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Wednesday, April 17, 2024

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Thousands in CT were set to have criminal records wiped. A year later, they're still waiting

By ALEX PUTTERMAN

For Adam Osmond, the erasure of his criminal record always seems just around the corner — and never seems to actually arrive.

Osmond, who was convicted more than 10 years ago of a misdemeanor offense he says he didn't commit, helped lobby in 2021 for Connecticut's Clean Slate law, which would expunge records for residents with old, relatively minor convictions. He wanted to help not only himself, he says, but also tens of thousands of fellow citizens whose charges make it hard to find housing or employment. When the law passed nearly three years ago, after a years-long push from advocacy groups, Osmond waited patiently for erasure. He waited through the state's initial January 2023 deadline. Then waited more as lawmakers delayed the timeline by a year. And more as January 2024 came and went and the state announced it was still behind schedule.

As of this month, Gov. Ned Lamont's office says the state has expunged convictions for only about 10 percent of residents whose charges are supposed to be wiped — just over 13,000 people in total. "It's just frustrating to see that still after all this time the bill is not implemented," said Osmond, who has [published data analysis](#) on Clean Slate will have once fully implemented. "I've been advocating for this for a long time, and it's frustrating."

In late March, advocates sent Lamont a letter informing the governor they were "extremely disappointed" by the slow progress and continued delays — and by the fact those waiting for expungement must pay \$75 each time they want to access their records to see if they've been erased. They demanded the administration devote greater resources to hasten the process.

"We believe this delay requires your urgent attention and focus to fix this immediately," they wrote. Lamont spokesperson Julia Bergman said the administration hopes to have 40 percent of eligible records cleared by the end of April and "the vast majority" done this summer. "The governor is a strong believer in giving people second chances, which is why he was proud to sign Connecticut's Clean Slate law," Bergman said. "He understands the frustrations with the delays in implementing the law, which has largely been due to challenges with historical data that in some cases is more than two decades old."

A new law... and lots of delays

After several years of lobbying and advocacy, Clean Slate passed in 2021, as part of a push to create "second chance" for Connecticut residents convicted of crimes years ago.

Under the law, misdemeanors are [eligible for automatic erasure](#) seven years after a person's most recent conviction, while certain low-level felonies were eligible after 10 years. To have a conviction cleared, someone must have completed their full sentence, including parole and probation. All erasures were slated to happen by January 2023.

"I am proud to sign a bill that will help people who have served their sentence and who have continued to live crime-free lives," Lamont wrote in a [letter to legislators](#). "Enacting this legislation adds to Connecticut's accomplishments as a national leader in criminal justice reform."

As it turned out, not only did the erasures not happen on time, but lawmakers had to [pass follow-up legislation](#) last year specifying and correcting aspects of the original law that had complicated the implementation process. Under the new bill, the timeline was pushed back 12 months, with erasures now scheduled for January 2024.

For much of 2023, there was little sign of further delay, and in December, Lamont held a celebratory news conference to announce all qualifying records [would be erased over the next month](#). In early February, the governor proposed an additional \$1.5 million in the state budget to implement Clean Slate efficiently.

But as the months passed, advocates who had pushed for the erasures wondered why they didn't seem to be happening. In late March, they held a news conference at the state capitol and delivered Lamont a letter demanding the governor hire more staff to erase records and that his administration provide more regular updates on their progress in doing so.

"Gov. Lamont pledged many times to get Clean Slate done 'this year,' and that was in 2023," said Rodney Moore, an advocate with the non-profit Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut, or CONECT. "But here we are a third of the way through 2024, and now we're told the new data and IT issues. How many times are we going to have data and IT issues?"

Spokespeople for the governor's office and for the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, the agency responsible for erasing the records, have said the delays aren't due to malice or to philosophical wavering over the issue, merely logistical challenges.

Rick Green, a DESPP spokesperson, said the process is "more complicated than originally thought," often has to be conducted manually and relies on "60-year-old systems based on technology that is no longer in use."

"Clean Slate is about helping people move forward with their lives and removing barriers to jobs and housing," Green said. "We are committed to overcome problems that unexpectedly emerged when we began the erasure process."

So far, Green said, a total of 33,656 charges have been cleared for 13,626 people. He said the state expects to wipe records for another 65,435 "in the coming weeks" and that the remainder of the erasures — more than 200,000 charges for more than 100,000 people — "will be completed in 6-12 months."

'It's just onerous'

Matt McDermott, an organizer with CONECT, wonders: If erasing these records was so difficult and complex, why did it take so long to realize it? And why did state officials keep promising results were right around the corner?

"There's no doubt it's a complex project, and some of the state's data systems are old and decrepit and so forth," McDermott said. "But the idea that we're discovering new data problems and data-quality issues after we supposedly spent a year addressing them and fixing them and getting new legislation passed and testing the system — it's frankly inexcusable."

McDermott said he doesn't think the Lamont administration is intentionally slowing the Clean Slate process. CONECT leaders have met with the governor's staff, and they understand that clearing so many records isn't as easy as pressing a button.

And yet during these delays residents with criminal records continue to face the barriers the Clean Slate law was designed to remove. Criminal records can follow people for decades, often making it more difficult to find [find jobs](#) and [housing](#).

Adding to the frustration, advocates say, the state has no procedure for notifying people when their charges are erased, and it costs \$75 to request a criminal record. That means someone waiting for charges to be erased may need to pay repeatedly just to find out whether they're in the clear.

