

# SENATE DEMOCRATS' SESSION



## PROTECTING CONNECTICUT IN DIFFICULT TIMES

By almost any measure, the nation is in a recession, and states across America are feeling the effects.

Connecticut faces these uncertain times with a biennial budget that makes important investments in local schools, roads, health care, school readiness, municipal aid, summer youth employment, prisoner re-entry programs, and other vital needs.

To be sure, there are many other priorities that remain. The Senate Democrats fought hard for additional investments in recent budget negotiations. Ultimately, as revenue forecasts continued to drop, the decision was made to hold the line on new spending and maintain the budget already in place (the biennial budget already increases spending for the 08-09 budget year by 4 percent—or \$729 million).

Even in these difficult times, Senate Democrats have relentlessly searched for ways to help Connecticut families who are getting squeezed, and we enacted long-needed reforms in the following areas:

**Criminal Justice • Health Care**

**Consumer Protection**

**Environment • Workers' Rights**

**Mortgage Lending**



## MAKING CONNECTICUT SAFER

### Criminal Justice Reform PA 08-1 **S H G**

- ◆ Creates the new crime of “Home Invasion” (minimum 10 years in prison).
- ◆ Increases sentences for violent offenders and makes the persistent offender law easier to apply.
- ◆ Replaces part-time parole board with full-time, professional parole board—with risk assessment tools—so all parolees are properly vetted.
- ◆ Creates a state-of-the-art information technology system so all appropriate agencies can instantly share information.
- ◆ Ends administrative review for parolees and requires an in-person or video hearing before a person is paroled, with notice to the victim and an opportunity for them to be heard.

### Cracking Down on Hate Crimes PA 08-49 **S H G**

- ◆ Makes it a discriminatory practice and a crime to hang a noose on public or private property with intent to intimidate or harass another person.
- ◆ Makes it a discriminatory practice to place a noose or simulation of one on private property without the written consent of owner.

### Persistent Dangerous Felony Offenders and Additional Resources to the Criminal Justice System PA 08-51 **S H**

- ◆ Doubles and triples minimum and maximum felony sentences up to life in prison for persistent dangerous felons.
- ◆ Provides \$10 million for prosecutors, state police, GPS tracking, alternative housing, public defenders and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.
- ◆ Requires that prosecutors who do not seek persistent dangerous felony offender status for those who qualify must state on the record why they are not seeking that option.

### Closing Sexual Offender Loopholes PA 08-54 **S H**

- ◆ Prohibits a sex offender from changing his/her name unless he/she notifies the public safety commissioner of the intent to seek a name change and the new name. The offender must submit a sworn affidavit that the change is not sought to avoid the legal consequences of their criminal conviction.



## HEALTH CARE

### Protecting Patients From MRSA PA 08-12 **S H G**

- ◆ Requires each hospital in the state to develop a plan to reduce the incidence of persons contracting the methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infection at such hospital.

### Improving Hospital Staffing HB 5902 **S H**

- ◆ Requires each licensed hospital, upon request, to make available to the Department of Public Health a prospective nurse staffing plan to provide adequate and appropriate patient health care services.
- ◆ The plan must promote collaborative practice in the hospital that improves patient care and the level of services provided by nurses and other hospital patient care team members.
- ◆ The nurse staffing plan must include the minimum professional skill mix for each patient care unit in the hospital, including inpatient services, critical care, and the emergency department.



## Lowering Health Care Costs For Municipalities and Small Businesses HB 5536 **S H**

- ◆ Allows municipalities, certain municipal service contractors, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses to join the state employee health insurance plan for their employees and retirees. Under it, all new employees will be pooled together with state employees in the state insurance plan.
- ◆ Requires the comptroller to provide insurance coverage when employers apply to cover all their employees or all of their retirees.
- ◆ Requires that premiums the municipal and other employers pay be the same as those the state pays for the same insurance plans. It allows employers to require an employee contribution toward the premium. It also permits the comptroller to charge participating employers an administrative fee based on a per member, per month basis.
- ◆ Permits two or more municipalities to join together as a single entity to obtain health insurance for their employees. It requires the group to be fully insured and meet existing health insurance requirements.

