

CAPITOL UPDATE 2012

Jobs Are Priority #1

We created new job opportunities for young people by funding the Youth Employment Summer Jobs program. We also supported adult evening education programs, as well as the Small Business Express program and a Connecticut Made initiative to promote products from local businesses. Additional, high level job opportunities will result from economic development funding for the Jackson Labs project that builds on our decision to become a world leader in bioscience and biotechnology.

We recognize the challenges facing cities and towns and secured funding for municipalities, relieving pressure on local property taxes.



Preserving Medicare Eligibility

Medicare Eligibility Preserved – ensures that thousands of seniors and people with disabilities can continue to use the Medicare Savings Program (MSP) to help pay for their Medicare co-pays and deductibles. The legislation, which passed unanimously, raises the income limit for the MSP in order to accommodate a 3.6 percent Social Security cost of living increase (COLA) which took effect January 1. It would have been a tragic irony if a welcome increase in Social Security benefits caused Connecticut residents to become ineligible for these Medicare benefits.



Dear Neighbor,

From jobs to education to improved response to natural disasters, the legislature helped citizens across our state in many ways in 2012.

It started last October when we passed comprehensive jobs legislation that invested hundreds of millions of dollars in small businesses, gave firms hiring incentives, encouraged entrepreneurship and innovation and eliminated red-tape for growing companies.

This spring, historic changes were made to our educational system so our children can succeed. We made it easier for people to exercise voting rights and demanded that utility companies respond better when storms and crises hit.

I hope this report is informative. I'm happy to answer any questions about these issues or any others facing our state or your family. Together we can create a better future for our families.

Sincerely,



Rep. Rick Lopes

Let's Keep In Touch In A Green Way

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Hospice Care

With just two licensed hospices in the state, this new law will permit hospices to follow federal standards, giving smaller hospice facilities the opportunity to provide high quality services that allow patients to stay closer to family and friends. This bill will help our state to ensure that residents have access to health care services across the full continuum of care.

Reducing Domestic Violence

This year we strengthened the state's laws to better protect victims, hold abusers accountable and give new tools to law enforcement by:

- Improving access to and enforcement of protective and restraining orders
- Giving police officers new tools, including a model policy for responding to domestic violence incidents
- Allowing victims to report email and texting violations of restraining and protective orders in the town where they reside
- Extending the maximum length of restraining orders from six months to one year
- Requiring the courts to share protective orders with schools that victims attend, upon request of a victim
- Strengthening the definition of stalking to ensure that stalking incidents—including digital stalking—are appropriately punished

Grandparent's Rights

As we all know, family relationships are complicated and emotional, and grandparents can sometimes be separated from their grandchildren's lives particularly when divorce, death or disagreements occur. This legislation helps grandparents seeking visitation rights by providing a guide of required evidence so a court can better assess each unique situation. This includes showing that a parent-like relationship exists and that a denial of visitation rights could cause harm to the child. A court must grant the request if clear and convincing evidence has proven these conditions exist. In the end, it is important that decisions are made in a child's best interests and this legislation helps do that.

Veterans

CUSTODY ORDERS WHILE ON DEPLOYMENT

In order to reduce the psychological trauma a parent feels when they leave a small child for an extended period of time, we protected parents' permanent custody orders in the event of deployment. We provided an opportunity for the military parent to create temporary custody orders that remain in effect only as long as they are away on deployment and for as much contact as possible between children and the parent who is absent while on military duty by providing contact by phone or email.

DESECRATING VETERAN MEMORIALS

Honoring the present and past sacrifices of our veterans is one of my highest priorities. It is shocking to see an increase in thefts and vandalism of veteran memorials. We increased penalties for desecrating veteran's memorials beyond the monetary value of what was vandalized.



CT VETERANS CHARITY NETWORK

Fraudulent charity groups often misrepresent veterans, trying to take advantage of our good will toward those who serve our country. We helped protect consumers from these fraudulent groups by creating a legitimate charities list on the Department of Veteran's Affairs website.

DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS FOR VETS WITH PTSD & LEGAL ISSUES

So many of our service men and women return home and face a variety of challenges, not the least of which are legal issues and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. A federally funded pilot program for veterans dealing with these issues is helpful but limited, so we expanded the program to more locations throughout the state.

Education Reform

Our education initiative will provide new support to help turn around underperforming schools. The education reform package has long-term implications for our children and for the state's economic well-being. The better we prepare children for the 21st Century workforce, the stronger we'll make Connecticut's economy. The bill:

- Includes more funding for school-based health centers and family resource centers.
- Recognizes the critical importance of early childhood education by underwriting 1,000 school readiness slots for preschoolers and funding initiatives to improve early reading success. Of these, 100 are expected to go to New Britain.
- Creates the Commissioner's Network, to provide the intensive supports and interventions needed to turn around 25 of the most chronically low-performing schools. Gives the state commissioner of education the needed authority to develop or modify plans with teachers and parents at "turnaround" schools.



Children With Special Needs

Children with Special Needs - offers protections and support of children with special needs through several new laws. One bill eliminates the unnecessary use of so-called seclusion or scream rooms. Another bill, which I backed, improves the special education student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and another creates a study on workforce development, training and employment of young adults with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities.