

36TH DISTRICT STATE REPRESENTATIVE
CHRISTINE PALM

To My Constituents,

My “freshman year” as your new state representative was exhilarating and inspiring, but I soon learned that enacting laws can be a hard, messy process. It requires legislators to listen well (to one another and to our constituents), to argue, compromise, and look to the next session with optimism.

Public policy is an incremental process – passage of a bill often takes several attempts, as I experienced when two of my own bills (both intended to protect the environment) passed one chamber but were not called in the other. A bill I introduced that would have required the teaching of climate change in public schools passed the House with a bipartisan vote (after a lengthy filibuster); and a bill to ban the commercial use of seismic surveying off the Connecticut coastline was combined with a Senate bill to ban drilling for gas and oil. It passed the Senate, but was not called in the House.

Despite much progress, our economy still needs major work, and I feel this need urgently. But I have come away from my first year with new ideas, eager to meet with more of you this fall, and inspired to work even harder next session. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me with your ideas and concerns.

Sincerely,



STATE BUDGET

Our biennial budget – which was balanced and delivered on time, provides fiscal stability with no increase in the income tax or broad-based sales tax, and does not cut municipal aid. We continue to protect our most vulnerable citizens while investing in the middle class and encouraging economic growth for all of Connecticut. And we succeeded in preventing cuts in aid for education, did not pass the unfunded pension burden to towns, and blocked an increase in taxes seniors pay.

This bipartisan budget:

- Maintains the tax exemptions for Social Security income
- Phases in a tax exemption on pension income to make CT more affordable to seniors
- Increases access to health care
- Increases education funding for our towns
- Keeps the “Passport to the Parks” fund
- Re-opens highway rest stops
- Repeals the Business Entity Tax starting next year
- Provides a tax credit to craft beer breweries
- Avoids a costly and disruptive nursing home strike
- Protects the Medicare Savings Program, and increases funding for Meals on Wheels
- Protects the Care4Kids program
- Establishes a Tourism Council to oversee the marketing of our beautiful state
- Stays within the parameters of the constitutional spending cap

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LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Here is a very brief summary of some of the new public policy we enacted in 2019. If you would like more detail, or bill titles and numbers so you can read the full legislation, please contact my office.

SUPPORT FOR WORKING FAMILIES

We passed two landmark bills that will help Connecticut's working families retain and increase their economic assets, while caring for loved ones. **Paid Family Leave** will help all employees in the event of a medical emergency by replacing wages to ward off the threat of financial ruin. Like an insurance plan, this program is funded by employee contributions. It is not anti-business – in fact, businesses that offer paid leave can compete better by attracting young workers, who are known to seek out companies that offer it. Every one of us will need to take time off at some point – paid leave helps prevent medical bankruptcy and gives peace of mind.

In addition, we raised the **Minimum Wage**, because no one working full-time should live in poverty. Connecticut families will have more economic security as the state's minimum hourly wage gradually rises to \$15 by June 1, 2023. This legislation will combat persistent pay disparities between races and genders as it stimulates our economy – when people have more disposable income, they tend to spend it locally on “extras,” such as eating out more often.

HELPING EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS

For Connecticut to grow, employer and employee must work together for mutual prosperity. By partnering with **Businesses to Repay Student Loans**, we're making it possible for a company that makes student loan payments on behalf of an employee to be eligible to claim a tax credit to defray the corporation business or insurance premium tax, or the insurance and health care center tax. We expanded the **Advanced Manufacturing Certificate Program** from the current pilot program into additional public high schools, and it now also allows for the participation of both private and public institutions of higher education. And we expanded the **Angel Investor Incentive** program to spur small business development.



Gun safety advocates with Rep. Palm at the Legislative Office Building

Rep. Palm introduces her Climate Change Education bill on the House floor

PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACY

We took the first step to allow **Early Voting** – which is shown to increase voter turnout – with a resolution to amend the state constitution. The resolution passed in both legislative chambers, and if approved again in the 2021 legislature, will appear as a question for voters on the 2022 general election ballot.