"If all through the course of 2024 there are going to be records erased in dribs and drabs and nobody can tell you what's erased and what's not — or which kind of records, or up to what year or anything to delineate if my record is erased or not — then I have to go back repeatedly, spending \$75 to see," McDermott said. "It's just onerous."

Osmond said he has heard frequently from others with criminal records who struggle to find jobs or housing and would benefit from their conviction being erased. He noted that Black and Latino people are arrested and convicted at higher rates than white people, leaving them disproportionately affected by delays in the implementation of Clean Slate.

After nearly three years of waiting, Osmond says he has a simple message for the Lamont administration: "Enforce the law."

Article continues below this ad

"The bill is passed. Implement the bill, just like every other bill that gets implemented right away," he said. "Nobody should be waiting for something that's already passed and that's already the law."

Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona defends FAFSA process during visit to Connecticut

By ALEX PUTTERMAN

MIDDLETOWN — During a visit to Connecticut on Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona defended recent changes to the federal student aid system, urging students who have applied to college to complete the necessary aid forms as soon as possible.

Under Cardona, a Meriden native and former Connecticut education commissioner, the federal Department of Education has sought to simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid process. Amid the overhaul, however, FAFSA forms became available months later than usual, and glitches in the online system made it difficult for some families to access the materials they needed. As deadlines approach for students to choose which college to attend, some still don't know how much different schools will charge them.

Even so, Cardona said Tuesday he doesn't regret rolling out the new FAFSA process this year, noting that this year's seniors otherwise would have been left with the prior, dated version.

"I know that there was a delay this year, but this process was broken. For 40 years nobody touched it," Cardona said. "We're fixing it, we're making it better so more students have access."

Cardona encouraged students families who haven't filled out their FAFSA forms to do so immediately. "It's working," he said of the new process. "You go to studentaid.gov today, and within three of four days your college will have your information."

Cardona appeared Tuesday at Middlesex Community College for a panel on higher education for incarcerated people, then visited Hartford Public High School later in the day for a FAFSA workshop for Hartford students. Department of Education officials have declared this the "FAFSA Week of Action," as they seek to drive application submissions.

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona discusses the FAFSA process with a Hartford student.

Cardona visited a FAFSA workshop Tuesday at Hartford Public High School.

Connie Coles, college and career specialist at Bulkeley High in Hartford, said some students have submitted their FAFSA forms without incident, while others have run into glitches that make the process near-impossible. She recalled one student who grew so frustrated she announced she didn't want to go to college after all, before being talked into trying again.

"When it works, it's a wonderful thing," Coles said of the new FAFSA process. "We just haven't had it working the whole time."

Siddharth Krishnan, a senior at University High School of Science and Engineering, said he'd managed to fill out the FAFSA forms and has committed to attend Georgetown University next fall. Friends of his, though, haven't been as fortunate, he said.

"My opinion of the process right now has been that it's affecting certain people disproportionately, and it's completely unfair," Krishnan said. "It's causing a lot of unneeded stress."

Though Connecticut hasn't been immune to FAFSA issues this spring, the state currently [ranks first nationwide](#) in its share of high school seniors who have completed the process.

As part of his visit to Connecticut Tuesday, Cardona spent the morning at Cheshire Correctional Institutional, where he met with incarcerated people involved in college programs. Afterward, he appeared in Middletown alongside Gov. Ned Lamont to discuss higher education initiatives behind bars.

"The level of dignity, of life's purpose that I heard from those folks earlier today is something that will stay with me forever," he said.

The panel also included several formerly incarcerated people who spoke to the value of educational opportunities in prison. Brian Sullivan, a formerly incarcerated Hartford resident who is now a criminal justice advocate, urged lawmakers to support the Second Chance Pell Experiment, which extends Pell grants to incarcerated students.

"I spent 30 years in the Connecticut Department of Correction, and I was guilty for what I was charged with, and I deserve to go where I was, but I knew I was better than that," Sullivan said. "Second Chance Pell was a key essential for me to be where I'm at right now, sitting next to the governor."

Cardona began his career as an elementary school teacher in Meriden, then became a principal and assistant superintendent in his home district. Lamont appointed him education commissioner in 2019, and he spent nearly two years in that role before President Joe Biden tapped him to lead the federal Department of Education.

Sikorsky to lay off hundreds in Connecticut after Army helicopter decision

By ALEXANDER SOULE

On the heels of the U.S. Army scrapping plans for an armed scout helicopter, Sikorsky is laying as many as 400 jobs in Connecticut.

Christian Abraham / Hearst Connecticut Media

After the U.S. Army [canceled plans for a new armed scout helicopter](#), Sikorsky is laying off as many as 400 employees in Connecticut, primarily in its engineering and digital technology ranks who would have developed the chopper.

Sikorsky confirmed the layoffs on Tuesday to CT Insider, with a spokesperson not providing a specific number of workers impacted, but that it equated to less than 1 percent of parent Lockheed Martin's workforce, which numbered 122,000 people entering this year. One source familiar with the company's plans said the cuts would affect about 350 jobs in Stratford and another 50 elsewhere in Connecticut. "We intend to retain as many roles as possible to meet national security commitments and preserve the U.S. rotary wing industrial base," Sikorsky stated in an email forwarded Tuesday by a spokesperson.

