antonio Felipe, of Bridgeport, on Thursday focused on House Bill 7033, which aims to protect people who are unhoused from being punished for sleeping outside.

Mayor Joe Ganim supports the bill.

"We want to make sure our unhoused neighbors are not being fined or punished in any way for dwelling outdoors," Ganim said.

"Any of us, God forbid, could be in that same situation for reasons totally beyond our control. At this time in our nation's history, when people's rights are eroding due to the insensitivity of some, we want to champion our unhoused neighbors and make sure they're protected," Ganim said.

Some who oppose the bill say it would make it hard for cities and towns to keep public places safe and clean and usable for everyone.

The bill would prohibit municipalities from punishing people for conducting "life-sustaining activities," such as eating, sleeping and storing belongings in public areas.

FOX 61

Connecticut bill requiring movie theaters to disclose actual start times attracts national attention

BY ANGELO BAVARO | 11:22 PM FEBRUARY 27, 2025

CONNECTICUT, USA — While movie-goers sit through endless ads and trailers at the theaters, wondering when the actual movie will start, a new state bill could change that.

The proposed legislation would require theaters to advertise the real start time of movies.

If the bill becomes law, people would see two times instead of one when buying movie tickets in Connecticut: the time that ads and trailers start and the actual start time of the movie.

"The bill came from constituents. I've heard from a number of constituents over the years who are frustrated that the time stated in the ad for a starting time was not the actual time of the feature," said State Sen. Martin Looney, who introduced the bill that would fine theaters up to \$1,000 per violation.

The bill has caught national attention. Debate is raging among vloggers, outlets like Barstool and the thousands of people reposting and commenting on articles.

"It comes under the general heading truth in advertising and consumer protection," Looney said.

However, there are also critics.

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"We already have so many challenges coming out of COVID. We're still trying to crawl our way back. Another regulation and something we have to do is not helpful," said Lew Michaels, executive director of Cinestudio, an independent film theater in Hartford.

He and other movie theater industry leaders are raising several concerns with the bill.

"We have films that are booked out in April right now. I have no idea which trailers will show before those films. So trying to put a time on our website when people will buy tickets, to say, 'hey, we're going to have trailers for 12 minutes,' it's just not practical," Michaels said. "I think there could be an issue with advertisers not wanting to be on screen if they're not going to be watching those ads and that is a big income line for most theaters."

Looney is reading the reviews amid his other work at the State Capitol.

"We're dealing with a number of major issues this year," Looney said. "We're grappling with not knowing yet what the level of federal cuts will be. We've got to make important decisions about special education funding, general education funding and also about support for higher education and dealing with the Medicaid shortfall if the government decides not to fund it at current levels and prescription drug costs."

He said he's surprised by how much attention the bill is getting.

"It reminds me, years ago, there was a comedian Robert Klein and he did a bit one time where he was portraying Shakespeare, getting noticed that his play 'Titus Andronicus' was creating a great buzz and awards, and he said, 'Titus Andronicus?' I'm the author of 'Hamlet,' 'Othello,' 'Romeo and Juliet.' 'Titus Andronicus?'" Looney said.

The General Law Committee is currently considering feedback from a public hearing and has until March 24 to pass the bill out of committee and onto the full legislature for a vote.

CT Public Radio

Affordable CT starter homes on the horizon with proposed bill

BY ABIGAIL BRONE | FEBRUARY 27 4:37 PM

A bipartisan effort to construct more affordable starter homes across Connecticut is being considered by state lawmakers.

Eighty percent of Connecticut's renters can't afford to buy a home in the current housing market, according to Jim Perras, Chief Executive Officer of the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Connecticut.

The Homes for CT program, which incentivizes builders to create more affordable housing, could be an answer to the state's housing crisis, according to Perras.

"Housing affordability is a top reason why professionals are leaving Connecticut, and we can help change that today," Perras said. "Homes for Connecticut Loan Program is a fiscally responsible, market driven solution. If passed, it will remove barriers for builders, while ensuring homes remain attainable for Connecticut families."

Homes for CT would offer low-cost financing for home builders to construct single-family starter homes. As of last year, the median priced home in Connecticut is about \$400,000, according to Alexa Kevalo, president-elect of the Connecticut Association of Realtors.

The Homes for CT program has garnered bipartisan support, and is also being endorsed by realtors and home builders.

The houses would be sold to buyers through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA), ensuring they'd be made affordable, according to Democratic State Rep. Jason Doucette, who represents Glastonbury and Manchester.

