



Dear Residents of the 85th District,

At the beginning of the '08 session, I sent out a survey to determine your views on priority issues, budget choices, changes to address the end of cheap oil, and uses of the surplus, if any surplus existed. You (305 residents) responded that your top 3 concerns were: (1) energy costs; (2) health insurance costs; and (3) property taxes. Our legislative response to these issues is included in this newsletter, although one of our priority measures, the healthcare partnership that we intended to address both affordable health care and lower municipal costs, was vetoed by the Governor. We will keep talking with Governor Rell to find common ground.



This summer I have offered to work with the Town of Wallingford to set up an energy audit program to train a group of willing residents to perform energy audits for their friends and neighbors. In towns where similar programs exist, homeowners can learn how to lower their fuel costs by systematically addressing each recommendation on the energy audit report. I will continue to work with my colleagues to find the funds to help residents replace inefficient furnaces and reduce their heating oil demand.

Regarding the budget, we agreed with Governor Rell that in the face of dramatically decreasing revenues, the wisest move was to use the 2007 budget we already passed, and not try and add anything new in 2008. The projected surplus vanished after the mortgage crisis and higher oil prices sent revenues down. As a member of the Peak Oil Caucus, I expect continued high oil prices and the challenge of a lean year next session. Our challenge will be to adapt to this reality and be as efficient as we can become. Please feel free to contact me about a home energy audit or any other issue that concerns you.

*Mary Mushinsky*

### Useful Numbers

- Veterans' Benefits and Information ..... 1-800-827-1000
- ConnPACE..... 1-800-423-5026
- Infoline ..... 211
- Healthcare Advocate..... 1-866-HMO-4446
- Area Agency on Aging ..... (203)-752-3059
- Non-Senior Fuel Assistance (Youth and Social Services)..... 294-2175
- Wallingford Senior Center/Fuel Assistance ..... 265-7753
- Mortgage Foreclosure Assistance Hotline..... 1-(877)-472-8313



# 2008 Legislative Report

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Hartford, CT 06106-1591  
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#### CALL ME FOR YOUR COPY OF:

- 2008 Senior Laws
- 2008 Education Laws
- 2008 Major Public Acts
- 2008 Laws Affecting Children
- 2008 Laws Affecting Businesses

## Representative Mary Mushinsky

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Hartford, CT 06106

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# State Representative Mary Mushinsky



## Reports on the 2008 Legislative Session Summer 2008

### SPECIAL SESSION ON ENERGY

The legislature called itself into special session in June to deal with the rapidly rising price of energy. Although the principle cause of the rapid rise is driven by worldwide oil demand and is beyond the scope of the Connecticut state legislature, we were able to address several issues over which we do have some control: repeal of the scheduled July 1st increase in the gross receipts tax on petroleum products, saving about \$0.03/gallon of gasoline; an early startup of the \$2.5 million furnace replacement program that was scheduled to begin October 1st; authorization for cash discounts to buyers of gasoline; and protection for those who paid deposits for home heating oil and propane. **PA 08-2 SS**

### CONNECTICUT HEALTHCARE PARTNERSHIP

HB 5536 would have opened the State Employee Healthcare Plan to municipal employees, non-profit groups, and small businesses. Allowing municipal employees to join voluntarily would have helped reduce costs to small towns while offering the quality and comprehensive coverage associated with the state plan. Businesses with fewer than 50 employees would have been able to take advantage of the increased bargaining power of 250,000 lives in the state pool. Municipalities would have saved money to avoid property tax increases. **PA 08-183 (VETOED)**



### MONEY FOLLOWS THE PERSON PROJECT

This bill will make sure the people who want to remain at home with their families can be cared for at a level that meets their needs. The Money Follows the Person program reduces reliance on institutional care and develops community-based long-term care opportunities. It will support elderly and disabled Medicaid recipients. We increased from 700 to 5,000 the number of individuals who can be served under the program. **PA 08-180**

### BENEFITS FOR INPATIENT TREATMENT OF SERIOUS MENTAL OR NERVOUS CONDITIONS

This session we passed legislation that expands benefits covered under group health insurance policies for those who receive care in a residential treatment facility for a serious mental or nervous condition. **PA 08-132**

### MINIMUM WAGE

At the June Veto Session, we raised the state minimum wage from \$7.65 to \$8.00/hr. beginning January 1, 2009, and to \$8.25 beginning January 1, 2010. **PA 08-92**

## Especially for Wallingford

### TEENAGE DRIVERS

Too often in recent months teen driving accidents have dominated the headlines. In an effort to prevent further accidents and encourage responsible driving, the General Assembly passed Public Act 08-32. This comprehensive legislation makes numerous changes to the teen driver graduated license by extending the passenger restrictions for new drivers from 6 months to 1 year, establishing a curfew of 11 PM for teen drivers, and requiring seat belts to be worn by all passengers in a car operated by a teen driver. In addition, the legislation requires teen drivers to have 40 hours of behind-the-wheel training instead of 20 hours. Plus, to foster greater parental involvement and understanding of the graduated license limitations and penalties, now a parent must attend a 2 hour class with their child. In addition, the bill significantly increases the penalties and suspensions for both violations of the graduated license restrictions and the more serious offenses of excessive speeding, DUI, street-racing and reckless driving. Finally, this law enables police officers to confiscate a teen's license for 48 hours for violating any of the graduated license restrictions as well as for excessive speeding, reckless driving and street racing. **PA 08-32**



