

**SESSION 2005:  
NEW LEADERSHIP  
FOR CONNECTICUT'S FUTURE**

**Better government; healthier kids & parents; a commitment to education**



**SENATE DEMOCRATS**



## INTRODUCTION



**W**ith a new sense of determination, Senate Democrats moved forward this session towards making government more accountable to the people Connecticut. We embarked upon a new era of responsibility while staying true to our core Democratic values in difficult economic times. This year we made progress in reforming our ethics laws, even as our state continues to recover and respond to the unprecedented events of last year, which were punctuated by the resignation of our governor. We passed legislation that was signed into law by the current governor which revamps our Ethics Commission, strengthens standards for contracting, provides for public financing of campaigns to get the special interests out of politics and increases real accountability in how government goes about doing the business of the people it represents.

We fought for additional aid to our cities and towns to support education and to keep our property taxes down. The maximization of federal revenue—getting our money back from Washington—remains a priority. We responded with targeted efforts to save our sub base and continue the expansion of our economic development efforts there.

We focused our efforts on our kids—what they eat in schools, how to keep them healthy, safe and physically fit. We protected access to health care, saved our HUSKY health care program for the parents of the children in the greatest need. We were successful in our fight to increase the minimum wage. We increased our school readiness dollars while providing more money to towns for general and special education.

This year was also devoted to environmental concerns. We fought hard to protect open space while enhancing historic preservation and affordable housing. We honored those who serve in our military, past and present, and passed a number of programs to support them. Transportation remained a high priority with more dollars devoted to decreasing gridlock and our dependence on foreign oil. Finally, as a result of thoughtful and prudent budgeting, we made sure that our seniors keep their prescription drug coverage under the ConnPACE program and that new, critical transportation initiatives help keep them independent.

# A NEW STATE BUDGET

The new two-year budget passed by the General Assembly addresses the priorities of Connecticut's citizens in a fair and comprehensive fashion. Many of the programs that were under attack—pared-down or eliminated in the wake of the post-9/11 economic slow down—were restored to their prior funding levels. We fought for additional money for higher education, health care and for our cities and towns resulting in property tax relief. Aid to our municipalities increased by 5%, or \$132 million over last year.

## A few highlights of the FY 06/07 budget include:

### Human Services

- HUSKY health care insurance for parents with incomes up to 150% of the federal poverty level will be continued (for a family of three, 150% of federal poverty level is \$24,135).
- Funding for more coordinated behavioral health care for children and their families is included, as is funding for a more comprehensive continuum of community-based mental health care.
- The Nurturing Families program for new parents will be made available to all hospitals in the state.
- Funding is provided for the state's first Safe Harbor Respite Home for teens with behavioral or social problems.
- Cost of Living increases for private human service providers.
- Significant increases in funding for nursing home rates.
- New funding for gambling addiction and awareness programs.
- The blind, aged and disabled will now receive a federal cost of living allowance for the first time in 15 years.
- New pilot program to address autistic kids and their special needs.

### Education

- The largest expansion of the School Readiness program since its creation (\$10 million in FY06 and \$13 million in FY07).
- Higher Education will receive \$52 million more than originally proposed.
- \$3.5 million more than originally proposed for charter schools.
- \$52 million more for Education Cost Sharing in FY06 over last year.

### General Government

- No increases in bus fares.
- No increases in the gas tax.
- \$9 million more than originally recommended for tourism and the arts.
- \$60 million over the biennium to fund collective bargaining agreements.
- \$75 million of the FY 05 surplus will be deposited into the rainy day fund.

### Agriculture and Open Space

- \$30 million for the acquisition and preservation of farmland and the development of affordable housing.

# ETHICS AND GOVERNMENT REFORM



## Campaign Finance Reform

During the campaign season, democracy can be at its best when candidates have a real chance to talk with residents about issues that most affect them. However, as the costs of campaigning increase across the state and country, candidates may see less time in the future talking about the most pressing issues and more time attending fundraising. This runs counter to what our democracy is all about, and it works against the best interests of voters. To stem this tide, the state Senate passed a comprehensive campaign finance package that would take some of the special interest money out of politics. The new system, which would be paid for through bottle escheats, is already being recognized as one of the strongest in the nation.