“The way it is drafted now is that it would be basically 100% affordable, every unit that is created through this program,” Doucette said. “From an administrative standpoint, there is less work to do for the developers, for the municipalities.”

The program would operate alongside the successful Build for CT program, which is geared toward increasing construction for affordable multi-family rental properties.

“Build for CT is just geared towards multi family rental housing. The single family market is a totally different animal,” Doucette said. “It will work as a companion program. CHFA would administer both programs.”

CHFA typically sells homes to residents earning up to 120% of the Area Median Income (AMI), and most CHFA homes across the state have a maximum sales price of about \$530,000, Doucette said.

Establishment of the program was up for a public hearing in the Banking Committee Thursday, but has not yet gone up for a vote.

The Homes for CT program would help builders save on construction costs and buyers get a reasonably priced starter home, Republican State Rep. Tom Delnicki, of South Windsor, said.

“That's what it's all about, the American Dream, the opportunity to be able to live in your own home and to prosper and to have a family and set your roots in Connecticut,” Delnicki said

WHSU Public Radio

CT lawmakers brace for major Medicaid cuts in proposed federal budget

BY MOLLY INGRAM | FEBRUARY 27 3:37 PM

Connecticut officials are warning of major cuts to Medicaid in the state if the federal budget passes as proposed.

The budget bill that passed the House earlier this week calls for \$880 billion in cuts to the Energy and Commerce Committee, which funds Medicaid.

It's not clear where exactly the cuts would be made — and Republican lawmakers have been adamant that they won't be from Medicaid — but Medicaid spending accounted for 14% of the federal budget in 2023. Democrats say it's hard to imagine where the cuts would come from otherwise.

“The reality is that for people who are struggling the most, who have the most challenges in our state, are going to be the most impacted,” Connecticut Treasurer Erick Russell (D) said on Thursday. “And we’re seeing this with respect to Medicaid, but also threats to cuts around health care more broadly, and childcare and food assistance programs.”

If the federal government reduces its Medicaid funding match to the standard 50%, Connecticut would need to spend \$850 million more to make up the difference.

Adherence to the state’s fiscal guardrails could prevent lawmakers from approving that increase, which would increase the number of uninsured people in the state by over 70%.

“Three in eight Connecticut children rely on Medicaid, yet Washington Republicans have voted to gut the program to bankroll tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans,” Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff said. “Think about that — they’re taking healthcare away from children and nursing home residents just to hand a windfall to millionaires. If that’s not immoral, I don’t know what is.”

The federal government currently matches Medicaid funding under the Affordable Care Act expansion at 87%.

Nearly one million Connecticut residents are on Medicaid.

CT lawmakers and advocates push for child tax credit

BY ISABELLA FABBO | FEBRUARY 27 2:34 PM

Some Connecticut lawmakers, along with advocates from the United Way of Connecticut, want to establish a \$600 child tax credit for up to three children per family.

The plan would phase in at \$150 per child and work its way up.

“I think given our current climate, getting a child tax credit on the books is the most important thing,” said Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney (D-New Haven), testifying at a public hearing Wednesday. “I think it will have to be phased in over a period of time given our fiscal situation, but establishing it with a schedule to reach full implementation is a realistic and pragmatic way to go.”

Looney said the previous, one-time child tax credit the state implemented during the pandemic was “transformative” and that, combined with the state-earned income tax credit, it could work miracles to raise families out of poverty.

“It’s the government investing in you to give you a little bit of help,” House Speaker Matt Ritter said. “It’s not a handout but to give you help and assistance as you raise your families, which with inflation becomes more difficult. If you look at what’s happening in Washington, they’re thinking the exact opposite. Instead of providing credits and help to families who are trying to raise two young children, they’re gonna provide tax breaks to the wealthiest among us.”

State Representative Kate Farrar (D-West Hartford) said too many families are struggling to make ends meet, and the state is falling behind in their effort to support them.

“Right now, we are the only high-cost state in the nation that has a personal income tax that does not adjust for a number of children or childcare expenses,” she said. “It means we’re at a competitive disadvantage when we look at our neighboring states.”

Farrar said that every dollar of a child tax credit can put \$1.38 back into the local economy.

“I think it really is an economic generator because it empowers lower-income people to have more money to spend to put back into the economy where they are, in fact, paying taxes,” Looney said.

United Way of Connecticut President Lisa Tepper Bates said more than 60 organizations in the state are working towards implementing a child tax credit.