



Dear Friends,

I hope you are enjoying being a part of our great city. I am pleased to share with you this update on the recently concluded legislative session.

Each year brings a new set of challenges, and the 2015 session was no different. Despite a serious budget deficit and the need to encourage economic growth, my colleagues and I passed a balanced budget that provides property and car tax relief for middle-class families and small businesses, in addition to protections and programs that empower Connecticut's families. It is vital to keep our funding promise to cities and municipalities.

We also created the framework for a once-in-a-generation investment in our transportation infrastructure, which will spur more growth in our economy and create thousands of jobs. The result of all this will improve quality of life for residents who use our roads and rail system.

In addition to delivering property and car tax relief, we passed legislation that will continue to improve our city. As your legislator I am always fighting for Bridgeport. We have restored critical funding to job training as well as sustainable energy. Investments in youth violence prevention and protecting arts and humanities, continues to be a proud accomplishment for our community.

We stood up for military veterans, students and Connecticut workers whose jobs and livelihoods are under threat from out-of-state competition.

I hope you find the enclosed information helpful and will feel free to call or email me for any reason — legislative or otherwise. It is my pleasure and honor to serve as your state representative and I welcome the opportunity to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Rep. Andre F. Baker, Jr.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

ANDRE F. BAKER, JR.

PROUDLY SERVING THE 124TH HOUSE DISTRICT | BRIDGEPORT



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STANDING UP FOR CONSUMERS

We passed a number of important consumer protection laws this year. Patients will better understand their prescriptions now that pharmacists are required to include certain information with generic drugs such as the brand name, the manufacturer's name, and the website and telephone number for the U.S. FDA's drug safety and reporting program (MedWatch). We have also prohibited companies from requiring mandatory product registration for certain consumer warranty coverage. In addition, anyone who provides material information which results in the successful investigation of a solicitor who tries to mislead consumers—commonly known as spoofing – will be compensated by the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP).

We've also required new car dealers to provide consumers with written information explaining that the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act makes it illegal for new motor vehicle manufacturers or dealers to void warranties simply because aftermarket or recycled parts were installed in the vehicle or because someone other than the dealer performed service on the vehicle.

REVIEW OF HEALTH CARE COVERAGE DENIALS

When a health insurance carrier denies coverage, sometimes it's because they don't have sufficient information. This year we required health carriers to offer the patient's health care professional an opportunity for a conference with a clinical peer employed by the carrier when a denial is issued. A clinical peer is a physician or health care professional who holds a license in a similar specialty to one who would normally manage the medical service being reviewed. The conference is intended to be a peer to peer conversation during which the provider makes the case for coverage.

HEARING TESTS IN THE BIRTH-TO-THREE PROGRAM OPTIONS

Beginning this year, hearing tests will now be included in the Birth-to-Three program. This program offers parents and guardians a variety of tools to ensure that their toddlers and children are properly screened and cared for if they are found to have a disability during this essential developmental period. Early detection of a delay or disability helps parents and guardians make use of early intervention services for their infants or toddlers.



Rep. Baker addressing Bridgeport issues at the annual "Bridgeport Day" at the Capitol

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FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION IN PUBLIC HOUSING

For years, public housing associations have regulated the use of their common areas. While many of these regulations are sensible and contribute to the overall safety and enjoyment of their residents, one prohibition severely limited tenants' rights to free speech. As of July 1, public housing projects may no longer ban political activities or meetings on social issues, allowing tenants who might otherwise have a hard time leaving the premises for such activities to invite candidates or speakers into their facility.



HELPING RESIDENTS OF SUBSIDIZED HOUSING MOVE TO BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS

Studies have shown that families moving from high poverty areas to ones with more opportunities have a better chance at succeeding. It can often be difficult for families residing in low-income neighborhoods to move to a better community. As of October 1st, the Department of Housing (DOH) will be required to create a residence mobility counseling program to assist those who receive housing subsidies with the relocation process. Participants will be provided with the necessary information for them to make a smooth transition into an area with better job and education options and better environment overall.



Beardsley Zoo of Bridgeport visits the Capitol

EXTENDING THE FORECLOSURE MEDIATION PROGRAM

The Foreclosure Mediation Program has provided vital services to consumers facing foreclosure, helping many families avoid foreclosure. This year we extended the sunset date of the Foreclosure Mediation program to July 2019, ensuring that this essential program can continue to function and serve more Connecticut residents.

STUDENT LOAN RATES DROP

In a historic step increasing college affordability, the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA) announced that it will offer a fixed interest rate of 4.95% for new student loans, down from its current rate of 6.75%. Not only is this the lowest rate that CHESLA has ever offered, it is also significantly lower than the new Federal PLUS loan rate of 6.84%.

A SECOND CHANCE SOCIETY

For years, Connecticut's drug policies have swelled our prisons with nonviolent drug offenders who struggle to reintegrate into society upon release. "A Second Chance Society" will reverse these policies largely by reducing jail time for such offenders. Penalties for possession of small amounts of illegal drugs will be reduced from a felony to a Class A misdemeanor; a drug-dependent offender may complete a substance abuse treatment program on a second offense; the 1,500 foot drug free school zones were maintained, but instead of an offender receiving a mandatory 2-year minimum sentence for possession, the penalty will now require a sentence that includes prison and probation. During probation, the offender must perform community service. We also ensured victims are notified of a parole hearing and have access to the inmate's complete file prior to the hearing. The expedited pardon review process for nonviolent crimes will also be streamlined; now offenders must receive a "pardon eligibility notice." These provisions will give ex-offenders a better chance to get back into the workforce – and also save millions in taxpayer dollars.



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