## Reform of the Ethics Commission

Our state continues to recover and respond to the unprecedented events of last year, which were punctuated by the resignation of our former governor. These events truly tested our system of checks and balances, and we are proud to report that our system worked. Nevertheless, we also learned that some of our checks and balances could be strengthened. As a result, we have improved oversight of ethical conduct by establishing an independent Citizens' Ethics Advisory Board to better ensure that officials adhere to the highest ethical standards. We have also instituted an innovative approach to reviewing ethical behavior by assigning our revered retired judges to preside over cases involving unethical conduct.

## Standards for Contracting

In the wake of the scandal in former Governor Rowland's office, we continued our efforts to tighten standards for procurement and contracting for state services that had so unfortunately been violated by the previous administration. This year the legislature established the State Contracting Standards Board to oversee state contracting and procurement. Our bill requires this new board to be composed of very experienced personnel who will work to improve accountability and ensure that taxpayer dollars are used in an efficient and ethical manner. In addition, we have strengthened the awarding of emergency contracts by requiring them to first receive a two-thirds vote of the legislature.

## Privatization Standards

In order to ensure that our tax dollars are used as wisely as possible, common-sense legislation was passed that requires state agencies to more comprehensively analyze their options for purchasing goods and for privatizing state services before deciding whether to sign the check. Our legislation establishes standards for procurement and privatization that ensures we are getting the best bang for our buck. It also protects against contracting with a business that has a poor service record, and it helps stem the loss of jobs that privatization can often cause.

## SAVING THE SUB BASE—AN UPDATE



For over a century, Connecticut's submarine industry—centered in Groton around the U.S. Naval sub base and the Electric Boat shipbuilding yard—has been a major economic force in the state. Half of the nearly 200 submarines built for the U.S. Navy have been constructed in Connecticut; the other half of the sub force was built by one of six other contractors. Today, there are more than 520 firms from nearly every town in the state employing more than 31,000 people who make parts just for the new Virginia class of submarines. The Bush administration's proposed closure of the Groton sub base could spawn an economic disaster that would devastate the southeastern Connecticut economy and potentially send ripple effects throughout the state. We in the state legislature are doing everything in our power to prevent that from happening.

This year, we have been working on various ways to enhance state support for Connecticut's submarine industry in anticipation that the Pentagon might recommend—as it did on that fateful day of Friday the 13th of May—closure of the Groton base. Working on a bipartisan basis with a broad coalition of military, industry, economic and political experts, we developed a number of innovative ideas that could potentially enhance the base's operations in the eyes of the Pentagon—and at the same time enhance Connecticut's submarine industry as a whole—while simultaneously sending a signal to the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission that we are completely committed to being active and responsive partners in the sub base's future.

We passed a bill providing \$10 million to be used to enhance the submarine base's infrastructure, and included another \$1 million to support a unique public-private technology partnership that should strengthen our state's military, private industry and collegiate sectors.

We'll continue to work diligently with the governor, our congressional delegation and military specialists to explain why it's in America's best strategic interests, and the nation's best economic interests, to retain the Groton sub base.

## PROTECTING CONSUMERS



### Return Policy in Stores

Retailers will now have to provide consumers with written warnings that the store has a limit on the number or the dollar amount of returns made by consumers. These policies must be clearly posted in the store for consumers to read. Stores that fail to refund or give store credit to consumers who have met the posted return/refund policy will be guilty of unfair trade practices under the new law. Consumers would also have to be notified, in writing, by any retailer who intends to terminate that consumer's ability to return goods. **SB 652—passed in concurrence**

### Gift Cards

Gift cards are one of the most popular retail purchases. In 2003, we passed legislation that exempted gift certificates from having an expiration date and banned retailers from charging "inactivity fees" on gift certificates that may be laying dormant or forgotten, perhaps in your kitchen drawer. However, if a gift certificate had remained unused for 3 years, it would be considered abandoned property and turned over to the state treasurer's office until claimed by its rightful owner. This session, we passed some consumer-friendly legislation that makes a good law even better. Now, gift cards will be exempt from the abandoned property statute, and they won't be turned over to the state if unused. Connecticut consumers can now rest assured that any gift card sold in the state truly does not have an expiration date. **SB 123—passed in concurrence**

### Protecting Consumers Who Get Income Tax Refund Anticipation Loans

Many tax preparation services offer citizens the opportunity to get a loan in advance of an anticipated tax return. However, these loans often charge exorbitant interest rates, and their terms aren't always clear to borrowers. Under legislation passed this session, the providers of these kinds of loans can't charge more than 60% annual interest in the first 21 days of the loan, and the rate is limited to 20% beginning on the 22nd day of the loan, until it's repaid. This legislation will help protect some of our state's most vulnerable residents from this subtle form of predatory lending. **HB 6830—passed in concurrence**

