

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
CAROLINE SIMMONS

PROUDLY SERVING THE 144TH HOUSE DISTRICT | STAMFORD

CAPITOL UPDATE 2015

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I am so proud to represent the 144th district in Stamford, which comprises so many devoted community members like you. Thank you for everything you do for our city - it is an honor to serve you in the Connecticut General Assembly.

My first legislative session ended in June and I would like to update you on some of the highlights. As a member of the Commerce, Public Safety, and Judiciary Committees, I introduced and co-sponsored 58 bills this session, which aim to help our students, business owners, seniors, veterans, teachers, police officers, and firefighters. To learn more about these bills, visit my website.

I also fought to secure substantial state aid for Stamford. This includes \$3.9 million towards property tax relief, \$1.5 million in new funding for our public schools, \$61.8 million for an expanded magnet school, \$4.9 million for JM Wright Tech, \$75,000 for a new pre-school, and substantial funds to reduce traffic on I-95, and improve Metro-North.

This session I joined the MORE Commission, which works to make government more efficient and transparent; the Women's Caucus, which is focusing on legislation to support affordable childcare and a new Women Veterans' Program; and the Young Legislators Caucus, which is working to ease student loan debt and create jobs for young people in Connecticut.

If you have ideas on how we can improve our community or a problem that I can help with, I want to hear from you. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime on my personal cell phone at 203-962-4619, or e-mail me at Caroline.Simmons@cga.ct.gov. All the best,

Caroline Simmons
State Representative



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LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 4016
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591
CAPITOL: 800-842-8267
CELL: 203-962-4619
CAROLINE.SIMMONS@CGA.CT.GOV
WWW.HOUSEDEMS.CT.GOV/SIMMONS

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COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

Student debt is a burden on families and students. I was proud to co-sponsor legislation making CT the first state in the nation with a Student Loan Bill of Rights to help students and families navigate their options. CT loan officials (CHESLA) will also lower new student loan interest rates from 6.75% to 4.95%. Starting early with a savings plan also is an important step. The CT Higher Education Trust (CHET) is a 529 plan that can help your family save for college. Investing in education is a smart move and the tax advantages built into CHET can make it an important part of your overall college funding strategy.

PROTECTING PATIENTS AT HOSPITALS

The CARE Act (Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable) ensures patients get the care they need after they leave a healthcare facility. Many times patients are discharged from hospitals without being given clear instructions on continuing care. This law requires a hospital to document a designated caregiver, notify the caregiver of the patient's discharge, and instruct the caregiver on any post-discharge tasks with which the patient will need assistance. In order to better protect and inform consumers, the Legislature also passed a law to require that pharmacists better label generic drugs and include the brand name on the label.



INCREASING ELECTRIC RATE TRANSPARENCY

Stamford residents often speak with me about rising and unpredictable electric rates. I believe the public has a right to know why their rates or fees may increase. That is why I co-sponsored legislation to increase electric rate transparency. If you have an issue with electric rates, feel free to contact the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) at 1-800-382-4586.

PROTECTING CT WATERWAYS FROM POLLUTION

I received letters from many of you regarding the need to ban plastic microbeads in personal care products, because they pollute sewage treatment plants, endanger wildlife, and spread toxins through our waterways. In response, I supported legislation that bans harmful microbeads, in order to help protect the environment.

HELP FOR OUR VETERANS

This year, the legislature advanced legislation that recognizes the important sacrifices veterans have made while defending our country. We established the Women Veterans' Program to better connect female veterans to services, and the Veterans to Agriculture Program, to give tax credits to vets working in agricultural production.



GROWING CONNECTICUT'S ECONOMY

One of the top concerns I hear from you is that we need to improve our economic competitiveness. To achieve this, I believe we must focus on three areas – supporting business growth and job creation; improving our transportation infrastructure; and investing in education.

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES AND JOB CREATION

CT's property tax system is especially tough on businesses. I fought to secure \$3.9 million towards property tax relief for Stamford. I also co-sponsored Senate Bill (SB) 543 to exempt new businesses from state regulations, SB 697 to waive fees on new businesses, SB 64 to reduce the corporate tax rate on businesses, and House Bill (HB) 6639 to provide a tax credit for businesses that hire recent graduates in CT, and will continue to push for these measures. I also helped create a bi-partisan CT Competitiveness Commission to recommend ways to improve our competitiveness.



IMPROVING TRANSPORTATION

Many of you checked off transportation as a top concern in my recent survey. Commuters face daily headaches on I-95, the Merritt and Metro-North, while businesses cite transportation problems as a top concern affecting productivity. This is also a safety issue, as hundreds of bridges in CT are structurally deficient and many roads need repair. I am committed to this year's historic investment in our transportation infrastructure, and pleased to report that significant funding will go to fixing transportation problems in Fairfield County and Stamford.

INVESTING IN EDUCATION

- **Increase in Public School Funding:** State funding for Stamford schools will increase by \$1.5 million over the next two years.
- **Expansion of Rogers Magnet School:** Stamford will receive \$61.8 million for an extensive renovation and expansion of Rogers International School.
- **More Funding for Wright Tech:** JM Wright Technical High School will receive an additional \$4.9 million over the next to years, to support 300 more students.
- **Eliminating Tests:** To ease the burden, the SAT will be replaced with the SBAC exam, and will be free for all students.
- **Childhood Literacy:** Early childhood literacy programs are essential to closing the achievement gap. This year, we required the State Department of Education to implement a statewide reading plan and to work with parents and local boards of education to help students with dyslexia.

