

DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER & STATE REPRESENTATIVE
MICHELLE L. COOK

PROUDLY SERVING THE 65TH HOUSE DISTRICT | TORRINGTON

BENEFITS FOR OUR FIRST RESPONDERS

Firefighters risk their lives every day to protect citizens within their community, but the risk does not stop once the fire is out. Each fire burns toxins into the air that firefighters absorb, even while wearing proper protective gear. These toxins highly increase the risk of certain cancers each time a firefighter is exposed.

Prior to this legislation, firefighters who contracted cancer had to return to work while still recovering because they are currently prohibited from receiving short/long term disability or social security.

I am proud to have authored bipartisan legislation that established a self-sustaining relief fund to cover lost wages without raising taxes. Now, both volunteer and career firefighters will be able to take necessary time to recover from cancer that they have contracted while on the job protecting us.

[PA 16-10 Effective Date: 2/1/2017]

I am also proud that we expanded municipal property tax relief to include retired volunteer firefighters, fire police officers, and EMTs who volunteer at least twenty-five years of service. *[PA 16-99 Effective Date: 7/1/2016]*



Michelle with members of the Torrington Fire Department during their visit to the Capitol.

TACKLING OUR LOCAL OPIOID EPIDEMIC

In recent years, the Northwest Corner has seen a heartbreaking increase in fatal opioid overdoses. I am proud to have cosponsored groundbreaking legislation that will combat this crisis. This lifesaving law will:

- Allow licensed healthcare professionals to administer drugs that reverse opioid overdoses
- Require municipalities to equip their first responders with the opioid reversal drug Narcan
- Cap first-time opioid prescriptions at a seven-day supply

[PA 16-43 Effective Date: Various]

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Friends and Neighbors,

We recently completed a difficult 2016 Legislative Session. Despite the budget crisis, we passed legislation that aids Connecticut businesses and job seekers, improves our response to the opioid public health crisis and supports our veterans and first responders.

I also worked hard these past two years to protect taxpayers and provide property tax relief for Torrington families. Our current mill rate is 45.75. Under recently passed legislation, the mill rate will be capped at:

- 37 in the 2015 tax assessment year (July 1, 2016 motor vehicle tax bill)
- 32 in the 2016 tax assessment year (July 1, 2017 motor vehicle tax bill)

This legislation saves Torrington taxpayers \$1.9 million in car taxes. I'm glad that we have enacted a fairer system that will provide Torrington residents significant savings.

I hope that you find the information in this newsletter helpful. Please do not hesitate to reach out to my office if I can ever be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Michelle Cook



Photo Credit: Cheryl Prior of Torrington



Michelle with Chef Michael McDowell and Oliver Wolcott Technical High School Culinary Arts students who prepared lunch for the House of Representatives.



Michelle with Future Farmers of America Students during Agriculture Day at the Capitol.

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ASSISTING TORRINGTON BUSINESSES

Promoting job growth in Connecticut is my top priority. To improve the state's business climate, I worked on legislation that:

Establishes an Entrepreneur Learner's Permit Pilot Program

- Covers the initial costs associated with starting up a business for first-time business owners
- Encourages entrepreneurial start-ups in the area of information services, biotechnology and green technology [SA 16-1 Effective Date: Various]

Encourages Careers in Manufacturing

- Programs are being developed that will introduce students and their parents to careers in manufacturing
- The Department of Labor will update their website to provide information on apprenticeship opportunities [PA-114 Effective Date: Various]

Helps Torrington Job Seekers

- Legislation will allow the Superintendent of Connecticut's Technical High School System to establish a pilot program to provide manufacturing training for the state's current workers who require additional skills, training or education to upgrade their employment [PA 16-42 Effective Date: 7/1/2016]

PROMOTING REGIONALISM AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

Torrington acts as a regional hub for many smaller towns in Litchfield County. It is vital that we embrace regional cooperation and municipal efficiencies. New legislation that was passed this year will allow our municipalities and local boards of education to work in a more cooperative manner. They can now purchase more products together and begin to combine back office functions. These actions will allow for real savings to our local taxpayers. [PA 16-144 Effective Date: Various]



Michelle with Pat and Charles Marciano at the Torrington UNICO Ambassador Awards Ceremony.



