

DECRIMINALIZING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

This year, I made efforts to promote prevention over punishment in our school systems. These changes will keep students safer and focused on learning. We addressed the unclear role of School Resource Officers (police officers in schools) by requiring boards of education to reach an agreement with their resource officers as to their roles and responsibilities within the school.

These agreements may include a graduated response model that would outline several alternative interventions before resorting to the criminal justice system. In addition, rather than punish young children by taking them out of the classroom, we prohibited out-of-school suspension or expulsion for students in preschool, kindergarten, and first and second grade. Schools are encouraged to implement early detection and prevention programs, via school-based primary mental health programs. Exceptions to the suspension and expulsion ban will be made for a student whose behavior endangers others or is overly violent or sexual, or involves weapons or drugs.



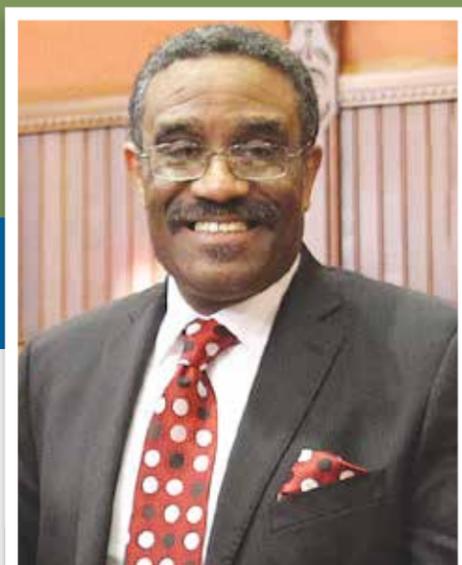
Rep. Morris with
House Speaker Sharkey

ADDRESSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

This session, we worked to help Connecticut close the achievement gap and improve educational outcomes for all students. We will increase early childhood literacy programs by requiring the state Department of Education to hire a Director of Reading Initiatives, who will be responsible for implementing a statewide reading plan and coordinating Connecticut's various reading programs.

In addition, more teachers will be certified in shortage areas, more minority teachers will be recruited and educators will be given new strategies to build better relationships with students of different cultures.

Starting next year, aspiring teachers will gain experience by working in both settings – student teaching, clinical or field work in an affluent community with high socioeconomic characteristics while also working in a less affluent before earning certification. Chronic absenteeism has also been an ongoing problem for struggling school districts and has been identified as a major contributor of Connecticut's Achievement Gap. We passed a new law requiring local boards of education to monitor and address their absenteeism rates in schools as well as establishing state level reporting and planning.



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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

BRUCE V. MORRIS

PROUDLY SERVING THE 140TH DISTRICT, NORWALK

CAPITOL UPDATE 2015

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for your support. It has been an honor to represent you in the General Assembly for another term. There have been many intensely debated issues this legislative session and it has been a privilege to represent the people of Norwalk 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 have continued to make important investments in Connecticut's Small Business Express Program, which has succeeded in helping to grow our small business community. The property tax burden has also remained a primary concern for many small businesses, and thankfully we worked to increase municipal aid in order to ease property taxes.

We also made historic investments in our transportation system and increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding for many cities and towns. These investments are critical to growing our economy as businesses will not come to Connecticut if their employees cannot get to work in a safe and timely manner and if we do not have an educated workforce ready to fill 21st century jobs.

I hope you find this information to be of use and please do not hesitate to call my office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Rep. Bruce V. Morris

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*Rep Morris visiting
"The Children's Playhouse Too" in Norwalk*

EDUCATION REFORM FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

At the beginning of the legislative session, House Speaker Brendan Sharkey asked me to serve on a special panel that was being formed to help improve the performance of students who are learning English. I was very happy to accept the challenge because improving students' performance was a priority of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, which I chair.

My colleagues and I, in the English Language Acquisition and Educational Equity Workgroup, looked for ways to address this particular issue and Connecticut's achievement gap for students. This year, we are now requiring the state Department of Education to develop standards for students receiving longer periods of instruction and annually report on the progress of these students. We are also creating a pilot program 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.

