

# 2008 LAWS AFFECTING CHILDREN

## CHILD PRODUCT SAFETY

In 2007, there were over 100 different children's products that were recalled because they were found to have high amounts of lead. A child even died from swallowing a charm that had a high concentration of lead!



Connecticut became one of the few states in the Union to pass a bill that establishes lead limits in children's products, prohibits the sale of these products and ones that contain asbestos, and requires the Department of Consumer Protection to post a list of children's products that are banned hazardous substances. It also ensures that toys previously taken off the market are not put on the market again at places like dollar stores. This bill will protect Connecticut's children from dangerous toys. (PA 08-106 & PA 08-122)



## EXPANDING THE CARE 4 KIDS PROGRAM

Connecticut's Care 4 Kids program is for low income working families which reaches over 17,000 children. This bill enables the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services to establish extended eligibility for those who previously would have been ineligible for the subsidy due to a temporary interruption in employment or other approved activity. (PA 08-100)

## REDUCING CHILD POVERTY

As a co-sponsor, I am very proud that I helped create a bill that aims at reducing child poverty in the state. Federal Food Stamp funds will be directed to reduce child poverty, which will help many local organizations that serve low-income families and individuals. The Department of Social Services will also administer a food stamp employment and training program. Efforts will be made to expand those eligible for enrollment in the program in education, employment, and training activities. (PA 08-161)



## SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



This bill clarifies the in-school suspension limitation and strengthens the bullying policy currently in place. Starting July 1, 2009, out-of-school suspensions may only be allowed after a hearing is held to determine if a student is too dangerous or disruptive. In-school suspensions will now be a maximum of ten days rather than five.

The bill also takes steps to strengthen the current law on bullying in schools. Now verified reports of bullying will be required to be filed in writing with the Department of Education. Schools must also create a prevention strategy in addition to an intervention strategy to address bullying behavior. (PA 08-160)

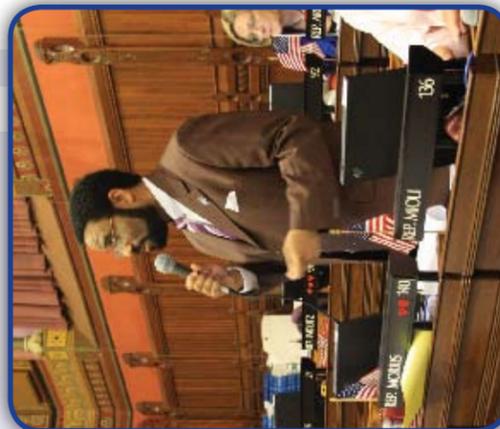
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I am honored to represent  
the City of Norwalk as your  
State Representative.

State Representative  
**Bruce V. Morris**

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# STATE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Dear Neighbor,

*I hope this newsletter finds you and your family in good health and in good spirits.*

*This was a challenging year at the State Capitol. As a state and as individuals, we face many new and difficult demands. In this newsletter, I would like to share some of my accomplishments that will benefit the people of the state and all of us here in Norwalk.*

*We have been hard at work crafting the necessary legislation to improve economic stability, education, health care, the environment and services that the people of Connecticut deserve. I have worked hard to advocate for mortgage assistance programs, municipal health care pooling, education, security for foster care children, expansion of home hospice care and many more programs and services.*

*Please continue to share with me your thoughts and ideas. Your letters, e-mail and phone calls provide insight on what's best for the district and allows me to understand your concerns. With your input, I will continue to fight for a better quality-of-life for the people of the 140th District.*

Sincerely,

Bruce V. Morris  
State Representative - 140th District  
City of Norwalk, Connecticut

**YOUR CAR, YOUR CHOICE**

New legislation will give vehicle owners—rather than insurance companies—the right to choose where repairs are made after an accident. This law is meant to eliminate “steering,” the practice of insurance companies requiring repairs only at “preferred repair shops.” Without this law, insurance companies could continue steering business to certain shops and guaranteeing only repairs made at those shops.

