

# CAPITOL UPDATE 2017

## CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

**INDEPENDENCE FOR TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOLS:** This legislation establishes the technical high school system as an independent agency. By separating the technical schools from the State Board of Education, we expect them to be more responsive to the needs of the business community in training our future workforce. The newly named Technical Education and Career School System will have stronger oversight, more effective governance and more checks to prevent wasteful spending.

*Representative Cook with Oliver Wolcott Technical High School students.*



**FIXING THE EDUCATION COST SHARING (ECS) FORMULA:** One of our most critical obligations as legislators is making sure that we are funding our local education system and providing our students with the supports they need. This year, we adopted a new formula for funding our schools that takes into consideration all of the factors that go into student success and ensures that every school district receives support. Under the Governor's Executive Order, Torrington was expected to receive \$4.8 million in ECS funds. Under the new budget, we are receiving \$24.3 million this year and \$24.8 million next year.



*Representative Cook welcoming fifth grade students from Vogel-Wetmore School.*

**HELPING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA:** I championed legislation that better prepares our teachers for addressing dyslexia by requiring special education teachers to receive training in reading and language diagnosis/remediation.

**CARE 4 KIDS FUNDING RESTORED:** The budget restores funding to the Care 4 Kids Child Care Subsidy Program. This funding will allow the program to reopen for enrollment and begin to address the 5,769 families who have been on the waiting list. This is a program that helps low-income families afford safe, quality child care and allows parents to remain in the workforce. Torrington has 161 children currently enrolled.



*Rep. Cook with Early Childhood Advocates at their annual advocacy event at the Capitol.*

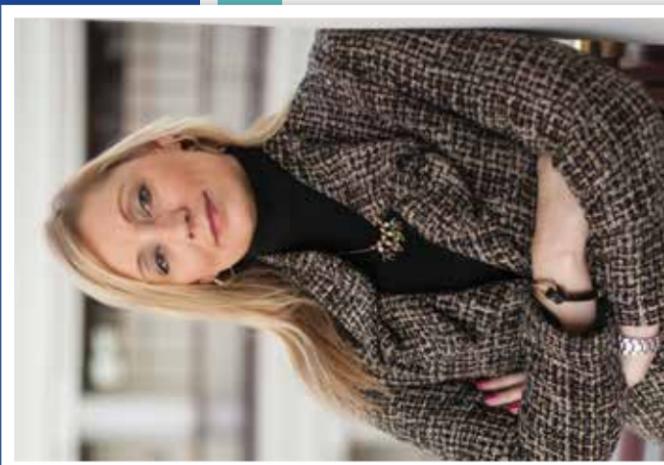
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## DEPUTY SPEAKER & STATE REPRESENTATIVE **MICHELLE L. COOK** PROUDLY SERVING TORRINGTON



Dear Neighbor,

Thank you for giving me the honor and privilege of representing you at the State Capitol. I worked tirelessly to earn your trust by defending our education system and protecting services for seniors and veterans, while working to responsibly close our state's budget gap.

Recently I voted in favor of a truly bipartisan budget agreement that passed both the Senate and the House with an overwhelming majority and was signed into law by the Governor.

I worked with members on both sides of the aisle to ensure that this budget is fair to our district, protects towns from devastating cuts, maintains vital social services, and invests in the growth of our economy.

This year I introduced legislation to establish safety measures for sober living homes in order to prevent tragic overdose deaths. I successfully led the bill to passage in the House, and was very disappointed that the Senate failed to act on it. I intend to reintroduce this bill in 2018 and continue fighting for the safety of our residents and community.

Please contact me if you have any questions on the legislation mentioned in this report or any other issue. I look forward to hearing from you as we prepare for the 2018 legislative session.

