



CRCOG Weekly Legislative Report

2019 Legislative Session

April 11, 2019

Weekly Legislative Feature Issues:

This week has been relatively quiet with the Judiciary Committee working diligently towards its final committee deadline on Friday, April 12th. Meanwhile, the Appropriations Committee and Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee—the other two committees that have not passed their final—continued working on developing a legislative budget proposal.

Governor Lamont Creates a New Position in the Office of the Governor

On Wednesday, April 10th, Governor Lamont announced the creation of a new position in his office to oversee investment at the intersection of housing and transportation. He named Lisa Tepper-Bates as the Senior Coordinator for Housing and Transit-Oriented Development. In this role, Ms. Tepper-Bates will lead strategy on promoting housing around public transportation and optimizing affordable housing investments for maximum federal and private dollars. Before taking a position within the Lamont Administration, Ms. Tepper Bates was a former CEO of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness and served on the board of the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority.

Dalio Foundation Donates \$100 million to Launch New \$300 million Investment Program in CT Schools

Another interesting development was the announcement that Greenwich resident and hedge fund billionaire Ray Dalio has donated \$100 million to launch a new \$300 million investment program in Connecticut's schools with \$100 million state government match over the next five years and \$100 million from other philanthropic groups. Dalio stated that "to [him], the most intolerable situation is how our system fails to take good care of so many of our children" and that "leaving of many children in poverty and not educating them well is the equivalent of child abuse, and it is economically stupid." Appropriations Committee Co-Chair Toni Walker said that "it's a great concept and [she] is excited that the Dalio Foundation is investing in the area of public schools that are the most neglected---the social and emotional development of our students." She did wonder "[h]ow do we blend it into the budget situation that we face right now?"

Governor Lamont's Office said that the partnership "will benefit residents of Connecticut's under-resourced communities, with a specific focus on communities where there is both a high poverty rate and a high concentration of youth who are showing signs of disengagement or disconnection from high school." The real question is whether this means that the funds will be spent primarily in communities that fit this description or is it exclusively for them. It will be a challenge to resolve this question as well

as the myriad other issues derived from this donation before the 2019 regular legislative session ends on June 5th.

This past week has revealed new developments of particular interest to you:

As June Deadline Nears, Here's Where Tolls, Marijuana and 8 Other Key Bills Stand in Connecticut's Legislature

With the June 5th deadline for adjournment approaching, Connecticut legislators are scrambling to move key bills forward. A bill establishing a framework for sale of recreational marijuana got through committee in late March. The bill would also limit sale to those 21 or older, prohibit the sale of marijuana-infused candies and gummies, and attempt to combat inequity by granting a portion of marijuana license to applicants from communities most affected by the 'war on drugs.' Revenue from legal marijuana is estimated to total between \$30 and \$180 million a year. Also still alive is Gov. Ned Lamont's toll bill, which would raise an estimated \$800 million needed for transportation infrastructure. The bill would set up tolls on I-95, I-91, I-84, and Route 15, with discounts are built in for frequent drivers and Connecticut residents.

Two minimum wage bills are on the table. Each bill would raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour, but with different time frames—one sets the final increase for 2023, the other for 2024. Either bill would cost the state an estimated \$20 million per year in increased wages to state workers. Two nearly identical family leave bills also got through committee in February, and they would allow for employee reimbursement of up to \$1000/week for up to 12 weeks after the birth of a child or to take care of a sick family member. The state would need to borrow \$20 million to get this program off the ground. School regionalization as well is still in motion. Lamont's plan to create a Commission on Shared School Services has been watered down so the commission can only recommend, rather than mandate, shared services.

Other key issues still up for debate include: two conflicting bills that would open up sports betting to multiple operators or give exclusive rights to sports betting to the tribes; a pair of bills that would expand casino gambling by allowing the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan tribes to build a casino off tribal land in East Windsor; a bill to prohibit or limit the use of plastic bags and straws statewide; a gun control law that would extend safe storage requirements to households with anyone under the age of 18, rather than 16; and a vaping/smoking bill that would raise the purchasing age of tobacco products from 18 to 21.

[Hartford Courant: As June Deadline Nears, Here's Where Tolls, Marijuana and 8 Other Key Bills Stand in Connecticut's Legislature](#)

Another Regionalization Idea Goes Down in Flames

In this editorial, the author concludes that Connecticut is adamant about keeping its schools free from state interference, no matter the financial costs. Two bills were introduced at the beginning of the session, each aimed at merging the administrative services of multiple small school districts into larger regional districts. The philosophy of such an approach was to save money by achieving the economies of scale seen in neighboring states with larger districts. One such bill would have required towns with a population less than 40,000 to share services with another school district. Another bill would have required districts with fewer than 2,000 students to form a new or join an existing regional district.

One last idea was proposed by Governor Ned Lamont, who preferred to create a Commission of Shared School Services—a board that could incentivize districts that regionalize and penalize districts that do not. But “an avalanche” of parents and educators spoke out against these proposals. Now, all that’s left to be voted on is a “toothless” version of Lamont’s commission, one that can only recommend steps for school regionalization rather than mandate them. According to the author, it seems likely that this bill will pass given the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. Whether these recommendations will be taken by Connecticut’s schools is yet to be seen.

[The Day: Another Regionalization Idea Goes Down in Flames](#)

Under Governor Ned Lamont’s Toll Plan, Here’s How Much Your Commute Could Cost

On Wednesday, April 10th, Governor Lamont’s office released examples of what commuters may pay under his electronic highway tolling plan. These figures were based on the proposed rate of 4.4 cents per mile during peak commute periods and 3.5 cents per mile during off-peak times. Additionally, the rates include discounts based on having a Connecticut-issued E-Z Pass and an additional discount for regular commuters.

Here are the example trips provided by Lamont’s office. The costs are for one way.

- **Torrington to Bridgeport:** 49 miles, \$0. (Route 8 would not have tolls).
- **Stamford to New Haven:** 41 miles, \$1.80 peak, \$1.40 off-peak
- **New Haven to Hartford:** 39 miles, \$1.72 peak, \$1.36 off-peak
- **Middletown to Old Saybrook:** 27 miles, \$0. (Route 9 would not have tolls).
- **Danbury to Waterbury:** 29 miles, \$1.28 peak, \$1.02 off-peak
- **Milford to New Haven:** 10 miles, \$0.44 peak, \$0.35 off-peak
- **Old Lyme to New London:** 14 miles, \$0.61 miles, \$0.49 off-peak
- **Putnam to Norwich:** 37 miles, \$0. (I-395 would not have tolls).

[Hartford Courant: Under Governor Ned Lamont’s Toll Plan, Here’s How Much Your Commute Could Cost](#)

Tracked Bills:

Please see attached document.