In addition to Connecticut, where the manufacturer [has its headquarters plant in Stratford](#), layoffs would extend to Sikorsky facilities in other states.

"It has been well documented that there is high demand for engineering and tech talent in our state right now, so it is our expectation these workers will be quickly and easily absorbed into our manufacturing ecosystem," Julia Bergman, spokesperson for Gov. Ned Lamont said Tuesday evening, noting the governor spoke with Sikorsky's CEO Monday. "The state, through the departments of community and economic development, is working with Sikorsky and other partners to help those impacted including proactively connecting workers with new job opportunities in-state.

"While this news is unfortunate, the company remains committed to Connecticut and will continue to be an important contributor to the state's manufacturing and defense sector," Bergman continued "The administration has spoken with senior Army officials who have expressed continued and increased support for the Black Hawk program."

Sikorsky had been vying with Bell Textron for the Future Armed Reconnaissance Aircraft program, offering its Raider X design. The Army elected to table the new program, with the rapid improvement in drone capabilities and satellite imaging to scan specific locales to gather intelligence and assess threats. Two years ago, Bell [beat out Sikorsky with a new, tilt-rotor aircraft](#) that will take on some of the missions performed today by the Sikorsky Black Hawk and other helicopters. In canceling the newer scout helicopter program, the Army [committed to another set of Black Hawk purchases](#) over five years beginning in 2027.

"This deeply sad news should also be a call to action—to aid the workers and communities most directly impacted, but also to enhance investment in our defense workforce," U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said in a statement. "Sikorsky's engineers are among the best in the world and my office stands ready to do whatever we can to help all the workers who are affected by this deeply disappointing decision."

Sikorsky continues to market Black Hawk helicopters to foreign militaries, and is also [building a new fleet of cargo helicopters](#) for the U.S. Marine Corps.

In recent years Sikorsky has maintained a Connecticut workforce numbering between 7,500 and 8,000 people at varying points. Lockheed Martin announced about [800 job cuts in early 2023](#) in the rotary and mission systems division that includes Sikorsky, without specifying a local impact.

"Last time they were able to find 30 percent of the people other employment within the company," state Rep. Joe Gresko, D-Stratford, referencing the prior Sikorsky layoff. "They're going to be deploying that again this time around."

Textron announced a round of 725 job cuts last November at Bell and another division that makes a range of specialized vehicles, ranging from golf carts and snowmobiles to airport tractors used to roll planes from gates.

Generations later, segregated Puerto Rican 'Borinqueneer' regiment honored in New Britain

By LAU GUZMÁN

NEW BRITAIN – A group of local dignitaries and family members gathered to honor the [65th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army](#), better known by the nickname “Borinqueneers.” The nickname nods to the fact that most of the members of the segregated regiment were volunteers from Puerto Rico, originally called “Borinquen” by the indigenous Taíno nation.

“Borinqueneers fought in all the world wars. They're mostly known for the Korean War, but were never recognized,” said Rep. Robert Sanchez, D, New Britain, during Saturday's event. "And that's why we wanted to erect a monument in their honor; because so many of us in the Puerto Rican community here in Connecticut probably have family members that have served in that regiment.”

The effort to honor the regiment is personal for Sanchez. He said two of his uncles served with the Borinqueneers and spoke about how they were treated as Korean war veterans. Sanchez was part of the committee that pushed to build the monument in 2018 and spoke about it as a way to recognize their sacrifice.

He said that his uncles never got the chance to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor in 2016 or live to see the celebration on National Borinqueneer day, which was first celebrated in 2021. Because of this, he said that the state of Connecticut chooses to continue honoring Borinqueneers with an official citation, even after they've died.

“Every ceremony, we give out a number of citations to family members that we know of that probably have not received the citation from their local government or their state government,” he explained.

This year, they presented a citation to David Palacios, the grandson of Borinqueneer Carmelo Valle Reyes. Even though Valle Reyes passed away 10 years ago, Palacios said that his grandfather retired in 1962 after 22 years of service.

He added that his grandfather's service inspired him as he served in the Coast Guard for 30 years. Palacios retired in 2020, but hopes to teach future generations about his family's military history.

“I have six grandbaby boys and I can guarantee you that they will hear about the Borinqueneers,” he said during the ceremony.

Sanchez remembers that the monument to the regiment was inaugurated in 2018 with a large ceremony that drew thousands of attendees, including the former governor of Puerto Rico Ricardo Rosselló. He added that the memorial mimics the architecture of Puerto Rico with walls that represent a traditional Spanish fortress in San Juan and is the only one on the continental U.S. that honors the regiment.

"New Britain is extremely proud to be home to the only monument dedicated to Borinqueneers in the entire country," said Mayor Erin Stewart. "The brave men of the 65th infantry from Puerto Rico fought for our country in multiple wars, so it means a lot to be able to celebrate their sacrifice and legacy."

CT Examiner

Lawmakers and Advocates Press for Quicker Wheelchair Repair Times

Robert Storace

HARTFORD — It can currently take up to a year to fix wheelchairs for the state’s approximately 5,000 users. And while advocates, lawmakers and repair technicians agree the delays are excessive, agreeing on an acceptable turnaround time has proven challenging.

In February, a legislative task force recommended that all wheelchairs be repaired in 10 business days. The report notes that consumers and advocates believe repairs can be made within a period of four business days or six calendar days.

