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Southeastern Connecticut bioscience bill moves forward

[Johanna Somers](#)

Hartford — The legislature's Planning and Development Committee gave its stamp of approval to the southeastern Connecticut bioscience growth bill on Tuesday. The Transportation Committee already passed the bill and it now goes to the House of Representatives for a possible vote.

The bill received swift support and only one minor technical change during the committee meeting. The bill would require the state to take the necessary steps to find an organization that would create a program to grow bioscience and biotechnology businesses in southeastern Connecticut.

Last month proponents of the bill said in a public hearing that the state needs to focus on southeastern Connecticut in order to prevent bioscience professionals from leaving the area, use existing infrastructure and bring more professionals to the region.

"Instead of just allowing people to sort of mass exodus, which is what I think people have assumed has happened, well how do we keep people, how do we make solutions," said Kristin Havrilla Clarke, an economic development specialist for Groton.

If the legislation passes, it would be the third piece of good news for bioscience professionals in southeastern Connecticut.

Earlier this month Gov. Dannel P. Malloy announced that Pfizer would donate its 24,000-square-foot Building 286 to the bioscience network Connecticut United for Research Excellence (CURE). In February the State Bond Commission allocated a \$4.2 million grant for CURE to establish a bioscience incubator. The nonprofit can use the funds for initial renovations. It plans to use the building to attract entrepreneurs and scientists involved in start-up companies and growth-oriented enterprises.

The bill at hand doesn't have a specific dollar amount attached to it, but states that the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) must provide a grant of an "unspecified amount" to the organization that is approved to administer the growth and marketing plan. The grant would come from Manufacturing Assistance Act bonds, and the DECD must report on the grant program to the Commerce Committee by Jan. 1, 2017.

The bill would require the DECD to issue a request for proposals by Feb. 1, 2015. Those who apply would have to explain, among other things, their outreach efforts, marketing plans and how they would acquire a facility to serve as a business incubator.

The technical change made during the committee meeting was to include regional councils of governments instead of regional planning organizations in the request for proposals process to reflect the name change. Others that can apply to administer the growth plan include educational institutions, economic and community development corporations and nonprofit organizations.

j.somers@theday.com