RESTORING TRUST BETWEEN LAW ENFORCEMENT & MINORITY COMMUNITIES

As Chair of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and a concerned minority, I took the initiative this session to introduce legislation that takes critical steps to restore trust between law enforcement and minority communities. I worked closely with my colleagues to ensure that among some of the most key provisions of the new law included: Police will now receive training in 1) the proper use of physical force; 2) using and retaining the records of body-worn recording equipment (body cameras); and 3) cultural competency, sensitivity, and bias-free policing.

By January 1, 2016, law enforcement units will be required to implement guidelines to recruit, retain, and promote more minority police officers. Other key components of the bill include assigning an independent prosecutor to investigate allegations that an officer's physical force resulted in the death of a person; requiring law enforcement units to document incidents in which a police officer discharges a firearm or uses physical force that likely caused serious physical injury or death; and providing more grant money for municipal police departments to purchase body cameras. Finally, this law strengthened protections for onlookers recording an officer performing his or her duties.

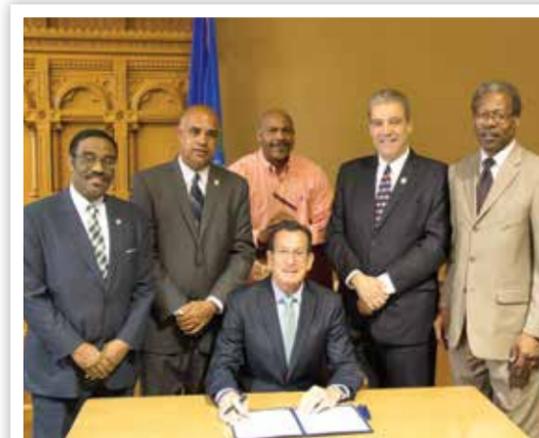


*Rep. Morris leading a press conference on
the Excessive Force Bill*

REDUCING SENTENCES FOR YOUTHS & IMPROVING THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

We continue our efforts to treat juveniles in the criminal justice system appropriately given their lack of maturity and brain development. New brain science and sociological studies show that the brains of young people are more susceptible to negative influences than the brains of adults. This has led to recent U.S. and Connecticut Supreme Court decisions limiting the application of adult sentencing rules to juveniles.

This session, the legislature raised the age when juveniles are automatically transferred to adult court from age 14 to age 15. We also excluded certain B felony offenses from automatic transfer to adult court. In addition, we passed legislation requiring criminal courts to consider evidence showing the difference between juvenile and adult brain development when sentencing for certain felonies committed prior to reaching 18 years of age. Parole hearings will now be offered to those serving sentences of over 10 years after they have served a portion of their sentence.



*Rep. Morris at the
Governor's Second Chance Bill Signing*

CITY OF NORWALK STATE AID FOR FISCAL YEARS 2016 & 2017

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Education Cost Sharing | \$23,102,190 |
| Priority School Districts | \$8,719,560 |
| PILOT: State Owned Property | \$562,773 |
| PILOT: Colleges & Hospitals | \$4,168,003 |
| Pequot/Mohegan Revenue Sharing | \$1,720,070 |
| School Transportation | \$146,272 |
| Local Capital Improvement Program | \$1,263,024 |
| Town Aid Roads | \$1,775,304 |
| Adult Education | \$140,102 |
| DECD Tax Abatement and MRSA Payments | \$5,702,341 |
| Total State Funds to Norwalk | \$47,299,639 |

A SECOND CHANCE SOCIETY

Connecticut's drug policies have swelled our prisons with nonviolent drug offenders who struggle to reintegrate into society upon release. The Second Chance Society will ensure public safety, save money, and help end the culture of mass incarceration by lowering sentencing for nonviolent offenses. The Second Chance Society will give ex-offenders more opportunity to get back into the workforce and will also save millions in taxpayer dollars.

EXPANDING SMALL BUSINESSES

This session, I helped allocate more funds for the highly successful Small Business Express Program. We are also requiring the Department of Economic and Community Development to dedicate funds to develop a program for construction projects for minority business enterprises. In addition, contractors who are awarded certain public works contracts by municipalities and quasi-public agencies will have to abide by existing laws pertaining to nondiscrimination and affirmative action requirements. All of these actions that we have taken this year will create jobs and better economic opportunities for Connecticut and our families.