NuMotion and National Seating and Mobility, the two primary companies in Connecticut that fix wheelchairs, also participated in the task force but disagreed on setting a time limit.

The task force report may undergo changes before the legislative session ends in three weeks, as lawmakers adjust key details to secure approval from both chambers and a signature from Gov. Ned Lamont.

Another point of dispute concerns the task force’s suggestion to eliminate prior authorizations, which require an insurance company’s approval before repairs are carried out. This recommendation is opposed by the Connecticut Association of Health Plans.

However, many lawmakers acknowledge that provisions with a significant price tag won’t make it into the new law.

State Sen. Cathy Osten, D-Sprague, co-chair of the Appropriations Committee, told CT Examiner she doubts her \$2 million proposal for insurance companies to cover the cost of motorized wheelchairs will advance, noting the funds would instead come from the state’s Insurance Fund.

“It won’t happen this year,” she said. “We are very tight on money and we often don’t put in high-ticket items or any financial losses in the second year of the budget.”

Wheelchair advocate Jonthan Sigworth told CT Examiner, “At the end of the day, the cost savings really shouldn’t be an issue because these are people’s lives on the line. ... The state of Connecticut is financially [strong] and they can afford to invest in the disabled community, and currently they are not.”

Sigworth, who has used a wheelchair since suffering injuries from a fall off a cliff in India at 19, founded the advocacy nonprofit More Than Walking and is a member of the CT Wheelchair Reform Coalition, which has been vocal on the issue as well.

“[NuMotion and NSM] are holding users hostage because we have no other options,” he said. “They need to face some significant financial risk [for noncompliance].”

NuMotion and NSM, both private-equity owned and based out-of-state, operate three branches in Connecticut with a combined total of 28 repair technicians for over 5,000 wheelchairs. Typically, these technicians travel to clients’ homes to perform repairs.

Medicaid and insurance cover the vast majority of wheelchair repairs, experts said.

The task force report revealed that out of 73 consumers responding to a survey about repair times, 56 waited between one and six months for wheelchair repairs, with some reporting waits of over a year, according to advocates.

The bill would allow the state Department of Social Services to enforce penalties upon the two companies if repairs are not completed in a timely fashion, including withholding Medicaid funding.

NSM declined to comment on the matter, and NuMotion did not respond to a request for comment.

Wayne Grau, executive director of the Virginia-based National Coalition for Assistive and Rehab Technology, told CT Examiner that the industry supports 10 out of the 12 task force recommendations. However, he disagrees with the proposed timeframe for wheelchair repairs and the penalty phase.

“We have to do better,” Grau said, noting that NuMotion and NSM are each in the process of hiring three additional technicians and one customer service representative. Grau said wheelchair repair wait times should decrease considerably, though declined to specify by how much.

Those additional staff, Grau said, “are already starting to make a difference. We are starting to see the backlog come down.”

Grau noted that while some individuals cannot visit the repair shops, others can visit in person. He suggested that reducing wait times is possible by encouraging more individuals to bring their wheelchairs for repair directly to the shops. COVID, he added, made everything in his business — from staffing to the supply chain — worse.

“The process has been inefficient for 20 years, ever since I’ve been in the industry,” he said. “But COVID changed everything. The whole market changed.”

If the bill passes, Grau said he supports having an advisory committee on wheelchairs repairs after the legislative session.

“We can sit down and share information on how we can get better. It’s all about making sure we get their equipment repaired as fast as possible,” he said.

State Sen. Lisa Seminara, R-Avon, has been an advocate for the disabled for years and is at the forefront of pushing for quicker wheelchair repairs.

“It’s a balancing act between everybody, but we are trying to address the concerns of the consumers and they have a legitimate gripe,” she told CT Examiner.

Seminara said most wheelchair users have specialized wheelchairs, which can range widely in price and cost up to \$65,000.

Seminara, whose 25-year-old daughter Martina needs a wheelchair to travel long distances, said the measure has bipartisan support.

“Who doesn’t want to make people’s lives easier? I think people recognize that this is an issue, and it’s not just an issue in Connecticut.”

Beverly Brakeman, chair of the wheelchair repair task force and a lobbyist, told CT Examiner that “having wheelchairs is a human right.”

Brakeman said everyone on the task force — which included industry stakeholders, lawmakers, advocates, consumers, Medicaid representatives, lobbyists and insurance companies, among others — would agree that something needs to be done for wheelchair users.

Hartford community members advocate for more state funding for flood victims

By Sydney Boyo

Residents in Hartford that have faced years of flooding are frustrated with the state. They say the flooding has caused thousands in damages.

“I’m looking for them to come up with some way to give us more money,” Donna Thompson-Daniels said. “I’m sure there’s more people that have experienced this problem. Not just me.”

Last year, the state launched the Hartford Flood Compensation Program, which provided \$5 million in financial assistance or reimbursement to Hartford residents making repairs due to flood damage.

“Where we are getting, have gotten some money,” Thompson-Daniels said. “Not enough to help out the whole community. And we need to help the whole community, not just some.”

Thompson-Daniels is just one of many residents who has applied for funds and been approved, but is stuck in the line for inspections. She said she’s received a letter that the state is waiting for additional funding.

“In the letter, it doesn’t say any time frame,” she said. “It doesn’t say if its going to be a month or two months.”

The letter sent out to many residents facing the same issue reads:

“At the present time, the program is awaiting a determination of additional funding for the program. While we do not know when these additional funds will be approved and for what amount, we will keep your claims open and will alert you when you can start to schedule an inspection.”

