

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

HILDA E. SANTIAGO

PROUDLY SERVING MERIDEN'S 84TH DISTRICT



Dear Neighbor,

The 2014 legislative session ended recently and I want to update you about what I have been up to in Hartford. This year was a short three-month session, but I am proud of the work that we got done in such a short period of time. The need to encourage economic growth, help working families, and make critical investments in the future of our children, as well as our state, was clear.

Meeting these priorities while also adopting a balanced budget with no new taxes took a lot of hard work, but I am happy to report to you that my colleagues and I were able to achieve our goals.

Working in a bipartisan manner, we were able to increase funding for education and enable more children to attend pre-school. We also made additional investments in job creation programs such as STEP-UP, which encourages employers to hire veterans and the unemployed, and will help our economy grow.

Spurring more economic development was also a priority that we met by helping United Technologies Corp. upgrade and expand its aerospace research and manufacturing facilities across the state. This in turn will have a domino effect and help its suppliers and related businesses.

I hope you find the enclosed information helpful and will feel free to call or email me for any reason — legislative or otherwise. It is my pleasure and honor to serve as your state representative.

Thank you,

Hilda E. Santiago

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CAPITOL UPDATE 2014

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VETERANS SECURITY DEPOSIT GUARANTEES

The Veterans' Housing Program allows the Commissioner of Housing to prioritize our state's veterans in consideration of persons applying to receive a security deposit guarantee on behalf of the state. An enrollee in the program may receive a security deposit equal to two months' rent.

HELP FOR JOBLESS VETERANS

This session we worked to streamline the state licensing process for our job-seeking veterans. Connecticut veterans can now apply their military training toward occupational licenses, including public safety positions and a variety of trades. In addition, college credits can be awarded for specialty training and apprenticeship credits applied to specific trades.



ENCOURAGING EDUCATION FOR ADULTS: GO BACK TO GET AHEAD

Students who dropped out of college before earning a bachelor's degree will be eligible to take three free courses at a Connecticut state college or community college. This initiative is part of the governor's "Transform CSCU 2020" plan aimed at increasing enrollment at the state's higher education institutions while also meeting the workforce demands of businesses in the state. The plan includes facilities upgrades that will connect classrooms with 21st century technology, and give our students the tools and skills to be competitive in the increasingly competitive workforce.

MORE NOTICE FROM HOSPITALS REGARDING A MEDICARE PATIENT'S OBSERVATION STATUS

Patients are increasingly finding themselves in the hospital under "observation status" for days or even weeks while believing they had been fully admitted. This is a problem for certain patients because Medicare considers this outpatient care and covers fewer services, and the patient may receive a significant bill following their stay. Also, if the patient is then discharged to a nursing facility for rehabilitation, the care they receive will not be covered because they have not met the 3-day inpatient hospital stay requirement. Hospitals must now inform patients when they have been placed on observation status.

ELECTRIC CUSTOMER CONSUMER PROTECTION

Energy suppliers will now be prohibited from offering consumers short-term "teaser" energy contracts with low rates, then switching to much higher variable rate contracts within weeks. Termination fees would be capped at \$50 under the law, and a consumer could switch back to the standard rate charged by UI or CL&P within 72 hours.

More transparent billing practices and faster switching, so a customer can fire a company quickly and easily, and prohibitions of coercive and deceptive sales practices, will empower consumers.

PROTECTING CONSUMERS FROM DISREPUTABLE HEATING OIL COMPANIES

Over the past few years, some heating oil companies have gone out of business, taking their customer's money and not delivering their oil. In order to protect consumers, we created a moratorium on selling fuel oil contracts during the peak heating season (between November 1 and March 31). Dealers that offer prepaid contracts will also be required to disclose details of the offer, including how the contract will be secured. The Department of Revenue Services commissioner will notify the Department of Consumer Protection annually of any outstanding tax delinquencies a heating fuel dealer owes to the state.

SAFE DISPOSAL OF UNWANTED MEDS

The Department of Consumer Protection, the Connecticut Pharmacists Association, and the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association will develop and implement a program that will allow members of the public to dispose of unwanted medication in a secure lockbox 24/7. This will prevent medication from getting into the wrong hands or into our water supply.

POLICE AND THE MENTALLY ILL

Police training will now include instruction on handling incidents involving people with a serious mental illness.

MINIMUM WAGE INCREASED

Raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 by 2017 will help thousands of struggling working families in our state, add hundreds of millions of dollars to our economy, and is the right thing to do. Connecticut led a national discussion just two years ago about getting to a \$10 minimum wage, and we are proud to lead the way again, setting the stage for Congress to hopefully follow suit.

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES TO GROW AND TRAIN WORKERS

Small manufacturers in Connecticut are an important source of jobs and the engine of economic growth. We work hard to provide support to these businesses through programs like the Manufacturing Reinvestment Account program (MRA). The MRA is designed to help small manufacturers fund capital investments and train their workers. This year, we made it easier for businesses to take advantage of the program by increasing the number of eligible employees from 50 to 150.

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN AND MAKING OUR SCHOOLS SAFER

This year we authorized \$22 million for another round of school security grants. This program helped many schools around the state add additional security infrastructure last year, with more than \$21 million in grants distributed. The state's technical schools, charter schools, private, and endowed schools will be allowed to access the funds. \$2.2 million has been set aside for private schools that will be reimbursed at 50% of eligible costs.

INCREASING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

One critical way to improve the mental health system in this state is to increase access to mental health services. Individuals will now be able to receive mental health services in locations outside of licensed clinics. The more convenient we can make mental health services accessible to those who need it, the more likely they are to get the help they require.



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