

CAPITOL UPDATE 2012

Jobs Are Priority #1

Growing jobs is key. That's why I supported the 2012 Jobs Bill that builds on the bipartisan jobs legislation passed last October, which established a number of programs designed to help small businesses expand and hire new employees. The 2012 bill expands some of those programs and introduces some new initiatives, including:

- Expanding the "Small Business Express" and "STEP UP" programs to additional state businesses, which allow small businesses to access much-needed funding for capital investments, hiring and training
- Creating the "Connecticut Made" and "Connecticut Treasures" programs to promote products made in state and the state's attractions
- Seeking to bring jobs to Connecticut by giving preference under the "First Five Plus" program to companies that relocate jobs here from overseas
- Increasing the reimbursement rate for independent pharmacies



Oliver Wolcott Tech receives National Metalworking Accreditation.

Storm Response And Power Outages

In the aftermath of the October Nor'easter and Tropical Storm Irene that left much of the state without power, the legislature passed sweeping reforms to better prepare for future severe storms and avoid wide-spread and lengthy loss of utility service, where:

- Utilities will be held to minimum performance standards for emergency preparation and response
- Noncompliance could result in penalties of up to 2.5 percent of an electric or gas company's annual distribution revenue, approximately \$25 million in the case of Connecticut Light & Power



Rep. Cook's family visiting at the Capitol.

Dear Neighbor,

From jobs to education to improved response to natural disasters, the legislature helped citizens across our state in many ways in 2012.

It started last October when we passed comprehensive jobs legislation that invested hundreds of millions of dollars in small businesses, gave firms hiring incentives, encouraged entrepreneurship and innovation and eliminated red-tape for growing companies. In June we had a one-day special session and built upon the jobs bill. The 2012 bill expands business-friendly programs and introduces some new initiatives. We also secured a grant for Torrington's Warner Theater.

During this spring's regular session, historic changes were made to our educational system so our children can succeed. We made it easier for people to exercise voting rights and demanded that utility companies respond better when storms and crises hit. We repealed a death penalty law that wasn't working and further protected victims of domestic violence.

I hope this report is informative. I'm happy to answer any questions about these issues or any others facing our state or your family. Together we can create a better future for our families.

Sincerely,

Let's Keep In Touch In A Green Way

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Hospice Care

With just two licensed hospices in the state, this new law will permit hospices to follow federal standards, giving smaller hospice facilities the opportunity to provide high quality services that allow patients to stay closer to family and friends. This bill will help our state to ensure that residents have access to health care services across the full continuum of care.

Grandparents' Rights

As we all know, family relationships are complicated and emotional, and grandparents can sometimes be separated from their grandchildren's lives particularly when divorce, death or disagreements occur. This legislation helps grandparents seeking visitation rights by providing a guide of required evidence so a court can better assess each unique situation. This includes showing that a parent-like relationship exists and that a denial of visitation rights could cause harm to the child. A court must grant the request if clear and convincing evidence has proven these conditions exist. In the end, it is important that decisions are made in a child's best interests and this legislation helps do that.

Reducing Domestic Violence

This year we strengthened the state's laws to better protect victims, hold abusers accountable and give new tools to law enforcement by:

- Improving access to and enforcement of protective and restraining orders.
- Giving police officers new tools, including a model policy for responding to domestic violence incidents.
- Allowing victims to report email and texting violations of restraining and protective orders in the town where they reside.
- Extending the maximum length of restraining orders from six months to one year.
- Requiring the courts to share protective orders with schools that victims attend, upon request of a victim.
- Strengthening the definition of stalking to ensure that stalking incidents—including digital stalking—are appropriately punished.

Saluting Our Veterans

Custody Orders While on Deployment

In order to reduce the psychological trauma a parent feels when they leave a small child for an extended period of time, we protected parents' permanent custody orders in the event of deployment. We provided an opportunity for the military parent to create temporary custody orders that remain in effect only as long as they are away on deployment and for as much contact as possible between children and the parent who is absent while on military duty by providing contact by phone or email.

Desecrating veterans' memorials

Honoring the present and past sacrifices of our veterans is one of my highest priorities. It is shocking to see an increase in thefts and vandalism of veterans' memorials. We increased penalties for desecrating veterans' memorials beyond the monetary value of what was vandalized.

CT Veterans charity network

Fraudulent charity groups often misrepresent veterans, trying to take advantage of our good will toward those who serve our country. We helped protect consumers from these fraudulent groups by creating a legitimate charities list on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website.

Diversionary programs for vets with PTSD & legal issues

So many of our service men and women return home and face a variety of challenges, not the least of which are legal issues and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. A federally funded pilot program for veterans dealing with these issues is helpful but limited, so we expanded the program to more locations throughout the state.

Jobs for Vets

Unemployment runs as high as 30% amongst veterans. During the recent special session, we established the "STEP-UP for Veterans" Program to help unemployed post-9/11 veterans find jobs.



Torrington Chapter of UNICO National and the City of Torrington are proud to announce Antonio Tadiello Italian Mayor of the Day.

Reforming Education

Our education initiative will provide new support to help turn around underperforming schools. The education reform package has long-term implications for our children and for the state's economic well-being. The better we prepare children for the 21st Century workforce, the stronger we'll make Connecticut's economy. The bill:

- Provides more funding for Vo-Techs like Oliver Wolcott.
- Includes more funding for school-based health centers and family resource centers.
- Recognizes the critical importance of early childhood education by underwriting 1,000 school readiness slots for preschoolers and funding initiatives to improve early reading success.
- Creates the Commissioner's Network, to provide the intensive supports and interventions needed to turn around 25 of the most chronically low-performing schools.
- Includes an additional \$468,825 for Torrington schools pushing our total in state education funding to \$24,402,168.
- Supports Vo-Ag schools by increasing per-student funding from \$1,355 to \$1,750.



Rep Cook and Marion at children's event.

Helping Children With Special Needs

Several new laws offer protection and support for children with special needs.

- Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which I introduced, improves special education for students as well as creates a study on workforce development, training and employment of young adults with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities.
- Eliminates the unnecessary use of so-called seclusion or scream rooms.