## Autism Legislation PA 08-63; HB 5590; HB 5696 **S H**

- ◆ Provides coordinated services and support, including case management, for people not otherwise eligible for DDS services and for their families. PA 08-63
- ◆ Requires the Commissioners of Education and Developmental Services, and the Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS), to define autism and developmental disabilities, and to define a state-wide plan to incorporate methods of teaching children with autism and developmental disabilities into programs, requirements, and training. HB 5590
- ◆ Requires health insurance policies to cover physical, speech, and occupational therapy services for autism spectrum disorders. HB 5696

## Presuming HUSKY Eligibility for Pregnant Women SB 0659 **S H**

- ◆ Gives low-income pregnant women presumptive eligibility in the state's HUSKY program, providing them with immediate health care access and coverage.

## Allowing Seniors to Receive Care at Home SB 561 **S H**

- ◆ Improves the "Money Follows the Person" program that moves individuals out of nursing homes and into community-based care programs. The state receives higher Medicaid reimbursement rates for people in the program, and thus saves money.
- ◆ Increases—from 700 to 5,000—the number of people who can participate in the program.
- ◆ Establishes a separate account to hold the extra money that the state receives in this program. It specifies that these funds need to be used on long-term care.

## Addressing Health Care Disparities SB 681 **S H**

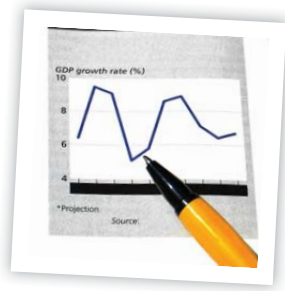
- ◆ Establishes a 32-member Commission on Health Equity. The Commission would work to eliminate disparities in health status based on race, ethnicity, and linguistic ability and improve the quality of health for all state residents.

## Improving Health Care For Women SB 172 **S**

- ◆ Requires that a written mammography report given to a patient must include information about breast density based on the American College of Radiology's Breast Imaging Reporting and Data System.

## Cystic Fibrosis Screening for Infants SB 569 **S**

- ◆ Requires hospitals to test newborns for cystic fibrosis, unless their parents object on religious grounds. Some hospitals do not test for cystic fibrosis, a genetic disease. Diagnosis of cystic fibrosis at an early age is important, so that treatment can begin as soon as possible.



## JOBS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Leveling the Playing Field For Connecticut Companies **SB 679 S H**

- ◆ Levels the playing field for Connecticut companies competing for Connecticut state contracts by enacting a reciprocal preference law, joining the 20 other states which already have one. Connecticut companies competing for state contracts would have an advantage over competing companies from states with a preference law.
- ◆ More taxpayer money and jobs would stay in Connecticut if a reciprocal preference law was enacted because local companies would receive an advantage when competing with companies from the other states with a reciprocal preference law.

### Helping Connecticut Attract Sports Events **SB 553 S H**

- ◆ Establishes a new Sports Advisory Board overseen by the Commission on Culture and Tourism.
- ◆ Board will report to the General Assembly on ways that the state can increase marketing opportunities, attract sporting events and teams to our state, and maximize the use of current venues in Connecticut.



## SAFE ROADS & IMPROVED TRANSPORTATION

### Teenage Drivers **PA 08-32 S H G**

- ◆ Further protects teenage drivers by expanding education and training requirements for driver's licenses.
- ◆ Requires parents to be involved in the driver's education process.
- ◆ Authorizes the immediate 48-hour suspension of licenses of teen drivers to protect their safety.

### Motor Vehicle Laws **SB 298 S H**

- ◆ Creates a "Support Our Troops" license plate so that residents of Connecticut can display their pride and appreciation for those in service to our country.
- ◆ Protects the blind by increasing fines for those motorists who compromise their safety.
- ◆ Expands the use of ignition interlock devices.

