

Re-Employment Of Older Workers

This year we looked to improve jobs opportunities for job seekers aged 59 years and older. The Connecticut Employment & Training Commission under the Department of Labor will add older workers to its campaigns for training and employment services. The department will also create a quick-reference guide of resources and have it posted on the 211 local services website. In addition, the Board of Regents will create definitions for non-credit vocational programs to enable the accrediting bodies to measure the success of these programs. *(HB 5377)*

Helping Seniors Remain In Their Homes

Most seniors would prefer to live in their own homes for as long as possible. We have taken steps to help make this happen. This year we created a \$6 million grant program for home modifications and other assistive technology that will allow people to remain in their homes longer.

The program is open to seniors and individuals with disabilities who are at risk of being unable to live independently without the modifications.

We also required the Commission on Aging to recognize communities that are implementing livable community initiatives, which include affordable and accessible housing, community and social services, planning and zoning regulations, walkability, and transportation related infrastructure. The Department of Aging and the Department of Social Services will hold quarterly meetings with nutrition service providers in order to improve elderly nutrition services. *(PA 14-73)*

Improving Access to Universal Pre-K

After years of delay we established an Office of Early Childhood that will centralize our efforts in providing access to quality early childhood education. Early education has been shown to be one of the most effective tools for improving student achievement by ensuring students are better prepared for their K-12 learning. We added over 1,000 preschool slots and have begun the process of developing a universal system that will provide access to families all over the state. This effort will be a partnership between the state, towns and private providers. *(PA 14-39)*

More Money For Cities And Towns

Despite not raising taxes and remaining under the spending cap, the state was still able to make many investments and provide additional funding to our municipalities. Cities and towns will see nearly \$70 million more than last year in funding for education costs, the Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program and other costs. The Town of Manchester will be receiving \$38,271,996 in 2014 and \$39,778,637 in 2015. The City of East Hartford will be receiving \$53,522,274 in 2014 and \$56,385,782 in 2015. By saving money for our municipalities, we allow them to provide tax relief and make local capital investments. In addition, I was able to guarantee funding for both East Hartford’s and Manchester’s youth service programs. Both programs will continue to receive \$85,303.

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Dear Neighbor:

The 2014 legislative session has come to a close and we produced this report to provide you with an update on legislation that was debated and passed into law, some of which didn’t get the level of media attention that other proposals got. News providers often focus on issues that are more contentious or sensational that they believe will attract the attention of readers and viewers. Often those more contentious issues never become law. Sometimes that’s good and sometimes that isn’t. Below is a summary of items I worked on that I hope are important to you.

This year was the second year of the biennial budget so most of the changes in the budget reflected needed changes to address line-item shortfalls in addition to some policy initiatives. The budget is always the product of negotiation and compromise and included funding for a number of programs important to our district and towns. Manchester will be receiving \$38,271,996 for 2014 and East Hartford will be receiving \$53,522,274 for 2014. Increasing the size of the Rainy Day Fund is good policy as it helps maintain the state’s credit rating and helps mitigate the effects of downturns in the economy.

More detailed information on all the bills is available upon request. If you’re interested just ask and I can provide you with detailed summaries. Please continue to share your thoughts and stances on issues as often as possible because it makes me a more effective legislator. Together we can shape the direction of our state, our district and our communities.

Sincerely,

State Representative Jason Rojas

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CAPITOL UPDATE 2014

INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES IN HIGHER ED

The Go Back to Get Ahead initiative will encourage Connecticut residents who have some college credits, but have not attained either an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, to return to the state’s universities, community technical colleges or Charter Oak State College to complete their degrees. Students who are eligible for the program will be able to receive up to three free college courses.

We also added initiatives to foster better collaboration among our community colleges and state universities that will help provide educational opportunities that match the needs of Connecticut’s employers.