Michelle greets Rebecca Lamoin and Natasha De Elye Cole at a ceremony honoring Special Olympic Athletes competing in the 2017 Global Games in Austria.



Michelle receives an award from Dr. Robert Murphy for her work on naturopathy legislation.

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Torrington's most vulnerable families are those that struggle to meet the needs of a family member with an intellectual disability. Unfortunately there are many families currently on waiting lists for services. This year I worked on bipartisan legislation to improve communication between families and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This new law requires DDS to provide, upon a client's request, information on an individual's position on the waiting list for residential services, documentation of an individual's need for residential services, copies of an individual's plan or assessment, as well as copies of any requests for funding or services along with any decisions made regarding those requests. [PA 16-60 Effective Date: Upon Passage]

ADVANCES IN NATUROPATHY

The University of Bridgeport teaches the only Doctor of Naturopathy (N.D.) program on the East Coast of the United States. However, while other states have allowed naturopaths to prescribe a limited list of drugs for years, current law in Connecticut still prevents this practice. Consequently, Naturopathic physicians most often refer clients to a prescribing doctor. This bill seeks to update the scope of practice of Naturopathic physicians by allowing the Commissioner of Public Health to establish a committee to consider what education or exam requirements must be met in order for Naturopaths to prescribe drugs, and to develop a list of specific drugs that may be prescribed. This bill works to recognize the expertise of Naturopathic practitioners and makes Connecticut a friendlier locale for students and practitioners of Naturopathy. [SA 16-3 Effective Date: Upon Passage]

ADVOCATING FOR THE ELDERLY

One of my greatest duties to Torrington is to our elderly and disabled residents. It is important that we ease the financial burdens they face, especially when it comes to housing. This law requires housing authorities and corporations providing state-assisted public housing for the elderly and disabled to allow their tenants to pay their security deposits in installments instead of the usual lump sum. Elderly and disabled homeowners will also now have until April 15th to reapply for property tax relief for three income-restricted programs: the state-funded Tax Relief Program for Elderly and Totally Disabled Homeowners (i.e., Circuit Breaker Program), and both the local option and state-funded Elderly Property Tax Freeze Program. [PA 16-74 Effective Date: 10/1/2016; PA 16-143 Effective Date: 10/1/2016]

ENHANCING OUR TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOLS

Oliver Wolcott Technical High School and Connecticut's Technical High School System (CTTHS) have recently struggled with teacher shortages. This is due to both a lack of candidates and an inability to directly make their case for funding. The superintendent of CTTHS can now submit the estimated expenditures directly to the state's budget office. Additionally, the superintendent will report workforce issues annually during legislative meetings. [PA 16-42 Effective Date: 7/1/2016]

IMPROVING INTERVENTIONS FOR DYSLEXIA

This year I worked extensively to create new legislation that establishes requirements for teachers and reading consultants who obtain endorsements in remedial reading and language arts. Beginning next year, individuals seeking endorsements will undertake a reading and language diagnosis and remediation program as part of their teacher preparation. [PA 16-92 Effective Date: 7/1/2017]

ENSURING SAFE HIRES IN OUR SCHOOLS

I am proud to have cosponsored new legislation that standardizes the fingerprinting and background check process and sets reasonable standards for districts to vet their employees. Greater disclosure will now be required by past employers and the State Department of Education when there is knowledge of a substantiated incidence of abuse or neglect or otherwise pending charges. [PA 16-67 Effective date: Various]

SUPPORTING LOCAL AGRICULTURE

To boost our state's agriculture business, we are encouraging companies to work with local farmers to provide their produce to our schoolchildren. We also improved the database for the Connecticut FarmLink which connects those who want to sell their farm or land with those who wish to buy it. Lastly, farm wineries will have the opportunity to sell wine starting at 8 A.M. instead of 10 A.M.

[PA 16-37 Effective Date: Various]

STANDING UP FOR VETERANS

I am proud to have supported new laws that make it easier for veterans to find jobs and own their own businesses. New legislation will:

- Give a price preference of up to 15% for veteran-owned businesses bidding on state contracts
- Require the Labor Commissioner to establish a clearinghouse to help highly-trained veterans and armed forces members find jobs that match their unique skill sets; a database will be created to match them with available jobs

[PA 16-184 Effective Date: 10/1/2016; PA 16-68 Effective Date: 10/1/2016]