### Expanding Bus Transportation **HB 5734 S H**

- ◆ Reinvests \$5 million originally bonded for bus retrofits into new bus purchases in order to expand the service and reach of our bus system.

### Open Containers and DUI **SB 301 S**

- ◆ Makes it illegal for anyone to possess an open alcoholic beverage container in the passenger area of a motor vehicle while the vehicle is on a Connecticut highway or highway right-of-way. Also makes changes in both criminal and administrative per se laws governing the operation of a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol.
- ◆ Defines an "open alcoholic beverage container" as a bottle, can, or other receptacle that contains any amount of an alcoholic beverage and is open or has a broken seal, or the contents of which are partially removed.



## ETHICS & GOOD GOVERNMENT

### 17-year-old Voting HJR 21 **S H**

- ◆ Proposed Constitutional Amendment would allow 17-year-old citizens to vote in a primary provided that they will turn 18 on or before the date of the general election associated with the primary.

### Ethics Reform SB 333 **S**

- ◆ Revocation or reduction of pensions for all state employees, public officials, officials of quasi-public agencies and municipal officials who plead guilty or no contest or are convicted of a crime related to their position.
- ◆ Creation of the Class A misdemeanor of failure to report a bribe.
- ◆ Addition of the governor's spouse to the definition of "public official" for purposes of the state Code of Ethics for Public Officials.
- ◆ Prohibiting chiefs of staffs of legislative caucuses and all public officials from soliciting campaign contributions from their respective staff and barring the governor and lieutenant governor's chiefs of staff from soliciting campaign contributions from commissioners and deputy commissioners.
- ◆ Mandatory ethics training for all new legislators and refresher courses for incumbent legislators every four years or when the Code of Ethics of Public Officials is significantly updated.

### Protecting Taxpayers From Fraud SB 440 **S**

- ◆ Establishes a state False Claims Act which empowers the Attorney General to investigate fraud against the state and recover liable damages for the benefit of state taxpayers.
- ◆ Allows individuals to sue those who defraud the state and to share in the recovery.

### Improving Judicial System Openness SB 605 **S**

- ◆ Requires the Judicial Selection Commission to evaluate state referees in the same way as judges seeking reappointment.
- ◆ Changes procedure of Judicial Review Council, making more records open to the public.
- ◆ Changes the procedures for adoption and modification of court rules so that changes are subject to disapproval by the General Assembly.

### Protection for Whistleblowers SB 335 **S**

- ◆ Provides new protections for whistleblowers from retaliation by their employers.
- ◆ Allows the Attorney General to intervene on behalf of a whistleblower against whom the state or a state contractor has taken retaliatory action.

## WORKERS' RIGHTS

### Minimum Wage HB 5105 **S H**

- ◆ Increases the state's minimum wage from \$7.65 to \$8.00 per hour on January 1, 2009.
- ◆ As of January 1, 2010, the bill raises the minimum hourly wage rate to \$8.25 per hour.

### Helping Workers Save For Retirement SB 652 **S**

- ◆ Allows the State Comptroller to establish and administer retirement plans that would be open to small businesses and self-employed individuals in Connecticut. Through the efficient pooling of many employees into one system, fees will be greatly reduced and therefore employee retirement accounts will grow at an accelerated rate.





## ENVIRONMENT

### Global Warming Solutions **HB 5600 S H**

- ◆ Mandates reductions in state greenhouse gas emissions: at least 10 percent below 1990 levels by January 1, 2020 and at least 80 percent below 2001 levels by January 1, 2050. The commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) must determine exact targets.
- ◆ Requires certain state agencies to identify activities and facility improvements to meet state energy saving goals and policies and regulations to help meet the emission limits.
- ◆ Requires the DEP commissioner, with the help of a regional nonprofit air quality and climate organization, to publish a baseline inventory of greenhouse gas emissions and recommend strategies, regulatory actions, and policies to achieve the necessary emission reductions.

### Encouraging Responsible Growth **SB 39 S**

- ◆ Establishes the Responsible Growth Cabinet which must review “regionally-significant projects” to determine their consistency with state growth management principles. Under the bill, these principles encourage the use of land and resources in ways that enhance the long-term quality of life for current and future state residents.