### LINEAR TRAIL

The State Bond Commission granted final approval for release of my bond funds to Wallingford for Phase III of the Quinnipiac River Linear Trail. The legislature had approved \$375,000 in a prior legislative session, but the funds still needed to be released by the Governor and legislative leadership. These funds will be combined with town and federal dollars to extend the linear trail from the tunnel under the Wilbur Cross Parkway to Yalesville center. Due to increases in the prices of steel and asphalt, Phase III will construct the bridge and an unpaved surface first, then add paving later.

## Veterans

### GOLD STAR FAMILY NUMBER PLATES

This bill eliminates the \$10 fee for the Gold Star Family license plate, which the legislature authorized in 2007 for immediate relatives of state residents killed in action while performing active military duty with the U. S. Armed Forces. **PA 08-104**

### TUITION WAIVER FOR NATIONAL GUARD MEMBERS

Graduate level education is increasingly critical to professional success in today's global marketplace, and expensive. In an effort to assist members of the state National Guard to afford graduate education, the General Assembly extended their undergraduate tuition waiver to include graduate programs at the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut State Universities. **PA 08-57**

### PERSISTENT DANGEROUS FELONY OFFENDERS

Under this legislation, people arrested for manslaughter, arson, kidnapping, robbery, assault, home invasion, burglary, sexual assault, who have already once been convicted of and served time for committing one of these crimes, may be charged as persistent dangerous felony offenders. Under current law, the penalty for someone who meets the criteria to be a persistent dangerous felony offender with one of the required prior convictions is up to 40 years. Under the bill, the penalty instead is a range from (1) twice the minimum penalty for the crime the person stands convicted of, including twice any mandatory minimum sentence that applies, to (2) the greater of 40 years or twice the maximum penalty for the crime the person stands convicted of. The bill retains the life sentence as the maximum penalty for the third offense and imposes a minimum term of three times the minimum penalty for the crime the person stands convicted of, including three times any mandatory minimum sentence that applies. This bill appropriates \$10 million to the criminal justice system to implement these measures. **PA 08-51**



## Environmental Initiatives

### CONNECTICUT GLOBAL WARMING SOLUTIONS

The General Assembly has enacted landmark global warming legislation. The legislation establishes mandatory greenhouse gas emission caps of 10% below 1990 levels that must be attained by 2020 and 80% below 2001 levels by 2050. This law will require low-carbon fuel standards for all motor vehicle and home heating fuels sold in the state. It will also require a revision to the State Building Code to reflect more stringent energy standards. **PA 08-98**



### SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES

Recognizing that polluting facilities are often concentrated in urban areas, including parts of Wallingford, 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**

### MOTOR VEHICLE LAWS

A key piece of legislation by the Transportation Committee made many technical changes within Connecticut's Department of Transportation. Some of the key points are outlined below:

- Individuals convicted of second degree manslaughter/assault with a motor vehicle will be subject to the use of an ignition interlock device.
- New standards on our school buses assist our children to exit the bus more safely. All 2007 and newer buses must now be equipped with a front bumper-mounted crossing control arm.
- Anyone applying for a Connecticut driver's license who has not previously held one from Connecticut or elsewhere must take an 8 hour course on safe driving practices, previously required only of 16- and 17-year-olds.



### 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. Effective January 1, 2009. **PA 08-146**

## Protecting Children and Families

### REDUCING CHILD POVERTY

My bill is aimed at reducing child poverty in the state. Federal Food Stamp funds will be directed to reduce child poverty using result-based accountability principles. 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**



### 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 day care subsidy due to a temporary interruption in employment or other approved activity. **PA 08-100**

### CONNECTICUT IDA INITIATIVE

The Individual Development Account program (IDA) initiative now encourages parents with low incomes to save for education or job training for their children. The IDA program is an incentive account for low-income individuals and qualified disabled people to save money for education and job training, purchasing a home and starting their own small business, buying a car to get to work, or making a lease deposit. **PA 08-23**

### CHILD PRODUCT SAFETY

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. **PA 08-106 & PA 08-122**

### RESPONSIBLE LENDING AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

With the number of foreclosures on the rise in Connecticut, the General Assembly has taken action to protect homeowner's rights and keep families in their homes without having a chilling effect on responsible lending. This law includes a comprehensive set of reforms that will: (1) provide mediation and financial assistance to individuals and families whose homes are at risk of foreclosure; (2) reform the practices of lenders and mortgage brokers; and (3) make sure nothing is done that will negatively impact the availability of lending for prospective homeowners. The agencies to contact regarding these programs are the Department of Banking's Foreclosure Assistance Hotline at 877-472 8313 or the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority at 860-571-3500. **PA 08-176**