How will people know they have a choice? This law will require repair shops to notify vehicle owners on appraisal forms, estimate forms, and customer service area signs that the vehicle owners have the right to choose the licensed repair shop where the damage will be repaired. Vehicle insurance companies will have to provide similar notice on the insurance identification cards they issue to vehicle owners.

In addition, if vehicle owners choose to have repairs performed at shops associated with their insurance companies, no repairs may be made without the vehicle owners’ written acknowledgement. This is another way to ensure that vehicle owners know they may choose any licensed vehicle repair shop. Effective January 1, 2009 (PA 08-146)



**CONNECTICUT HEALTHCARE PARTNERSHIP**



PA 08-183 opens up the State Employee Healthcare Plan to municipal employees, non-profit groups, and small businesses. Allowing municipal employees to join voluntarily will help reduce costs to small towns while offering the quality, comprehensive coverage associated with the state plan. Businesses with fewer than 50 employees will be able to take advantage of the increased bargaining power of 250,000 lives in the state pool while giving their employees access to a good healthcare plan, allowing these businesses to expand and grow.

Major points:

- Municipalities, small businesses (<50 employees), and non-profits can now join the Connecticut State Employee Healthcare Plan.
- Participation is completely voluntary.
- Municipalities can save money to offset property tax increases.
- Increased bargaining power will help reduce and stabilize costs. The State Employee Plan had a 0% increase this year.
- Twenty-four other states have opened up their state employee plans to local government employees, but Connecticut is the first to open it to private employers.

**MINORITY HEALTH ADVISORY COMMISSION**

The health and well-being of Connecticut’s residents is a top priority of the General Assembly. Reports have shown that many minority ethnic groups receive lower quality care than their counterparts, even when income, age, insurance, and health status are taken into consideration. To begin to address the myriad of health care related disparities for members of the state’s minority communities, the legislature passed a bill this session that establishes a 32-member Commission on Health Equity within the Office of the Health Care Advocate for administrative purposes. The office will work to eliminate disparities in health status based on race, ethnicity, and linguistic ability and improve the quality of health for all state residents. (PA 08-171)



**MONEY FOR NORWALK**  
(Fiscal Year 2008 - 2009)

**PILOT State-Owned Real Property**  
\$374,193

**PILOT Colleges and Hospitals**  
\$1,277,131

**Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Sun Grant**  
\$1,0339,007

**Town Aid Road Fund Grant**  
\$440,753

**Local Capital Improvement (LoCIP) Program**  
\$646,599

**Public School Pupil Transportation**  
\$252,375

**Non-Public School Pupil Transportation**  
\$25,741

**Adult Education**  
\$85,005

**Education Cost Sharing Grant**  
\$10,095,131

**Total Statutory Formula Grants**  
**\$14,535,884**

*This reflects an increase of \$482,497 compared to Fiscal Year 2007 - 2008.*

**SUPPORT FOR GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVE CAREGIVERS**

This bill gives the same rights to grandparents and other relative caregivers appointed through Superior Court, and who are not receiving subsidized guardianship or foster care payments from the Department of Children and Families (DCF). They are now able to apply for grants under the Probate Court administered Kinship Fund and Grandparents and Relatives Respite Fund. Previously, only guardians appointed through the Probate Court were able to receive financial support. (PA 08-97)

Effective Date: July 1, 2008



**EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE**



Connecticut law allows eligibility for the Department of Social Services’ emergency housing benefits to those in the process of a home foreclosure. Due to a rising rate in home foreclosures, the Connecticut legislature has recognized the benefits of this program do not become active until too late in the foreclosure process. Public Act 08-22 allows foreclosure defendants to be eligible for housing benefits at the time a foreclosure judgment is entered. (PA 08-22)



*Please feel free to contact me if you should have any suggestions, questions or concerns.*

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**SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES**

Recognizing that polluting facilities are often concentrated in urban and low income areas, the legislature took steps to help these communities. The new law requires applicants seeking approval for new or expanded polluting facilities in environmental justice communities to provide notification, submit a public participation plan, including holding an informal public meeting, and consult with municipal officials to arrange for an environmental benefit agreement to ease the facility’s impact. (PA 08-94)