On Tuesday afternoon at the capitol, a group which included community advocates and Senator Doug McCrory of Hartford met with Speaker of the House Matt Ritter to discuss the potential for additional funding.

“We discussed ways to enhance it and find more resources for the program,” McCrory said. The group said it came to an agreement in Ritter’s office to secure an additional \$1 million in funding that should cover those waiting for inspections.

“\$1 million is just the start,” McCrory said. “We know there’s going to be a lot more than that.” The proposed funding will be brought to Governor Lamont, who first approved the first \$5 million in 2023 next month. As of date, the state said it has disbursed over \$3.5 million in funding to over 300 residents.

Financial aid delays are impacting future and current college students in Conn.

By Mike Savino

Samuel Brookwood has been trying to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, but without any luck.

His problem: he hasn't been able to get help from the U.S. Department of Education to reset a password. "FAFSA even emailed me saying that they were going to drop my case, even though I didn't get the help I needed and all I needed was a simple password," he said during a FAFSA workshop at Hartford Public High School on Tuesday.

Families across the country are facing similar problems and delays, holding up their decision on where – and whether – to [attend college next year](#).

The U.S. Department of Education rolled out a new Better FAFSA this school year, meant to make the form easier to complete.

"When the president hired me, he said fix a broken system," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said. But the rollout delayed the application period and students said they've been dealing with technical issues since it opened.

"Yes, they've condensed the FAFSA, but still, people are not able to get help," Brookwood said. And it's not just students like Brookwood, who are still waiting for a FAFSA answer before deciding on a college plan.

The National College Attainment Network said FAFSA [applications are down 38.3%](#) from this time last year.

University of Saint Joseph Student Financial Services Director Stacey Downing said many students – both high school and college – put off the application after hearing about problems.

"Our continuing students seem to think the FAFSA is broken and so they haven't all completed the FAFSA as timely as they have in years past," Downing said.

Cardona said Better FAFSA is the first overhaul of the application in 40 years. He also said it comes with changes that will make another 600,000 students nationwide eligible for aid.

He acknowledged the changed caused a delay, but insists the process is working now.

"If a student fills out FAFSA today, and I encourage them to do that – StudentAid.Gov -- by the end of the week, colleges will have their information," he said.

Schools are doing everything they can to get students to complete the form, but there are ultimately some people who won't apply and that the drop in applications could turn into a drop in enrollment.

"We do have a high number of high needs students who need the financial support," Downing said.

News 12

Group recommends traffic stop audits for every officer after State Police ticket probe

By John Craven

Traffic stops could face a lot more scrutiny, following the Connecticut State Police false ticket investigation.

A national law enforcement consultant is recommending monthly audits for every police officer who conducts traffic stops. But it's unclear if police agencies have the technology – or the funding – to conduct the extra reviews.

“FALSE TICKET” INVESTIGATION

State troopers have been under the microscope for almost a year, after a [Connecticut Racial Profiling Project Advisory Board audit](#) found a “high likelihood” that troopers falsified at least 26,000 tickets. Those citations didn't match both the Central Infractions Bureau database, and the state's racial profiling system.

Months later, an independent investigation by former federal prosecutor Deirdre Daly [cleared most troopers](#) of intentional wrongdoing, but did point to a pattern of miscommunication and sloppy record-keeping.

“There have been significant failures by the Connecticut State Police (“CSP”) with respect to the reporting of racial profiling data,” Daly wrote. “The failures demonstrate inadequate leadership, judgment, and initiative.”

Connecticut's new head of public safety vowed to make changes.

“We will get better,” Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection Commissioner Ronnell Higgins told reporters on Feb. 1. “We will improve.”

NEW RECOMMENDATIONS

To identify improvements, the racial profiling board [turned to IntegrAssure](#), a consulting group that includes former Stamford and New Haven Police Chief Dean Esserman.

IntegrAssure's new report recommends that each traffic cop in Connecticut undergo a random audit of three stops per month – plus additional “targeted assessments” for “stops involving the use of force, including the display of firearms, vehicle or person searches, handcuffing, frisks, pursuits, summary arrests, and those generating citizen complaints.” Each review would cross-reference dispatch logs, the Centralized Infractions Bureau's database, body camera footage and perhaps even license plate readers.

“The implementation of automated data entry systems that minimize human error and establishing a culture of accuracy and accountability within law enforcement agencies are also effective strategies,” the report says.

Eventually, the report suggests that artificial intelligence could “learn” problematic traffic stop patterns – and flag them in real-time.

“Going further, AI could also be employed to assess the ‘apparent’ race, age, and gender of a driver using advanced image recognition algorithms,” the IntegrAssure report states. “While there are serious ethical and accuracy considerations to address in the development of such technology, the goal would be to reduce subjective human reporting errors. This AI would not replace human discretion but would serve as a supplementary tool to provide officers with data that may assist in unbiased reporting.”

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project will spend the next few months examining the recommendations.

“We are now going to begin a process where we engage our local police partners and our Chiefs of Police Association in a discussion around recommendations in this report,” said project manager Ken Barone. “This report is intended to be the start of our conversation, not the end of our conversation.”

Some police agencies said they already conduct audits, but the IntergrAssure report said the process needs to be uniform across the state.

“All of the issues that have been uncovered relative to the traffic stop issue have resulted from front-line supervisors auditing their personnel,” said state police Lt. Col. Mark Davison, a member of the advisory board.

Higgins is also on the board.

“As DESPP and Commissioner Higgins move forward, the agency is using the framework and recommended remedial measures outlined in the independent investigation and report compiled by Deidre Daly and her team at Finn Dixon & Herling,” said DESPP spokesperson Rick Green.

Barone said the next step is determining how much the additional audits could cost, including technology upgrades.

“We have to start to try to understand what is feasible, where we'd like to be versus where we can be,” he said.

Additional issues may be uncovered by two federal investigations that are still ongoing into the “false” ticket audit. In addition, state lawmakers are [considering tougher penalties](#) for falsifying traffic stops.

Connecticut joins partnership to hold airlines accountable for consumer complaints

By Tom Krosnowski

Connecticut is one of several states to join a new partnership aiming to hold airlines accountable.

The Airline Passenger Protection Program allows the Attorney General to investigate consumer complaints against airlines, something only the federal Department of Transportation could do previously.

News 12's Tom Krosnowski is at Tweed New Haven Airport with more on what the partnership means for travelers.

[CLICK HERE](#) to watch the report.

Proposed CT legislation would lower legal BAC limit for driving

By Olivia Schueller

State lawmakers planned to discuss a bill that would lower the legal drinking and driving limit in Connecticut from .08 to .05 percent.

The proposal was set to be taken up at a news conference in Hartford on Wednesday.

Several state officials, including Sen. Christine Cohen, Rep. Roland Lemar, Sen. Tony Hwang, and Rep. Kathy Kennedy, were scheduled to attend in support.

They said Connecticut ranked third nationally in fatalities due to impaired driving, and the research indicated that the risk of crashes was significant in drivers with a BAC over .05.

In each of the last two years, Connecticut State Police said they have arrested more than 2,000 drivers under the influence.

This legislation sought to encourage drivers who were impaired at any level to reconsider getting behind the wheel.

Road safety advocates will also attend the news conference to share their support for lowering the legal BAC limit in the state.

Last year, changes were discussed, but concerns were raised about the proposal impact on the tourism and hospitality industries.

Lawmakers said they would regroup and reconsider efforts to get tougher on impaired driving. The details were set to be unveiled at 10 a.m.

Attorney General Tong announces partnership that will protect airline customers

By Cassidy Williams

There's a new partnership to help travelers in Connecticut.

If problems arise while flying, the Attorney General's Office now has the power to intervene. Even on a slow night at Bradley International Airport, finding someone struggling with an airline's customer service didn't take long.

"They were giving me and my mom a loophole, and they weren't trying to give back the money. It's kind of frustrating because it's just an expensive time right now where you really need whatever you got," said Jose Hernandez.

Now, there's another place to turn when you aren't getting the answers you want.

A partnership between the Connecticut Attorney General's Office and the U.S. Department of Transportation was announced Tuesday.

They now have the power to investigate consumer complaints against airlines.

“They can no longer say you know, this is a federal matter, you don’t have jurisdiction here. We do have jurisdiction here now, and we’re ready to take action and protect Connecticut travelers,” said Attorney General William Tong.

In 2023, the Attorney General’s Office received 60 complaints against airline companies.

When you file a complaint, they will work with the company to resolve it and refer complaints to the Department of Transportation when necessary.

“What I want is the airlines to make it right. If they do something that’s unfair or unreasonable, they should just make it right and do what it takes to make sure that the Connecticut traveler gets to where they are going and they get the benefit of what they paid for,” Tong continued.

WTNH (Channel 8)

State law could help Sterling crack down on roaming livestock

By Tina Detelj

State lawmakers are once again considering legislation that could help one small town dealing with roaming pigs and cows.

Last year, Sterling added livestock to its existing roaming dogs law. Now, it’s hoping for more help. “We want them to keep their animals in, that’s it,” said Victoria Robinson-Lewis, Sterling’s zoning enforcement officer.

She said roaming pigs and cows from the Radical Roots Farm have torn up lawns, trampled through gardens and eaten hay from nearby fields — causing \$78,000 in damage last year alone.

She said those included losses incurred by a beef and hay farmer.

“I was told by the person who does that haying that he lost \$20,000 in crop that year,” Sterling First Selectman Link Cooper said.

It’s a neighbor-to-neighbor dispute that some said could have farther reaching affects, like the price of hay going up because a farmer would have to buy it instead of growing his own.

News 8 tried to contact the owners of the roaming livestock, and talked with the Farm to Consumer Legal Defense Fund, which is the organization representing the farm.

“My feeling is that the town needs the tools of being able to do this in civil realm, in the same way that they could issue citations for zoning violations or wetlands violations, or something like that,” Rep. Doug Dubitsky (R-District 47) said.

Cooper said that the issue “is going to be settled in court one way or the other ,and one time or another it’s just that to me the agency that should be doing that should be the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.”

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture has been working with the town on this matter.

Sterling has twice tried to pass an ordinance regarding roaming livestock. Both times it has failed in front of residents at town meeting.

News 8 was told that's because farmers felt it was too restrictive, even though they also feel that farmers should not allow their livestock to damage other people's property.

"If it's state legislation, I don't think we have to go through a town meeting," Robinson-Lewis said.

