

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

EZEQUIEL SANTIAGO

PROUDLY SERVING 130TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Dear Neighbor,

I'd like to share some of the highlights of the 2013 legislative session. This year was a difficult one—we addressed many tough issues over the five-month session. My priority remains, as ever, to serve the city of Bridgeport and the people of Connecticut.

The legislative process took several turns this year. Our focus at the beginning of the session addressed the development of a gun violence prevention package, which became the strongest gun safety law in the country. In addition to addressing gun violence, this comprehensive bill improved access to mental health care and strengthened school safety measures.

In the second half of the session, we focused on the biennial budget, where I am very pleased that state aid to municipalities was protected without raising taxes.

Additionally, we passed several bills that help small businesses and grow good jobs. We moved \$20 million in state funds into the already successful Small Businesses Express Program to help more small businesses grow and thrive. Small businesses are the backbone of Connecticut's economy and giving them the help they so desperately need is important, especially in these tough economic times.

It is my pleasure to serve you. Please contact me, or my office, for more information or with any concerns you may have.

Sincerely,



STATE REPRESENTATIVE, EZEQUIEL SANTIAGO

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

EZEQUIEL SANTIAGO

PROUDLY SERVING BRIDGEPORT | 130TH DISTRICT

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CAPITOL UPDATE 2013

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Rep. Santiago and Rep. Ayala with advocates from Bridge House which assists people dealing with mental illness.

AN ADEQUATE PROVIDER NETWORK TO ENSURE POSITIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

Under the Affordable Care Act, individuals making up to \$15,300 per year are eligible for Medicaid coverage beginning January 1, 2014. This Medicaid expansion means the strength of Connecticut's healthcare provider network is more important than ever. This law tasks the legislature's Council on Medical Assistance Program Oversight with evaluating the provider network and making recommendations for reducing barriers to provider participation, improving care coordination, eliminating racial and ethnic disparities, and lowering costs. (SA 13-7)

STATE MILITARY RELIEF FUND

Military service often creates hardship for the immediate family members of Connecticut armed forces. The Military Relief Fund provides grants to help these families pay for essential household goods or services. This act expands the group of eligible grant recipients who are unable to pay for certain expenses due to their military service. (PA 13-107)

INCREASING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Connecticut Housing Finance Authority is a quasi-state agency that creates affordable housing opportunities for individuals and families in the state. This law increases from \$1.5 billion to \$2.25 billion the amount of funds available for CHFA mortgage purchases and loans that are not guaranteed by certain state and federal entities. This allows CHFA to provide more mortgages, create construction jobs and boost economic activity in the state. (PA 13-65)

ELIMINATING A TOWNS ABILITY TO PHASE IN A REAL PROPERTY ASSESSMENT DECREASE

This law makes Connecticut property tax bills more predictable and fair by removing the flexibility the towns and cities have to phase in property assessment decreases. If the value of your home has decreased, you should not have to pay taxes based on the higher value. Another part of the law allows towns and cities the choice to offer property tax abatements to the spouses of emergency medical technicians who die in the line of duty. Towns are already allowed to do this for other first responders. (PA 13-204)

INCREASING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE

Connecticut residents who earn minimum wage have gone three years without seeing an increase in their salaries. While the economy recovers, workers who earn minimum wage are faced with price increases and are forced to make decisions about what is a priority to their families. This law allows these families to earn approximately \$900 more a year if they work full-time which is essential to those individuals on that end of the economic spectrum. These wages are spent locally, which in turn help large and small businesses in the state. By increasing the minimum wage the legislature is helping low wage earners and boosting local economies. (PA 13-117)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

This law seeks to prevent students from being improperly assigned to special education classes when they are actually in need of extra help learning the English language. If the State Department of Education has ruled that a school district has misidentified a disproportionate number of students, that district's Board of Education will have to submit a report to the Department containing a plan that reduces such misidentifications by improving reading assessments and interventions for students who are in kindergarten through grade three. The law also requires the State Department of Education to study these plans to see what improvements can be made to teacher training. (PA 13-193)

Si usted o algun conocido necesita una version de este boletin en español, por favor llame a mi oficina.

TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Teaching our youth is a tremendous and increasingly complex responsibility. While our current teacher certification process is quite vigorous, it does not specifically include comprehensive training regarding how children learn and develop socially and emotionally. This session, we passed a law that requires the State Board of Education to include in their current course of study instruction in how to conduct a comprehensive, coordinated social and emotional assessment of, and early intervention for, children who appear to have social or emotional problems. This better prepares future teachers to handle all aspects of a child's learning and development. Training must also include educating teachers about the availability of treatment services for such children, referrals for assessment or intervention. This training will be embedded in the existing coursework for prospective teachers.

HOMEOWNER PROTECTION RIGHTS

The ability to own a home is part of the American dream, but financial hardship can threaten that dream for families, sending them to the brink of foreclosure. We worked hard this past session to protect homeowners and facilitate a fair and speedy foreclosure mediation process by passing An Act Concerning Homeowner Protection Rights. A more streamlined process helps both the banks and the homeowners come to a quicker solution to keep homeowners in their homes, while fulfilling their obligation to the bank or lender. The provisions include: At least three mediation sessions before referring a case to a judge, a requirement that banks mediate in good faith, which helps remove blighted properties from neighborhoods by shortening the foreclosure timelines for abandoned property, and requirements that the bank treat a homeowner's most recently submitted financial package as current which will end the burden of constant requests for new documents. Finally, the law provides the Department of Banking with the authority to create regulations that require banks to disclose various foreclosure related information. (PA 13-136)