### Renewable Energy **SB 590 S**

- ◆ Requires the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development, in consultation with the Energy Conservation Management Board, to establish a low-interest residential loan program for energy-efficient improvements, such as high-efficiency boilers and furnaces.
- ◆ Increases the maximum income a loan recipient could have from 150 percent to 200 percent of the median area income.

### Clean & Alternative Fuels **SB 125 S**

- ◆ Extends, from July 1, 2008 to July 1, 2012, the sales tax exemption for: new vehicles exclusively powered by a clean alternative fuel; equipment used to convert vehicles to use clean alternative fuels exclusively or to use both clean alternative fuels and any other fuel; and equipment incorporated or used in compressed natural gas or hydrogen filling, or electric recharging, stations for vehicles powered by a clean alternative fuel.
- ◆ Extends, from October 1, 2008 to October 1, 2012, the sales tax exemption on the sale of hybrid passenger cars with an estimated federal highway mileage rating of at least 40 mpg.



## CONSUMER PROTECTION

### Sub-Prime Mortgage Reforms **HB 5577 S H**

- ◆ Authorizes the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) to use \$30 million in existing bonds to purchase mortgages directly from lenders and place eligible borrowers on an affordable payment schedule for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage.
- ◆ Provides \$14 million in the state’s emergency mortgage assistance program (EMAP) for borrowers facing foreclosure.
- ◆ Continues the \$40 million Connecticut Families Assistance Program.
- ◆ Creates a foreclosure mediation program within the state Judicial Branch.

## Product Safety Recall HB 5650 **S H**

- ◆ Establishes limits for lead in children's products and requires that warning labels be placed on products that contain lead paint.
- ◆ Prohibits the sale of items marketed for children under 16 that contain asbestos.
- ◆ Requires retailers to complete a final disposition report for any banned hazardous substances to account for the disposal of recalled products.
- ◆ Requires stores to post recall notices in a conspicuous place to notify consumers of recalled products.

## Identity Theft SB 315 **S**

- ◆ Makes numerous changes in laws relating to the crime of identity theft and restricts the dissemination of Social Security numbers. In addition, it requires those who possess the personal information of others to safeguard it.



## SUPPORTING THE NEEDS OF SENIORS

### Grandparents and Relative Caregivers SB 066 **S H**

- ◆ Allows more grandparents (or other relatives) who take over guardianship of a grandchild to access state grants, by allowing those who obtained guardianship in Superior Court to apply for the grants. Currently, only those who obtained guardianship in probate court can apply.

### Protecting Nursing Home Residents from Extra Charges SB 382 **S H**

- ◆ Prohibits some telephone and cable television providers from charging an installation fee to a resident of a residential care home, who changes rooms within the facility.

### The Department Of Aging PA 07-2

- ◆ Reestablishes a Department of Aging (which was disbanded in 1993) effective July 1, 2008 and transfers the functions, powers, duties, and personnel of the Department of Social Services Division of Elderly Services to the Department on Aging.



## VETERANS

### Unemployment Benefits for Military Spouses PA 08-40 **S H**

- ◆ Military spouses who voluntarily leave their jobs between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008, can receive unemployment compensation if their military spouse is relocated. This legislation extends the eligibility period for unemployment benefits until June 30, 2014.

### Tuition for Families of Military Members Killed in Action SB 48 **S H**

- ◆ Requires Connecticut's various institutions of higher learning to waive the tuition for any state resident who is a dependent or surviving spouse of an active duty military member and was a state resident and killed in action after September 11, 2001.

### Educational Opportunities for Military Children PA 08-57 **S H**

- ◆ Expands the tuition waiver for veterans to include graduate school tuition for National Guard members beginning on July 1, 2008.
- ◆ Adopts the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.

### Recognition of Veterans SB 307 **S H**

- ◆ Ensures that the Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs has access to the list of eligible veterans and to award certain medals posthumously.