FOX 61

Connecticut bill for at-home healthcare safety changes amid concerns to provide hospice care

By Jake Garcia

Following the death of Joyce Grayson, a traveling home healthcare nurse found dead in a patient's home in October 2023, state lawmakers vowed to require safety precautions and risk assessment in the industry.

"The home health worker's workplace is a home of a patient and that's a fastest growing segment of people because we want people to age at home. We want people to be able to get treatment at home," said State Sen. Saud Anwar.

Lawmakers said safety for these medical professionals are top priority.

"When a person even enters the home, they have enough information to be able to make sure that they need any other safety communications, and they also want to make sure that they're not alone," said Anwar.

Anwar said at-home health care workers should know the situation they are going into "If there's a high-risk situation," but that "in order to get that data, it takes a little bit of time and it takes a little bit of effort."

The well-intended [Senate Bill One](#) created some unintended consequences that had lawmakers making some last-minute changes.

Connecticut Hospice was the first hospice facility in the United States and the first in the world to provide at-home palliative care. Barbara Pearce, the interim CEO of Connecticut Hospice, raised concerns that the bill would have resulted in people not getting at home hospice care.

Pearce said it would have them required them to conduct lengthy screenings like "...background checks on both patients and their families, including criminal records, possession of firearms, drug and substance abuse, and all kinds of things, including the statistics of crime in their neighborhood."

"That would have been an insurmountable barrier for people to get hospice care during a time of day or week when you couldn't do that background check," said Pearce.

Her concerns included that it would result in possible discrimination of hospice care and would delay starting hospice care that Medicare requires within 48 hours of getting a request, costing time that many hospice patients don't have.

"At the end of 2020 we had 300 people die within three days, 200 people within two days, and 100 people within one day of entering home hospice care, meaning that few if any of those patients would be able to be served," said Pearce.

After concerns were raised, state lawmakers changed their approach and chose to exclude hospice workers from the bill for now. Anwar said lawmakers plan to make a new tailored bill in the future to ensure safety.

"We will have a plan of action to see what can be done to reduce the risk for hospice care workers to because they are also healthcare workers and home health workers and they are in some very stressful environment. We want to make sure they're safe to," said Anwar.

Lawmakers are racing against the clock as the 2024 legislative session is set to adjourn on May 8, nearly three weeks away.

Three air permits approved for offshore wind farm projects in New England

By Doug Stewart

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued air quality permits for three companies to build new wind farms off the coast of New England.

Sunrise Wind, Park City, and Park City Wind were issued the permits that allow for construction to begin on these three offshore "wind development areas" located in federal waters.

Other federal agencies also approved the projects, including the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's Records of Decision.

"When built, these projects will contribute 3 gigawatts of energy – powering 1.8 million homes and leaping toward the [Biden-Harris administration's goal](#) of generating 30 gigawatts of clean, abundant energy from offshore wind by 2030," said EPA New England Regional Administrator David W. Cash. "New England continues to lead the way to our clean energy future, growing clean tech jobs, and making sure our communities most overburdened by air pollution can breathe clean air and take advantage of green workforce development."

The permits regulate pollutants from outer Continental shelf sources during the construction phase - such as jack-up barges that will construct each wind turbine and the electrical service platforms. Additionally, emissions associated with air-emitting devices used during the operation of the wind farm, including generators used as a source of backup electricity for space conditioning where sensitive electronics are housed, and for emission standards for all vessels used within 25 nautical miles of the projects are also regulated.

Electronic copies of the permits, fact sheets, virtual public hearing information, and all supporting materials can be found on EPA's website at: <https://www.epa.gov/caa-permitting/epa-issued-caa-permits-region-1>.

Clean Air Act Permitting by EPA: <https://www.epa.gov/caa-permitting>

Cardona visits Cheshire Correctional to discuss education for incarcerated youth

The U.S. Secretary of Education [Miguel Cardona](#) visited his home state of Connecticut on Tuesday to discuss education and opportunities for incarcerated youth.

Cardona started at Cheshire Correctional Institution, where he joined students who are working toward their re-entry and a career once their sentence is up.

Then, he sat down with state leaders to talk through old and new partnerships between the justice system and community colleges.

"I asked them, 'What should people know across the country about prison education programs?' Without missing a beat, what I heard is, 'They make the community safer.' The second person said, 'It opens doors,'" Cardona said.

"Then one said, 'There are no limits to what I can do,'" Cardona added.

April is Second Chance Pell Month, which recognizes the grants that allow students to get credit while locked up.

CT Hospice Says It Can't Provide Home Care Under Bill To Protect Healthcare Workers

by John Ferraro April 16, 2024, 11:00 am

Connecticut Hospice has warned lawmakers it will be unable to care for gravely ill patients in their homes under a proposed law aimed at protecting home healthcare workers.

At issue is Senate Bill 1, which would require organizations that care for people in their homes to conduct background checks on the clients and anyone in the location where care is being given. The checks would include psychiatric histories, and for histories of violence, domestic abuse, substance use, and criminal records.

The bill is being considered after the death of visiting nurse Joyce Grayson at a halfway house for sex offenders.

Barbara Pearce, the chief executive officer of Connecticut Hospice, urged lawmakers to remove Connecticut Hospice from entities that would be required to conduct those background checks, noting that the organization which provides end-of-life care is typically called into homes when a patient has days left to live.

