

College Affordability

Sixty-four percent of college graduates in our state have student loan debt. Connecticut became the first state in the nation to create a Student Loan Bill of Rights, which establishes an Office of the Student Loan Ombudsman. This office will regulate student loan servicers, compile data on borrower complaints, develop a financial literacy education course for students, and will help student borrowers and their parents navigate the loan process.



In addition, the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority will offer its lowest fixed interest rate yet at 4.95%, down from its current rate of 6.75%. This rate is also significantly lower than the Federal PLUS loan rate of 6.84%.

Reducing Duplicative Testing in Schools

Since the rollout of No Child Left Behind almost 15 years ago, one area of concern is that there are too many standardized 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. The legislature is now allowing schools to replace the SBAC test with a free SAT test for all high school juniors.

A Parents' Bill of Rights Regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder

Many families may not be aware of the various transition services available to help young adults with autism spectrum disorder shift from school to successful jobs and independent living. This year my committee, Program Review and Investigations, required the State Board of Education to produce a Parents' Bill of Rights for those with children receiving special education services. Parents will be introduced to these services while their children are in the 6th grade so that children will be more successful as adults.

The ABLE Act

Another recommendation of my committee, the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act allows families to save funds for transitional services for their child with disabilities without tax penalties. The new law will encourage independent living as the child matures into adulthood.

Second Chance

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 change will improve employability and will also save millions in taxpayer dollars. Reducing imprisonment for non-violent offenses is one of the sustainable spending recommendations of the Institute for the 21st Century.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

MARY MUSHINSKY

SERVING THE 85TH HOUSE DISTRICT | WALLINGFORD



PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
HARTFORD, CT
Permit No. 3937

CAPITOL UPDATE 2015

Dear Neighbor,

This past session, we worked to adopt a budget that represents the wide-ranging priorities of our state, and encourages economic growth. We protected middle-class families by providing **property tax relief** through municipal aid to our communities, and funded vital services people rely on every day by asking millionaires and corporations to pay a little bit more.

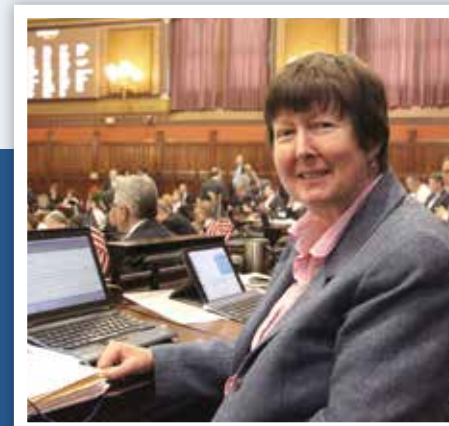
The budget is balanced, under the spending cap, and invests in Connecticut's **transportation** infrastructure, which is critical to our future economy. By investing in the New Haven-Hartford Springfield rail line, and repairs to our highways, roads, bridges, and ports, we are encouraging smart growth, addressing traffic congestion, and bringing sustainable jobs to Connecticut.

Essential funding for families that need it most was protected, including social services, libraries (which many constituents asked me to defend), before- and after-school programs, mental health services, developmental services (sought by many constituents) and state parks. We also allocated more funds for the highly successful Small Business Express Program.

I invited the Institute for the 21st Century to present their recommendations for **sustainable spending** to my colleagues. The Institute's principal analyst summarized major expenditures that could be changed to achieve significant savings—about \$1 billion per year after 5 years. I was able to insert the first step to incorporating these sustainable spending ideas into the budget implementer bill. One example of savings is a more rapid shift to a 50% home care model for patients who would otherwise enter nursing homes.

The Finance Committee also approved, and the legislature adopted, a more realistic **Rainy Day Fund** that more accurately calculates and sets aside revenues in good years to handle volatile revenue changes in economic downturn years.

This newsletter is only a brief summary. If you need more information, please contact me by phone or email me at mary.mushinsky@cga.ct.gov. Thank you.



LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591
CAPITOL: 800-842-8267
WWW.HOUSEDEMS.CT.GOV/MUSHINSKY

Seniors/Veterans/Health

Protecting the Elderly

In situations where abuse or neglect is suspected, the Department of Social Services can now petition a probate court to gain access to that person's home to make an assessment. For the purpose of these investigations, the definition of neglect has also been expanded to include elderly people who do not live alone, but whose caretaker fails to arrange for the necessary services to keep an elderly person healthy.

