

THE BUDGET - TAX RELIEF FOR WORKING FAMILIES

FUNDING FOR VITAL SERVICES RESTORED

Facing difficult circumstances – including a \$1.3 billion deficit in January – the Assembly worked to adopt a budget that represents the wide-ranging priorities of our diverse state. We protected hard-working, middle-class families by providing property tax relief through additional aid to our communities, and funded vital structures and services people rely on daily – like schools, libraries, emergency services, and dial-a-ride. The budget is balanced, under the spending cap, and invests in Connecticut’s transportation infrastructure, which is critical to our future economy. By investing in key transportation projects such as the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield rail line, the widening of Connecticut’s highways, and restoration of key roads and bridges, we are addressing traffic congestion and bringing jobs to Connecticut.

FOR WEST HARTFORD, THE BUDGET IS REAL PROGRESS

Our delegation succeeded in increasing state aid significantly - by \$5,451,585 over the next two years - including \$3,288,665 in increased education cost sharing funds alone. This increased state support will help our town improve teacher-to student ratios while reducing the pressure on local property taxes.

DELIVERING FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

West Hartford car owners will see a cut in their motor vehicle tax as we capped the car tax mill rate statewide at 32 mills beginning July 2016 and 29.36 mills for July 2017. Increased state aid for West Hartford will allow municipalities to lower their mill rates. Private colleges that own off-campus property, and larger non-profit hospitals that begin to buy property, will begin to contribute to a town’s tax base to help pay for services they use such as fire, police, and public works. This lessens the property tax burden currently borne solely by families and small businesses in our communities. Towns with a larger number of tax-exempt properties (e.g. state property, churches, colleges and hospitals) receive additional aid for further property tax relief as well.

Military veterans’ retirement pay will now be 100% exempt from the state income tax. Tax loopholes that allowed some corporations to shift their earnings to other states are being closed. And individuals and families making more than \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 a year, respectively, will see a slight increase in their income tax rate. This impacts about 20,000 households out of CT’s 1.5 million, or the top 1.3% of taxpayers. Our rates remain lower than those of neighboring states – and I will keep working to ensure that our revenue structure is equitable and fair to Connecticut residents and businesses alike.

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CAPITOL UPDATE 2015

REDUCING REQUIRED TESTING IN SCHOOLS

Since the rollout of the federal No Child Left Behind Act almost 15 years ago, standardized testing has come under a lot of scrutiny – as it should. One area of concern has been that there are simply too many tests. For example, high school juniors in West Hartford are currently required to take the Smarter Balance Assessment at a time when many of them are taking the SAT or ACT college admission tests, achievement tests and/or Advanced Placement exams – too many tests at once.

I'm glad to report that the legislature took a big step forward this year, approving a bill I co-authored that will replace the Smarter Balanced Assessment for 11th graders with the new SAT. With this approach, the cost of the SAT will now be covered by the state for all high school juniors, so that more students will take the exam; there will be fewer exams for students to worry about; and we may see more students thinking about higher education as they move toward senior year.



Andy and Sen. Bye announce testing changes with W. Hartford High School juniors.

GIVING TOWNS MORE SAY IN SCHOOL BUDGETS

Since the state first implemented a Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) years ago, school enrollment numbers have begun to decline. The rigid requirement that towns spend the same amount (or more) on education than they did the year before was beginning to create a disincentive for towns to deliver education efficiently and collaboratively. This year, we offered greater flexibility to towns with low rates of poverty that are experiencing declining enrollment.

These towns can now reduce their education budget by as much as 3% if their enrollment has declined sufficiently. Districts like ours – with 20% of children receiving free or reduced price lunch – may reduce the education budget by as much as 1.5% if declining enrollment justifies such a reduction. And our state's lowest performing districts, designated as Alliance Districts, are not allowed to reduce their education spending – since their results clearly show the need for continued investment in education.

WEST HARTFORD STATE AID 2017 FISCAL YEAR

Education Cost Sharing	\$21,469,839
Municipal Project Grants	\$805,784
PILOT: State Property, Colleges & Hospitals	\$1,385,646
Pequot/Mohegan Revenue Sharing	\$220,032
School Transportation	\$234,677
Local Capital Improvement Program	\$436,682
Town Aid Roads	\$687,452
Adult Education	\$97,688
Additional Sales Tax Revenue & PILOT Increases	\$2,286,706
Total State Funds to West Hartford	\$27,624,506
Increase in State Aid to West Hartford	\$5,451,585

REDUCING SCHOOL SECLUSION & RESTRAINT

It is absolutely critical that school districts and schools have plans in place to ensure students' safety and provide clear guidelines for school personnel when a student's behavior may warrant some type of seclusion or restraint. Key provisions of a new law I strongly supported this year include prohibiting teachers, administrators, and other public school employees from ever using life-threatening or prone physical restraints on students. School employees may only place a student in seclusion to prevent immediate or imminent injury to the student or others, and are prohibited from using physical restraint or seclusion for the sole purpose of punishing the student, because it is convenient, or in place of a less restrictive alternative. A school board must also notify a parent within 24 hours of their child being secluded or restrained – and provide the reason for the steps taken. Altogether, this new measure helps ensure that seclusion and/or restraint will be used only when absolutely necessary – and in ways that cause the least possible trauma for students and educators alike.



PATIENT-DESIGNATED CAREGIVERS

It has been common for patients to return to the hospital soon after discharge because they weren't instructed properly on follow-up care. Under our new CARE (Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable) Act, a hospital must document a caregiver in the patient's discharge plan, designated by the patient. They must attempt to notify the caregiver of the patient's discharge, and to instruct the caregiver on any post-discharge tasks to increase the likelihood of good, healthy outcomes.



HELP FOR OUR VETERANS

This year, the legislature advanced legislation that recognizes the important sacrifices that veterans have made while defending our country. A new law I supported increases services for our female and college veterans. The Department of Veterans' Affairs will now be required to conduct benefits and services outreach for female veterans, and offer recommendations to the legislature on what types of service initiatives would be best for female veterans.

Operation Academic Support for Incoming Service (OASIS) members will help veterans of the Armed Services receive grants and scholarships to purchase needed school supplies when enrolling in educational programs.

REDUCING PESTICIDE USE AROUND CHILDREN

Children are particularly vulnerable to the health risks of pesticides – because, as they grow, toxins accumulate more quickly in their tissues. This year, Connecticut took a step forward in protecting children by banning use of these harmful chemicals on municipal playgrounds – just as we banned them at preschools, elementary schools and middle schools five years ago. Also, school websites and social media will be used to notify families of a pesticide application at least 24 hours before it happens.

The new law encourages safer alternatives to pesticides, such as integrated pest management. Taken together, these measures follow the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendation to reduce the chances that children are exposed to toxic chemicals at school or play.