“Our national hospice organization could find no similar bill in any other state,” Pearce wrote in testimony to the Public Health Committee. “This bill is too broad, too unclear as to requirements, not guaranteed to achieve its aims, duplicative of other procedures required in hospice care, and contradictory to certain regulations of Medicare.”

Connecticut Hospice “is frequently sought at the last possible moment – Friday is by far our busiest day, we admit often at night and on weekends, and families are often dependent upon our admission to be able to bring their loved ones home to die, if that is their choice,” wrote Pearce.

“The statistics are shocking: 20% of our home care patients die within three days of admission to hospice care. Since 2020, this has only accelerated. If a law or regulation were imposed, that in any way impeded our ability to admit urgently, we would see a huge drop in patients and families served,” she wrote.

State lawmakers are aware of Hospice’s concerns and are exploring ways to satisfy the needs of patients while keeping home healthcare workers as safe as possible, said Sen. Saud Anwar, the co-chair of the Public Health Committee.

“We know that for Hospice, time is of essence,” Anwar said. “We need to keep in mind that the idea (of the legislation) is to protect workers – but not at the cost of patients in pain or discomfort.”

Pearce noted that approximately 300 patients have died in Hospice home care within three days, 200 within two days, and 100 within one day.

“The list of proposed requirements in Senate Bill 1 would mean that most, if not all, of these patients would have died in a hospital, an emergency room, or at home without nursing support or comfort measures,” she wrote.

She also argued that a provision related to the checking of neighborhood crime rates would conflict with Medicare requirements. More than 90 percent of Connecticut Hospice patients are on Medicare or Medicaid, she wrote.

“Medicare requires that we start care within 48 hours of a referral, and we would simply not be able to perform the background checks outlined in that amount of time, especially on an evening or weekend,” she wrote. “It also requires that we not discriminate, but checking neighborhood crime rates will almost surely cause some less fortunate families to experience delays.”

Cardona, Lamont Tout New Financial Aid Form To Spur Greater College Access

by Hudson Kamphausen, April 17, 2024, 5:00 am

U.S Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and Gov. Ned Lamont both said Tuesday that the new federal financial aid form will bring college application rates back up and give more students access to higher education.

Cardona and Lamont also commended the state second chance Pell Grant system at a roundtable at Connecticut State Community College, Middlesex in Middletown.

In the wake of delays for college students that have had to wait in order to apply for federal financial aid, Cardona – who was flanked by Lamont – said that fixing the system will be a work in progress. They agreed that changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, commonly known as FAFSA, was a step forward.

“When the president hired me, he said: ‘Fix a broken system.’ We had a million people going into default every year. We had over 600,000 people that didn’t have access to higher education because we had a FAFSA system that’s older than me. We’re fixing it. It’s hard work. We’re going get it right.” Colleges and universities began receiving student information last month that had been backed up for months while the system was being overhauled with changes stemming from the FAFSA Simplification Act.

Cardona said that because of the changes to FAFSA, 600,000 new individuals now have access to Pell Grants. Additionally, he said the new form is much easier and simpler to fill out and only takes 15-20 minutes.

Still, he said that more needs to be done.

“I’m not satisfied with 60 percent of our students filling out FAFSA,” Cardona said. “That’s unacceptable, we shouldn’t be happy with that. We should have a sense of urgency in getting those numbers up.” He urged students to continue to apply.

Cardona, the former commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Education said that the delays have largely subsided, and that the information of students who fill out the form now will be available to the colleges they listed within a few days.

Cardona said that thousands of students that have eligibility now that didn’t before, and that the department is committed to giving students what they need to succeed. That sentiment was echoed by the governor.

“The FAFSA program’s incredibly important, and we’re getting it right,” Lamont said. “If there’s been a 30 day delay, so be it. We got it right, now take advantage of it.”

The amount of federal aid that can currently be received from a FAFSA Pell Grant is \$7,395, and Cardona said he is hopeful that that number can be raised to over \$8,000 this year. Increasing the benefits, he said, will expand the availability of higher education to more people.

“In this country, higher education should be for those who want to continue to learn, not for those born into wealth,” Cardona said.

He said there is currently no requirement for school districts to reach out to their students about filling out the FAFSA form, but that the entire system could work better in terms of getting students to apply.

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“Everyone’s on board with this. Everyone understands the benefit of it,” he said. “We just have to do what we’ve done, which is: collaborate intentionally to make sure we raise the bar, have more students fill that out, and have more students have access to higher education.”

Connecticut, Cardona said, has the highest FAFSA completion rate in the country.

Cardona and Lamont also commended the second chance Pell Grant system for incarcerated students, which they said is a vital part of the higher education and labor system in Connecticut.

Brian Sullivan Sr. Is a former student under the second chance Pell grant, and said that his experience and education while being incarcerated helped him turn his life around.

“I knew I was more than what I did,” Sullivan said. “I knew I was better than that and I knew that’s not where I wanted to be or where I wanted my life to end up.”

Sullivan now works with the ACLU in advocating for incarcerated individuals.

Seeing the success of the 9 facilities in the state that offer classes to incarcerated students, Cardona said he was impressed.

“It reinforces some of the things that we’re doing, but also reminds me that we have to do a better job across the country at making them accessible to more.”

Lamont said that the impact of the program is not just teaching math, but giving incarcerated individuals some direction and control over their lives again.

“What a difference it makes,” he said. “I particularly love people getting that second chance.”

Recidivism and crime, Lamont said, are down because of increases in educational access.