



# Update

## New Legal Developments to Connecticut Labor and Employment Laws: What You Need to Know

Two new changes to the employment landscape in Connecticut are set to take effect July 1, 2022, including expansions to the state's minimum wage rate and limitations on disciplinary measures that may be taken with respect to employees who refuse to attend employer-sponsored meetings or view communications purposed to communicate an employer's opinion on religious or political matters. Timely compliance is critical to avoid penalties or possible civil claims. Here's what Connecticut employers need to know.

### *Increase to State's Minimum Wage Rate*

Effective July 1, 2022, Connecticut's minimum wage is increasing from \$13.00 per hour to \$14.00 per hour for non-exempt, hourly employees in accordance with Public Act 19-4. Connecticut has adopted plans to implement a fair and gradual increase of the state's minimum wage rate over a 5-year period, beginning in 2019, to an ultimate rate of \$15.00 as of June 1, 2023. On January 1, 2024, the state's minimum wage rate will become indexed to the employment cost index, which is calculated by the U.S. Department of Labor and will grow in keeping with economic factors on an ongoing basis.

Connecticut employers should work quickly with Human Resources and payroll personnel to ensure non-exempt hourly workers are paid in accordance with the increased rate \$14.00 per-hour rate as of July 1, 2022.

### *Expanded Protections of First Amendment Rights – Religious or Political Matters*

Effective from July 1, 2022, Connecticut law expands the right of freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of association to include the right not to be required to listen to speech.

The amendments also impose liability on private employers who discipline (including terminating employment) or threaten to discipline employees for refusing to attend company-sponsored meetings to listening to or viewing company communications primarily purposed to communicate the employer's "opinion on religious or political matters."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Connecticut employers may not take any action to discharge, discipline, or otherwise penalize employees for refusing to attend employer-sponsored meetings, listen to speech, or view any communications that are intended to convey the employer's opinion on such matters, except in circumstances where the communications are necessary for the employees

<sup>1</sup> "Political Matters" is defined as matters relating to elections for political office, political parties, proposals to change legislation, proposals to change regulation and the decision to join or support any political party or political, civic, community, fraternal, or labor organization. See CONN. GEN. STAT. § 31-51q.

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to perform the essential functions of their position with the employer, is required by law and only includes such information required, is communicated in casual conversation where participation by employees is not mandated, or is required only of managerial or supervisory employees.

Connecticut employers must work quickly ensure that company policies and procedures are updated to reflect these new laws. Furthermore, Human Resources personnel, supervisors, and managers should be trained on the changes to avoid any unlawful disciplinary actions for exercise of religious liberty.

Our team continues to monitor and review emerging laws in Connecticut and across the nation impacting the home care industry. For further guidance, please do not hesitate to reach out to us directly.