



Dear Neighbor:

We are all aware of the changes in our national economic picture. The polarization this has created does not further policies that help our children and families.

Fortunately, we were able to work together across party lines in Hartford to get things done. Several of the bills that came out of the Committee on Children broke new ground nationally. I am proud, as the House Chair of this Committee, that I was able to effect positive change.

Utilizing the Children's Report Card ([www.ckidsreportcard.org](http://www.ckidsreportcard.org)) we were able to move numbers, like out- of- state placement of foster children that have been stuck for years. Bringing kids back to Connecticut not only saves us money, but also achieves better outcomes, as they are near family members and have a connection to their community.

Also Public Act 13-178, an Act Concerning the Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health of Youths and Public Act 13-114, an Act Concerning Animal Therapy grew out of the terrible tragedy in Newtown.

On the jobs front, we expanded the incredibly successful Small Business Express & Step Up Programs creating and sustaining jobs.

Many of you also followed my quest to get accountability for the \$8 million of state money spent on the Freedom Schooner Amistad. This is in keeping with my belief that a concerted focus on Results-Based Accountability (RBA) is the best method for assuring that programs work for the taxpayer.

As always, I am available to help you in any way I can.

Sincerely,

Diana Urban  
State Representative

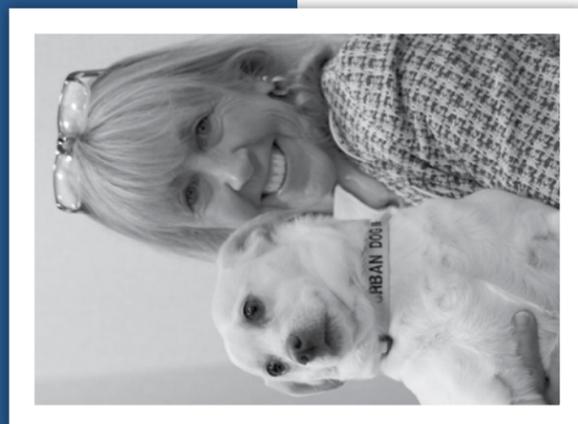


# STATE REPRESENTATIVE Diana Urban

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## CAPITOL UPDATE 2013

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## THE MENTAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH OF YOUTHS

We know that there is a lot of stigma associated with mental health issues and we know that School-Based Health Centers work to reduce that stigma. In fact, 34% of all services used at School-Based Health Centers are for mental health issues. That is why I fought so hard for our own School-Based Health Center at Pawcatuck Middle School.

Recent events in Newtown have shown us even more acutely the importance of providing affordable accessible mental health services to those suffering from a mental illness and disease, especially our children. This session we passed a law that requires the Commissioner of Children and Families, in consultation with representatives of the children and families served by the department, providers of mental, emotional or behavioral health services for children and families, and advocates, to develop an implementation plan, across agency and policy areas, that meet the mental, emotional and behavioral health needs of all children in the state. This law also establishes a Children's Mental Health Task Force to study all aspects of mental, emotional and behavioral health of children in our state.

## ANIMAL THERAPY

I had the honor of being invited to Newtown to thank all the first responders and to also thank the animal therapy teams that helped many kids and families through the trauma they experienced. My co-chair and I were also recognized for shepherding a first-in-the-nation bill on animal therapy through the General Assembly. It was heartwarming to look out on Newtown Green at a sea of therapy dogs with children literally attached to them. I had the opportunity to talk to parents and kids. Over and over again they expressed the healing power of therapy dogs and requested that we do everything possible to keep them in Newtown.



Representative Urban with animal therapy dogs in Newtown.

Many therapists will tell you that there is a natural affinity between kids and animals. I think that intuitively we all recognize it exists. For instance, when kids are asked whom they share their feelings with, almost all of them include their family pet.

Our bill, now law, is a first because it not only recognizes this bond but acts on it by designating animal therapy teams that are trained and deployed with DCF counselors under the direction of the Commissioner when there is an incidence of trauma impacting children. There is also no extra cost associated with this bill.

## DISSECTION CHOICE

The most compelling reason for passing Dissection Choice was the testimony of students. I was particularly influenced by a young woman who testified that she would try to skip days at school when she knew she had to dissect an animal in her biology class.

With the onset of "virtual dissections" on the computer and with the knowledge that this software is available, free in many cases, we decided that it was time to give students a choice about whether to do an actual dissection or a virtual dissection. Schools can opt for dissection alternatives and actually save money. The animals dissected come at a cost. We also made sure that the legislation required that parents give their consent when a student chooses a virtual dissection. Many schools already accommodate students but some do not. This legislation stops any inconsistency and assures a student an alternative assignment if they choose not to participate in an actual animal dissection.

## SMALL BUSINESS EXPRESS

The Small Business Express Program is helping businesses grow and expand, and it's helping Connecticut's economy get back on its feet. It provides customized financial incentive packages tailored to fit individual businesses. The legislature increased support for the Small Business Express Program by authorizing an additional \$60 million in bonds for it, increasing its total bond authorization to \$160 million.

## BUDGET

My colleagues and I also delivered on other top priorities including passing a balanced budget that does not raise taxes and helps municipalities hold the line on property taxes while protecting investments in education, job growth and consumer protection. Because budget sequestration cut federal spending and because new technologies can change the way we live and work, we reactivated the Economic Development Advisory Commission that will work to modernize the state's manufacturing base. The renamed Commission on Connecticut's Future will determine how to diversify the state's defense businesses or help them switch to making consumer products, and ensure that the state's colleges and universities are preparing students for jobs in the manufacturing sector.

## LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH

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Representative Urban speaks at a press conference on Toxic Chemicals.

## STEPUP PROGRAM

A recent report shows that 369 residents in our region have found work through the Subsidized Training and Employment Program (STEP UP). A total of 572 employers state-wide have taken advantage of the incentives to hire unemployed job seekers. More than half of the hires were long termed unemployed which means they had been out of work for at least 6 months.

Getting a job is important, but what is even more important is keeping the job. The Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, which implements the program in our area, reports that the retention rate is in the 80% range. This is partially because of pre-screening to make sure that skills match the job that is offered. We recently broadened the program to include returning veterans.

## GMO's

One of the major reasons I support and introduced our recently passed legislation on labeling of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's) is that I understand how markets work. The more information a consumer has, the more productive and efficient the market is. In other words, every time you purchase a product you are in a very real sense "voting" for that product with your dollars and directing the market to produce more of it. The more information the consumer has, the better the decisions consumers can make.

Many parents are concerned about the safety and nutritional value of GMO's. By requiring labeling of certain foods parents and consumers will be able to make a choice about what to feed their families. The labeling requirement becomes effective once similar laws are enacted in four states, including one that borders Connecticut, with an aggregate population totaling 20 million. We included this requirement so that there would be economies of scale in the switch to labeling.