



Girl Scouts Day at the Capitol

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood assists young children ages birth through five to ensure their success in life. These young children need high-quality early-learning programs. The establishment of an Office of Early Childhood will help aid parents in making educational and health related decisions by creating a hub which funnels necessary information from multiple agencies to one office. This change will help parents better navigate the system to get the help they need and enable them to choose the best fit for their family.

### CARE 4 KIDS PROGRAM

In our current economic climate, parents working full-time are common, requiring them to put their children in day care. The Care 4 Kids program helps low- to moderate-income families in Connecticut pay for child care costs. This allows children in the program to maintain the positive relationships formed with their caregivers that promote healthy brain development and better health, emotional and academic outcomes.

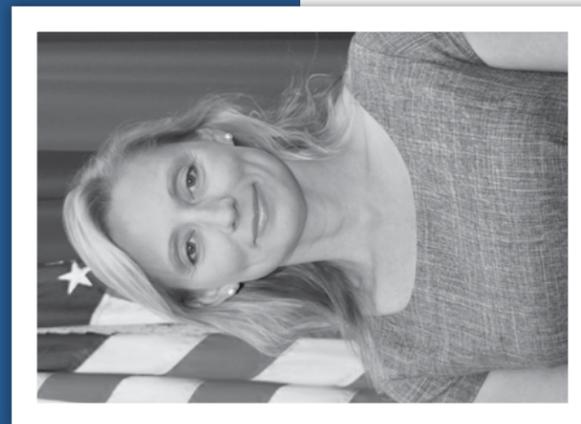


JoAnn Ryan, Rep. Cook and Mr. Axon with Valedictorian Luke Pepper and Salutatorian Suzannah Kozlak of Oliver Wolcott Technical School

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**MICHELLE COOK**  
 PROUDLY SERVING TORRINGTON | 65TH DISTRICT

Legislative Office Building  
 300 Capitol Avenue  
 Hartford, CT 06106-1591  
 Capitol: 800-842-8267  
 Michelle.Cook@cga.ct.gov  
 www.housedems.ct.gov/Cook

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**MICHELLE COOK**

# CAPITOL UPDATE 2013

Dear Neighbor,

The 2013 legislative session has ended and I have put together this newsletter to update you about what I, and the legislature, did this year. Thank you for all of your support during this difficult session.

We were able to pass a balanced budget that does not raise taxes and helps municipalities hold the line on property taxes while protecting investments in education and job growth.

This session I worked to get funding for Torrington school buses, which run on propane. The propane buses are part of a three-year, \$13.1 million transportation contract extension, which runs into the 2017-18 school year. The district's current transportation contractor is supplying 51 new propane buses, and projects a \$256,000 savings in the first year of the program. Fuel costs are paid for directly by the district, in addition to the \$13.1 million contract. Torrington will be receiving a \$.50 per-gallon "alternative fuel" tax break which will lead to the savings. Torrington is the first school district to use propane fuel.

I was happy to support the creation of an Alzheimer's Task Force, which will be looking into the ins and outs of this horrible disease, and determine how we can help Connecticut residents and their families who have to cope with this disease first-hand.

As always, I encourage you to contact my office at 860-240-8500 or Michelle.Cook@cga.ct.gov with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,  
 Michelle Cook



Past Interns Come Back To Visit Rep. Cook in House Chamber



2013 Children's Champion

## HOMEOWNER PROTECTION RIGHTS

The ability to own a home is part of the American dream, but financial hardship can threaten that dream for families, sending them to the brink of foreclosure. We worked hard this past session to protect homeowners and facilitate a fair and speedy foreclosure mediation process. A more streamlined process helps both the banks and the homeowners come to a quicker solution to keep homeowners in their homes, while fulfilling their obligation to the bank or lender. The provisions include: At least three mediation sessions before referring a case to a judge; a requirement that banks mediate in good faith, which helps remove blighted properties from neighborhoods by shortening the foreclosure timelines for abandoned property; and requirements that the bank treat a homeowner's most recently submitted financial package as current which will end the burden of constant requests for new documents. Finally, the law provides the Department of Banking with the authority to create regulations that require banks to disclose various foreclosure related information.

## TETHERING OF DOGS OUTSIDE

Many people in the state of Connecticut see their dogs as member of their family. Unfortunately, some people do not treat their dogs as well as others do. This law prohibits the tethering of dogs outdoors under extreme weather conditions, providing protection to a dog's health and well being, and penalizing owners who leave a dog outside for more than 15 minutes during the extreme weather.



Rep. Cook Volunteering with the Award Winning Torrington High School Marching Band



Rep. Cook Being Interviewed by a UConn Intern on the Legislative Process

Picture Courtesy of Marianne Killackey

## SYNCHRONIZING PRESCRIPTION REFILLS

Thanks to constituent John Mastrocola's suggestion, your prescription refills can now be synchronized. This means that all of a patient's prescription refills are coordinated to occur on the same day every month. This law protects patients' drug coverage by requiring that insurance companies cover prescriptions filled in a synchronized manner as long as the patient, their doctor and their pharmacist approve this medication plan. By simplifying the prescription refill process this legislation helps small pharmacies that traditionally offer home delivery of prescriptions, allowing them to cut down overhead costs by only delivering to a specific home once a month.



Groundbreaking for Community Health & Wellness Center Addition

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

This session the House and Senate passed a law that works in tandem with the gun violence, mental health and school safety bill we had passed earlier in the session. SB 972 strengthens the system we have in place here in Connecticut relating to children's mental health. Pediatricians will get more training about signs of mental illness, seeking to reduce mental, emotional and behavioral health issues in children through more early identification and intervention. It also promotes better consistency between home visitation programs and public education campaign, asks the state to create a study of incarcerated youth with mental health issues, and creates a Children's Mental Health Task Force to look into these issues further.

## HELPING VETERANS

Streamlining access to programs and assistance for our veterans was one of our priorities this session. A new law requires cities and towns that do not have one to appoint a town employee to serve as a veteran's service contact who acts as an ombudsman that can guide veterans to the appropriate local, state or federal resources.



Honoring Italian Mayor for the Day Mr. and Mrs. Joseph C. Gelormino

## LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

This Livable Communities initiative demonstrates the state's commitment to giving seniors a choice in their long term care and support services. This legislation requires the Commission on Aging to establish and facilitate partnerships with municipal leaders, planning and zoning boards and social service organizations to encourage collaborative efforts for long term care planning. By January 1, 2014, state resources will be available that facilitate aging-in-place and the creation of livable communities, and the Commission will be required to establish a website that acts as a single portal for disseminating information on nationwide initiatives.

## HOMEMAKER COMPANION AGENCIES

This law helps to protect some of our most vulnerable residents, requiring that homemaker companion agencies notify clients in writing that a comprehensive background check was performed on the employee. This must occur before sending an employee to a client's residence for the first time. The legislation also adds additional consumer protections to agency contracts, including specifying payment obligations and when contracts between the agency and client are enforceable and can be cancelled.

## LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH

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