Reducing Health Care Costs to Connecticut Cities & Towns

Allowing municipal employees and retirees to join state employee health plans will considerably reduce healthcare costs for towns and cities around our state. The coverage costs are reduced because employees from participating towns would join a shared risk pool with state employees and other participating towns. The State Comptroller will be required to offer this coverage to towns and cities.

Veterans' Services

This year, the legislature supported and advanced legislation that improves the lives of veterans who have served our country. My committee reorganized transitional housing and assured greater privacy for services at the CT Veterans' Home at Rocky Hill. The legislature also established the Women Veterans Program to help better connect female veterans to services, and initiated the Veterans to Agriculture Program to give tax credits to vets working in agricultural production. We also created the Incarcerated Veterans Reintegration Council to help incarcerated vets reintegrate back into their community.

Public Health and Safety

Regulating the Use of E-Cigs: E-cigarette regulations are now in line with existing restrictions on smoking, banning them in state buildings, restaurants, places serving alcohol, and healthcare facilities.

Preventing Substance Abuse and Overdoses: Prescribers are now required to receive training in how to properly prescribe controlled substances and must also check a patient's record in the prescription drug monitoring program to help prevent prescription drug abuse. This law also increases access to life-saving opioid antagonists such as Narcan, which can be administered to counter a heroin overdose and prevent death. Passing this bill was a major goal of Coalition for a Better Wallingford.

Authorizing Pharmacists to Dispense Drugs in 90-Day Quantities

To better help patients with chronic illnesses and others, pharmacists are now allowed to refill a prescription for up to a 90-day supply. The 90-day supply must not exceed the total quantity prescribed by the doctor, and must not be a controlled drug. The pharmacist also must inform the doctor of the refill within 48 hours after the refill is made. This does not apply to patients whose insurance won't cover the cost without additional copayment.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

MARY MUSHINSKY

SERVING THE 85TH HOUSE DISTRICT, WALLINGFORD

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING | HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

CAPITOL: 800-842-8267 | WWW.HOUSEDEMS.CT.GOV/MUSHINSKY

Environment

Long Island Sound Blue Plan

To protect the Sound, the "Blue Plan" will inventory the resources, uses and conservation areas of our portion of Long Island Sound. With this plan in place, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection along with the newly established Advisory Committee will be able to more effectively manage our offshore waters through data-driven processes. Plans similar to this have been instituted by a number of our neighboring coastal states with great success.

Linear Trail

This fall, Phase III of the Quinnipiac River Linear Trail is finally under construction. The project had to successfully overcome numerous permitting and design challenges. This phase will extend the trail by an additional 1.25 miles to connect Wallingford to Yalesville, including the installation of two more bridges over the river.



Prohibiting the Import and Sale of Cosmetics that Contain Microbeads

Microbeads are becoming a problem for our state's waterways, fish and crustaceans. They are found in a wide range of cosmetics, and are finding their way into our aquatic life. A ban will be phased in beginning in 2018.

Drones

I was unable to pass my committee's drone regulation bill due to a lengthy delay in the Senate, but this bill will be a priority for next year. Among other features, the bill would have prohibited using civilian drones to carry a weapon.

Business/Consumer Protection

Lowering Municipal Costs by Sharing Purchases

Numerous municipalities have found that by purchasing and sharing certain pieces of equipment and items in bulk with other municipalities can lower costs and save taxpayers money. This year we encouraged municipalities to participate in the Intertown Capital Equipment Purchasing Incentive Program. The amount that a municipality must contribute to receive matching funds from the state will be reduced.

Cottage Foods

After several attempts, we finally made it easier for small, craft bakeries and other food producers to sell their own products to others in their community, just as we allow this practice at farm markets and school bake sales.

Commuter Rail

Wallingford will have a new train station and more frequent commuter rail service as we restore the line to double track and add a longer platform. Commuter rail has been shown to improve economic activity.



Extending the Foreclosure Mediation Program

We extended the sunset date of the Foreclosure Mediation program to July 2019, ensuring that this essential program can assist more Connecticut residents to keep their home.

Reverse Mortgages

On the third try, we passed additional protections for consumers who may use reverse mortgages on their homes to pay bills or living expenses. Out-of-state marketers of this loan product must provide in-state counseling to ensure homeowners understand the risks and benefits of such a loan.