


Spring Update

As we approach the end of the 2014 legislative session, I write to let you know about some of the critical issues on which I have been focused. Over the past few months, I have worked to ensure that our tax dollars come back from Hartford in the form of capital and community investments. I have also been working with local groups to curtail the proposed tree trimming by UI. As a member of the Education Committee, I supported establishing the Office of Early Childhood Education as well as efforts to ensure adequate retirement for our teachers.

It is my honor and privilege to serve you, and I look forward to a productive session. If you have comments, questions, or concerns about these or other issues I urge you to contact me at 800-842-8267 or Michael.Dagostino@cga.ct.gov.

Sincerely,
State Representative D’Agostino



Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106-1591
Capitol: 800-842-8267
www.housedems.ct.gov/Dagostino



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
D’Agostino
HAMDEN | 91ST HOUSE DISTRICT

SPRING UPDATE

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
HARTFORD, CT
Permit No. 3937



Rep. D’Agostino speaks on behalf of Hamden residents about tree trimming.

UI TREE TRIMMING

As many of you know, community groups, residents, local officials, and our town government have come together to prevent a massive tree trimming operation by UI that would have permanently changed our streetscape and neighborhoods. I understand routine trimming is necessary for UI to protect its lines and prevent frequent and sustained outages, especially considering the increase in extreme weather. Nevertheless, their approach did not take into consideration either the aesthetic of our neighborhoods, or the environmental concerns, and did not replant trees to make up for the loss.

Following a series of community meetings and public hearings, I worked with the Hamden Alliance for Trees to draft new legislation that would require utilities to obtain written consent from property owners for the removal of trees on private property and to replace a tree for every tree removed. The bill will also require the establishment an electronic communication or email depository for tree trimming complaints, questions and inquiries. Lastly the bill would require a notice by UI that, if the owner objects to the proposed pruning or removal and the tree falls on any utility infrastructure, the owner shall not be billed for any resulting damage.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

MIKE
D'AGOSTINO

HAMDEN | 91ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN AND OUR TEACHERS

I supported the establishment of an Office of Early Childhood Education, which will ensure that all children have access to pre-kindergarten and allow for the sharing of information between programs to establish best practices. It will also provide outreach to families, service providers and policy makers to ensure children get the tools they need early on to be school ready at age five. Countless studies show that early access to education is the key to lifelong learning, and the establishment of this office would enable that lifelong learning to start earlier.

After thirteen years on the Hamden Board of Education, I am also supportive of a proposal to help teachers at the end of their careers. Presently, retired teachers cannot collect full social security benefits if they receive a teacher pension. The majority of widowed retired teachers are not able to collect their deceased spouse’s social security. Even those teachers who contributed to social security are unable to receive their full benefits. Those teachers who contributed to social security should be able to collect it; it’s that simple. I also support a graduated reduction in state income taxes on retired teachers’ pensions (which they also fund with their own contributions). Research shows that every pension dollar paid to these retirees results in \$1.52 in total output in the state’s economy.

INVESTING IN HAMDEN

So far this year we have seen our tax dollars returning to Hamden in the form of investments in our town’s infrastructure and organizations that help maintain our standard of living. Four state grants were awarded to Hamden to build and maintain playgrounds, totaling \$180,000. The funds will go toward playground improvements at three Hamden elementary schools, West Woods School, Bear Path School, and Shepherd Glen School, as well as for a new play area for the preschool program at the Alice Peck School.

Two nonprofits also benefited from state funding: The Children’s Center will receive \$117,000 for building improvements, and Opportunity House was awarded \$79,656 for new vehicles. The Children’s Center of Hamden is Connecticut’s oldest private child caring agency, serving on average 150 children and their families each day. Opportunity House provides residential and day programs for adults within the autism spectrum with services tailored to individual needs, abilities, and preferences. I am thrilled that these groups were given the help they needed from the state to continue to serve our community.



Rep. D'Agostino and Speaker Sharkey meet with Hamden parents about Pre-K.

REVERSE PILOT

I have been working alongside Speaker Brendan Sharkey to overhaul the payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) system. Our bill would let cities assess colleges and hospitals for full taxes, then let the institutions receive reimbursement from the state. Many hospitals and non-profits now operate like businesses. These institutions have become major corporations with significant budgets and they look and act and feel a lot like any other major corporation, despite their non-profit status. In Hamden, for example, Quinnipiac University has bought up dozens of homes for their students, removing them from our tax rolls. In this way, the university acts as a landlord; it should pay taxes like one.



Rep. D'Agostino with Speaker Sharkey and Sen. Looney at the PURA public hearing in Hamden.