SENSIBLE GUN SAFETY

As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I am especially proud of three life-saving gun safety laws we enacted: **Ethan's Law**, named after a young man who lost his life due to an improperly stored firearm, that will ensure guns and ammunition are properly locked; a bill to **Secure Guns in Unattended Vehicles**; and legislation to **Ban Ghost Guns** – homemade weapons (including those made on a 3-D printer) that have no serial numbers and circumvent our background check laws.

IMPROVING EDUCATION

We protected young kids and their families by increasing the family income ceiling for the **Care 4 Kids** program. A new bill will **Bring Back Recess** by allowing boards of education to offer an additional amount of time for undirected play in elementary schools beyond the currently required minimum of 20 minutes of daily physical exercise. And we improved educational outcomes for **Students with Dyslexia** by establishing a task force to assess licensure.

BETTER HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

While we still have not managed to enact true reform to our broken healthcare system, we made strides this session. We enacted laws that will protect **Pre-existing Condition Insurance Coverage**, the lifesaving and money-saving provision of the Affordable Care Act. We achieved **Mental Health Parity** by treating the diseases of the brain as we do diseases of the body. And we ensured that women will have **Mammogram Coverage**.

We're keeping cigarettes out of the hands of young kids through **Tobacco 21**, are helping those with **Autism** by improving communication between them and police officers, and are enhancing **HIV Prevention** by increasing young patients' access to the viral blocker PrEP. Additionally, we're **Covering Police and Firefighters for PTSD**, increasing the availability of lifesaving **Epi Pens**, and expanding access to **Husky A** insurance for thousands of families.

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

As a member of the legislature's Environment Committee, I was proud to co-sponsor many great initiatives, including the **Plastic Bag Ban**, the **Ban on Fracked Waste**, passing the state's comprehensive **Water Plan**, and introducing a new **Invasive Species Stamp** to help maintain the quality of our waterways – so vital in our district.

We extended **Renewable Energy Programs** including traditional net metering and the Green Bank renewable solar investment program. We created a **Green Jobs Career Ladder**, cleared the path for **Offshore Wind Energy** generation so Connecticut can become a leader in green energy technology, and protected the very popular **Passport to the Parks**.

RESPECT FOR VETERANS

This session we greatly enhanced resources for our veterans by expanding **In-State Tuition for Military Families**. We're improving **Access to Services for Veterans** so they do not get lost in bureaucracy when they reach out to town hall to explore benefits offered. And we passed a **Veterans' Medical Aid** law which will require EMS training for treating veterans' health conditions, especially those struggling with PTSD.

SUPPORTING OUR SENIORS

Our district, like our entire state, has an aging demographic. We are helping our seniors retain their independence, health and dignity with new laws that **Tackle Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease** by modifying continuing education requirements for physicians to include diagnosing and treating cognitive conditions, including Alzheimer's disease, geriatric depression and related cognitive impairments. We expanded **Background Checks for Caregivers** to help identify potentially dangerous individuals seeking jobs that require contact with our elderly population. And we leveraged funding for the state's **Meals on Wheels** program in order to keep our seniors fed.

CONSUMER ADVOCACY

We enacted several public policy initiatives that will enhance the quality of life here in our state by protecting individual citizens' rights, including: **Protecting Women in the Workplace** through the “**Time's Up Act**,” which extends the statute of limitations related to the reporting of sexual abuse and assault. We are ensuring **Safe Nursing Home Staffing Levels** by requiring nursing homes to calculate and post daily information related to the number of nurses and nurse's aides who provide direct care to residents during their shift.

We are making the **Motor Vehicle Licenses and Registrations** requirements less onerous, responding to the frustration many of us feel when waiting at the DMV. And we created a **Consumer Privacy Task Force** to make sure businesses do not abuse private information in this technological age.