

# CAPITOL UPDATE 2012

## Highway Safety

A New Law requires that drivers move-over one lane if an emergency vehicle or maintenance vehicle with flashing lights is parked on the shoulder of any state highway. This increases the safety for roadway workers and motorists by expanding the existing 'move-over' law. This new law requires drivers to move over on two lane highways as well as for road maintenance vehicles and tow trucks.

## Storm Response

Now residents will not have to endure hardships similar to last October's Nor'easter and Tropical Storm Irene thanks to sweeping reforms that better prepare for future events and avoid wide-spread and lengthy loss of utility service. Utilities will be held to minimum performance standards for emergency preparation and response with corresponding penalties of up to 2.5 percent of an electric or gas company's annual distribution revenue, which could amount to millions of dollars in fines.

## Reducing Domestic Violence

We have made great progress in helping families affected by domestic violence in recent years, but the problem persists in our communities. Building on earlier successes, this year we strengthened the state's laws to better protect victims, hold abusers accountable, and give new tools to law enforcement. The 2012 bill provides police officers the tools they need to better identify and respond to domestic violence, requires courts to share protective and restraining orders with schools that victims attend, and extends length of restraining orders from six months to one year. With increasing numbers of people using texting as their primary way of communicating, the bill also charges the Office of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications with conducting a study to determine the feasibility of developing a 911 texting system.



## State Representative **JOE VERRENGIA**

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Dear Neighbors:

2012 has been a challenging year, from jobs to education to improved response to natural disasters; the legislature has helped citizens across our state in many ways. We passed bipartisan jobs legislation that invested hundreds of millions of dollars in small businesses, gave firms hiring incentives, aligned education programs with jobs-in-demand, encouraged entrepreneurship and innovation, and eliminated red-tape for growing companies.

Historic changes were made to our educational system so our children can succeed. We made it easier for people to exercise voting rights, and demanded that utility companies respond better when storms and crises hit. We repealed a death penalty law that wasn't working, and further protected victims of domestic violence.

Along the way, we gave new hope to those suffering from debilitating illnesses by legalizing medical marijuana. We also helped children with special needs by improving Individualized education plans, and creating a study on workforce development, training and employment of young adults with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities.

However, there are still significant challenges going forward and I am committed to making Connecticut's state government more efficient, transparent and accountable to our residents.

As always, please call me at my legislative office: 860-240-8500 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

## SENIORS

## VETERANS



### Jobs are Priority #1

We created new job opportunities with the Small Business Express program, streamlining the application process and funding the program with \$1 million. We also supported opportunities for young people by funding the Youth Employment Summer Jobs Program and opportunities for adults through evening education programs. A Connecticut Made initiative was also encouraged to promote products from local businesses.

Additionally, high level job opportunities will result from economic development funding for the Jackson Labs project that builds on our decision to become a world leader in bioscience and biotechnology.

We recognize the challenges facing cities and towns and secured funding for municipalities, relieving pressure on local property taxes. Loosening budgets can support local projects and job growth.

### Education Reform

Historic, bipartisan education reform makes for a brighter future for our children by supporting teachers' development, providing students with effective educators, increasing Pre-K slots, and building a framework for meaningful intervention in our lowest-achieving schools. This legislation also allows the commissioner of education to assist struggling schools.

### Price Gouging & Pain at the Pump

Skyrocketing gasoline prices are a result of global factors such as growing demand from expanding economies such as China, turmoil in the Middle East and oil market speculators. Faced with the reality of a global dilemma, the legislature acted in a bipartisan manner to be a part of the solution, by capping the state petroleum gross receipts tax (GRT) on motor fuels and enacting new price gouging laws to protect consumers from oil companies and gasoline dealers that try to exploit abnormal market conditions for profit.

### Sunday Sales

We eliminated one of the last vestiges of the state's Blue Laws. The new law allows package and grocery stores to sell alcohol on Sundays from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. It also allows them to sell on Memorial, Independence and Labor Days, and on Mondays following any Independence, Christmas or New Year's Days that fall on a Sunday.

### Grandparent's Rights

This new legislation will protect the rights of grandparents seeking child visitation through the courts. The bill recognizes the often-complicated relationship between grandparents and children and visitation rights for the ultimate benefit the child.

### Medicare Eligibility Preserved

A new law ensures that thousands of seniors and people with disabilities can continue to use the Medicare Savings Program (MSP) to help pay for their Medicare co-pays and deductibles. The legislation, which passed unanimously, raises the income limit for the MSP in order to accommodate a 3.6 percent Social Security cost of living increase (COLA) which took effect January 1.



### Personal Care Assistants

We now allow certain PCAs, along with child care workers and family care attendants, the right to collectively bargain with the state. Personal care attendant and daycare workers nurture our most vulnerable – the elderly, disabled and children. Allowing these workers to collectively bargain will give these industries more stability and attract more people to work in these fields. In many cases, personal care attendants and family childcare providers are underpaid, work limited hours and have no access to health benefits.

### Custody Orders While on Deployment

In order to reduce the psychological trauma a parent feels when they leave a small child for an extended period of time, we protected parents' permanent custody orders in the event of deployment. We provided an opportunity for the military parent to create temporary custody orders that remain in effect only as long as they are away on deployment and allow for as much contact as possible between children and the parent who is absent while on military duty.

### Desecrating Veteran Memorials

Honoring the present and past sacrifices of our veterans is one of my highest priorities. It is shocking to see an increase in thefts and vandalism of veteran memorials. We increased penalties for desecrating veteran's memorials beyond the monetary value of what was vandalized.

### CT Veterans Charity Network

Fraudulent charity groups often misrepresent veterans, trying to take advantage of our good will toward those who serve our country. We helped protect consumers from these fraudulent groups by creating a legitimate charities list on the Department of Veteran's Affairs website.