There are numerous opportunities for our young students too. The CHET Baby Scholars program offers new parents up to a \$250 investment in a tax-free college savings account for their child. The budget creates an additional 1,020 pre-kindergarten slots in the neediest districts. It also provides additional funding for after-school programs that allow children to learn even when classes are over.



Representative Rojas and Majority Leader Joe Aresimowicz after the passage of the Increased Opportunities in Higher Education bill.

CONNECTICUT’S AEROSPACE REINVESTMENT ACT

This year we approved a historic agreement with UTC to ensure that their work continues here in Connecticut and in East Hartford. The deal also has a significant impact for the 2,500 suppliers in the region and the state, including a number of which are located in Manchester. This agreement is expected to have an impact on 75,000 jobs in Connecticut and is expected to create nearly 1,500 construction and other related jobs throughout the initial capital expansion. UTC will invest up to \$500 million to upgrade and expand its aerospace research, development and manufacturing facilities over the next 5 years. The centerpiece of the agreement is the construction of a new 425,000-square-foot world-class engineering and global headquarters building for Pratt & Whitney and building of new labs and infrastructure at United Technologies Research Center in East Hartford. During the same time period, the company expects to invest up to \$4 billion in research and other capital.

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PORT AUTHORITY CREATED

We created a Port Authority to oversee Connecticut’s three deep water coastal seaports in Bridgeport, New Haven, and New London. Their mission includes marketing to domestic and foreign shippers, seeking private investments, and pursuing state and federal funding for dredging and infrastructure improvements to increase cargo capacity. Our ports are underutilized commercial hubs that represent an untapped resource for new economic growth. **(HB 5289)**



Rep. Rojas preparing for the debate on the Port Authority bill

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PREVENTING SEXUAL ASSAULT ON CAMPUS

In the wake of greater recognition of dating violence and sexual assaults on college campuses the legislature passed what is being called one of the most comprehensive policy responses to the issue.

HB 5029 expands the scope of the policy, prevention and awareness programming by requiring all institutions to also comply with state policies. Under the legislation institutions must provide written notification to a survivor of their rights and options under the institution’s policies. The law also allows institutions to permit anonymous reporting. The legislation requires expanded disclosure of the number of incidents and disciplinary cases involving sexual assault, stalking, and intimate partner violence. The new law calls for the establishment of campus resource teams to review their policies and recommend protocols for providing support and services to students and employees who report being victims. It also expands training for the institution’s Title IX coordinator and special police force, campus police force or campus safety personnel.



CLEANING UP CONTAMINATED PROPERTIES

The redevelopment of brownfield sites is an important policy initiative for East Hartford, Manchester and communities all over the state. Brownfield sites often become blighted properties and/or occupy valuable land and locations that could serve as an economic driver. Rather than paving over farms or cutting down forests for development we should be more strategic about investing in already built up areas with the appropriate infrastructure in place. HB 5573 provides more options to property owners to comply with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection’s (DEEP) requirements for addressing brownfield sites. The legislation provides greater flexibility with timelines, definitions of contamination; and access to brownfield loans, which are critical to ensuring capital is available for costly clean-ups.

INCREASED FINES FOR ROBO CALLS

Unsolicited, pre-recorded telephone calls, referred to as robocalls, are intrusive and annoying. This year we increased the fine from \$500 to \$1,000, when a company’s robocall fails to disconnect when you hang up. Complaints can be submitted to the Public Utilities Regulation Authority through their website: www.ct.gov/pura or by phone at 1-800-382-4586. **(PA 14-14)**

BUDGET BALANCED, NO NEW TAXES

We adopted a balanced budget on time without any tax increases for the fiscal year 2015, which begins July 1. Increased aid for education and our municipalities, investments in our children and our towns, will help stabilize local property taxes. Additional investments in job creation programs such as STEP-UP, which encourages employers to hire veterans and the unemployed, will help our economy. **(HB 5596)**



Representatives Rojas and Ritter discussing budget details