Best Wishes,



Photo Credit: Cheryl Prior of Torrington

## PUBLIC HEALTH

**PROTECTING HOSPITAL FUNDING:** Charlotte Hungerford Hospital is not only the immediate health care provider for Litchfield County patients, but also is the largest employer in Torrington. This session, I worked to support them as an economic driver in our community. The bipartisan budget implements a proposal that will bring new revenue to the state while also increasing state payments to hospitals over 2017 levels, due to enhanced federal reimbursements. Enacting this agreement will:

- Support community hospitals and those that serve a disproportionate share of Medicaid clients
- Put additional federal dollars into the system, which will have a ripple effect on our economy



*Radiologist Dr. Neal Mandell and the Radiological Society of Connecticut recognized Rep. Cook for her leadership in health care reform and advocacy of patient friendly policies.*

**COMBATTING THE OPIOID CRISIS:** This session, I cosponsored legislation that further strengthens our opioid overdose and addiction prevention efforts. The new legislation:

- Reduces the maximum first-time opioid drug prescription for minors from a 7-day to a 5-day supply
- Requires health insurers to cover medically necessary detox treatment
- Requires medical providers to discuss opioid risks with patients
- Eases restrictions to facilitate the destruction of unused medications

This law, paired with historic legislation passed in 2016, is another step in putting Torrington and Connecticut on a better track to combat this crisis.

## DEPUTY SPEAKER & STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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## PUBLIC SAFETY

**SAFER SOBER LIVING HOMES:** Sober living homes across Connecticut continue to remain unregulated. This is a danger to those who are seeking a safe place to recover from addiction. Torrington especially saw an inexcusable and tragic number of deaths occur in these facilities. I authored legislation that would have:

- Required homes to inform residents of what services they offer and to have Narcan on-site
- Required the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to create a disclosure form that homes must have prospective residents sign, stating that the homes are not licensed to provide substance abuse treatment services. These forms would have been required to be submitted to DMHAS.

I led the bill to passage in the House with bipartisan support, and I was disappointed that it was not called for a vote in the Senate. I will continue to push for this legislation in 2018.



*Rep. Cook attending a panel on sober living homes with community providers.*

**PREVENTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING:** Legislation that I championed has strengthened our state's human trafficking laws by:

- Broadening the crime of trafficking in persons to include sex trafficking and enhancing the penalty to a class A felony
- Creating the felony crime of "commercial sexual abuse of a minor" for those who patronize or solicit minors who are trafficked for sex
- Requiring the state to develop a tool for identifying victims of trafficking, training for professionals, and a plan for diverting victims into community-based treatment programs

**ESTABLISHING A MINIMUM AGE TO MARRY:** Prior to this legislative session, Connecticut didn't have a minimum legal age to marry. I introduced legislation that protects vulnerable minors by making 16 the minimum legal age to marry, and only permits 16- and 17-year-olds to marry with the permission of their parents and a probate judge.



**NEW TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICE:** I supported legislation this session to provide police training on locating children with autism who wander from home. Children with autism are 90% more likely to wander than their neurotypical peers, and often wander towards water. Traditional search methods for finding missing children – such as the use of lights and loud sounds – may actually scare autistic children.

*Don't forget, you can bring old medication to the Torrington Police Department for proper disposal. This drop box is located in the lobby on the first floor of the Department.*

## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

**HELPING OUR SENIORS:** While we had to make difficult choices to balance the budget, ensuring that Connecticut is an affordable and accessible place to live for our seniors was a priority of mine. The budget funds:

**CT Home Care Program for Elders**  
**Renters Rebate**  
**Dial-A-Ride**

These services allow seniors to stay in their homes for longer. In addition, our budget eases the tax burden on seniors by maintaining the \$200 property tax credit and phasing out income taxes on Social Security and pensions.

**HONORING FALLEN SOLDIERS:** We passed a law that allows municipalities to provide a property tax exemption to a parent or surviving spouse of a service member killed in action while performing active military duty. A municipality may exempt up to \$20,000 or 10% of the property's assessed value.



*(L to R) Rep. Cook with the 2017 Italian Mayor of the Day and veteran Joseph Barbieri.  
Rep. Cook with Dale Becker at the grand opening of Dale's Barbershop on Water Street.*

**SUPPORTING TORRINGTON BUSINESSES:** The budget maintains funding for important programs that support growing industries and Connecticut-based entrepreneurs, including:

**Bioscience Innovation Fund**  
**Angel Investor Tax Credits**  
**Small Business Express Program**  
**Women's Business Development Council**

The budget also supports Connecticut's Manufacturing Innovation Fund, which aids the growth of our advanced manufacturing sector by encouraging collaboration with universities, assisting with business development, and matching funds to leverage federal grants.

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