



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for your support. It has been an honor to represent you in the General Assembly for the 2015-2016 term. There have been many intensely debated issues this legislative session and it has been a privilege to represent the people of Windham in each of those discussions.

Connecticut's economy continues to recover and looking back at the 2015 legislative session I am proud of the steps the legislature took to grow our state's economy. We supported the successful Small Business Express Program and made historic investments in transforming our state's transportation system.

We have continued to support our education system by providing additional aid to English Language Learners and students with learning disabilities like dyslexia. We also took significant steps to lower the cost of higher education by becoming the first state in the country to establish a Student Loan Bill of Rights.

I hope you find this information useful. Please know that Windham's working families remained at the heart of each vote I cast in the House Chamber. As always, please do not hesitate to call my office if you have any questions, and sign up for my email blasts at my website: www.housedems.ct.gov/Johnson.

Sincerely,

Susan Johnson

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PROUDLY SERVING THE 49TH HOUSE DISTRICT | WINDHAM



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CAPITOL UPDATE 2015





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ASSISTANCE FOR VETERANS

This year, we supported and advanced legislation that recognizes the important sacrifices that veterans made while defending our country. We increased services available to veterans on state colleges and university campuses; established the Connecticut Women Veterans’ Program; created the Veterans to Agriculture Program; and we are ensuring veterans have housing.



Rep. Johnson with therapy dog, Gizmo, during his visit in the House Chambers.

STUDENT LOAN RATES DROP

The Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA) announced that it will offer a fixed interest rate of 4.95% for new student loans, down from its current rate of 6.75%. Not only is this the lowest rate that CHESLA has ever offered, it is also significantly lower than the new Federal PLUS loan rate of 6.84%.



Rep. Johnson with the 2015 winner of American Idol, Nick Fradiani.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

Car owners in Windham and Willimantic will see a cut in their motor vehicle taxes as the legislature capped the car tax mill rate statewide at 32 mills beginning July 2016 and 29.36 mills in July 2017. Windham’s current mill rate is 36.21 and Willimantic’s current mill rate is 45.98. This plan provides much needed car tax relief to car owners. Here’s how it works:

The formula to determine the car tax is 70% of the car’s value multiplied by the mill rate, then dividing the sum by 1000. For example, a 2010 Dodge Caravan’s blue book value is \$9,250. 70% of that value is \$6,475. Multiply this sum by the current mill rate (36.21) and you’ll get \$234,459.75. Divide this number by 1000 and the car tax bill will be \$234.45 for Fiscal Year 2015.

DISTRICT 1 (WINDHAM TAXING DISTRICT)

If you drive a 2010 Dodge Caravan valued at \$9,250 this year you paid approximately \$235 in car tax.
In FY 16 you will pay \$207, saving \$28.
In FY 17 you will pay \$190, saving \$45 over what you paid this year.

DISTRICT 2 (WILLIMANTIC TAXING DISTRICT)

This year you paid \$297.72.
In FY 16 you will pay \$207, saving about \$90.
In FY 17 you will pay \$190, saving about \$107 over what you paid this year.

IMPROVING OUR AGING TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

According to the business community, our outdated transportation infrastructure is one of the biggest drags on our economy. That is why my colleagues and I made sure our state has a long-term plan to invest in modernizing our transportation network.

Starting next year a fraction of a percent of our sales tax will go toward replacing and repairing neglected roads and bridges, and upgrading rail and other public transit systems. Making this investment is critical to our economic future.

Connecticut can’t continue to grow with a transportation system designed for the 20th century.



JOB CREATION

By investing in transportation projects around the state, we are encouraging smart growth, addressing traffic congestion and creating sustainable jobs in Connecticut. To ensure the state’s economic competitiveness and promote new jobs, we formed the Commission on Economic Competitiveness, which will develop policies that promote economic growth. The commission will analyze the impact state tax policy has on state business and industry.

Additional funds were allocated for the highly successful loan program called the Small Business Express Program. The Department of Economic and Community Development will dedicate funds to develop a program for construction projects for minority business enterprises. These moves will create economic diversity for Connecticut families.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

This year, a bilingual education workgroup convened to address the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) and our state’s staggering achievement gap. We are requiring the State Department of Education to develop standards for students receiving longer periods of instruction and to annually report on the progress of these students. A pilot program was also created in four towns and cities to identify best practices and provide more administrative support to all schools in Connecticut.

Moreover, districts will not be penalized with low rankings when these students perform poorly on standardized tests in their first two years of learning English. Finally, we directed Regional Education Service Centers to study and recommend ways that districts with low numbers of ELL students may still receive quality instruction.

REDUCING REQUIRED TESTING IN SCHOOLS

Since the rollout of No Child Left Behind almost 15 years ago, standardized testing has come under a lot of scrutiny. One area of concern is that there are simply too many tests. For example, juniors in high school are currently required to take the SBAC exam at a time when many of them are taking the SAT or ACT college admission tests. As we work statewide and across the country to improve the use of standardized tests, the legislature took another big step forward this year by allowing schools to waive the SBAC testing for any student taking college admission tests.

PATIENT DESIGNATED CAREGIVERS

A new law called the Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable (CARE) Act, requires the hospital to document a caregiver **who has been chosen by the patient** in the patient’s discharge plan. The hospital must attempt to notify the caregiver of the patient’s discharge, and to instruct the caregiver on any post-discharge tasks with which the patient will need assistance.