## Restaurant Wine Purchases

Patrons of Connecticut's restaurants will now be allowed to take home the unused portion of one bottle of wine if they purchased it at a restaurant while eating a full-course meal. Under current law, some restaurants were allowing patrons to take their wine home and some were not. The new law helps protect consumers, potentially serves as a deterrent to driving under the influence and treats such patrons equally throughout the state. *HB 6804—passed in concurrence*

## Heat & Utility Surcharges in Leases

The legislature banned the use of utility surcharges by landlords in rental agreements that have heat and utilities included in the rent. This prohibition will apply to rental agreements or renewals beginning October 1, 2005. *HB 6598—passed in concurrence*

## Telecommunications Services Deregulation

Many changes have occurred in the telecommunications and utility marketplaces today, including the emergence of wireless services, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP), cable telephone services and many other technologies which have changed the way we communicate with each other—changes that were never anticipated in our laws prior to this Legislative Session. The Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation ensuring that Connecticut's telecommunications and utility laws are not only fair for our businesses, but help consumers as well. As a result of this legislation, Connecticut's citizens will have more choices in a competitive market. *SB 1097—passed in concurrence*

## PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT



### Farmland Preservation

Connecticut has a long history of protecting and preserving its farmland. Not only are our farmlands a valuable resource simply for their beauty and open space, they're also critically important to the state's economy. That's why we passed legislation establishing a matching grant program to help towns and cities promote and sustain local agricultural activity. This legislation also establishes the "Connecticut Farm Link Program," a database for farmers who intend to sell their farm operations or farmland. People interested in starting or expanding an agricultural business can access the database through the state Department of Agriculture and find the land or equipment they need. Lastly, the bill establishes a fund to help promote culture and tourism, affordable housing programs, open space and agriculture.

*SB 410—passed in concurrence*

### Clean Car Tax Incentives

It's nearly impossible to watch television or read the newspaper without hearing about alternative fuel or hybrid vehicles. In addition to increased fuel efficiency, these vehicles also emit lower emissions. We passed legislation this session that provides greater incentives for consumers to purchase such fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly automobiles. The commissioner of state Department Environmental Protection, representatives from the federal Environmental Protection Agency and others will develop a plan to shrink the sales tax on these cars, and to consider increasing the sales tax on vehicles—such as certain behemoth SUVs—that emit higher emissions. *HB 6908—passed in concurrence*

### Frederick Law Olmstead Day

Parks in urban areas are wonderful places for people to play and groups to gather, providing an escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. Connecticut native Frederick Law Olmstead, who is considered the founder of American landscape architecture (he planned Central Park in New York City), contributed greatly to the state's urban parks, including Hartford's park system and the Beardsley Park in Bridgeport. To honor Olmstead's legacy, we passed legislation establishing April 26th as "Frederick Law Olmstead Day." *SB 794—passed in concurrence*

## Plans of Conservation and Development

Smart Growth is a term that has become popular in describing certain ways to develop and use land. Although there's no one definition of smart growth, it generally refers to the practice of saving natural resources from unnecessary development, targeting development in areas where there's already existing infrastructure (such as water, electricity, streets and sewers) and avoiding using taxpayer money to support sprawl. One way to accomplish smart growth is to draft consistent, effective and useful plans of conservation and development, and we passed legislation this session that requires changes in such plans to help achieve just that. These changes include requiring the state Plan of Conservation and Development to identify areas suitable for mixed-use development, requiring consistency among the state, regional and local plans and establishment of a process for the state Office of Policy and Management to designate priority-funding areas ripe for development. *HB 6570—passed in concurrence*

## Bi-State Long Island Sound Committee

Long Island Sound is one of Connecticut's greatest natural resources. Its fragile environment and unique beauty is not only a recreational asset, but is an economic treasure as well. Since we share the Sound with New York, it's important that we work together to protect it. We passed legislation this session to create a new Bi-State Long Island Sound Committee responsible for mitigating the impact of any proposed industrialization of the Sound, such as the proposed floating liquefied natural gas facility. The committee will consist of 9 members from Connecticut and 9 members from New York who will ensure the best interests of Long Island Sound are protected. *SB 637—passed in concurrence*

## Bottle Bill

Recycling is a simple yet effective way to help keep our environment clean. Many state residents already recycle by taking advantage of our bottle redemption law and returning their cans and bottles for a 5 cents. This session, the Senate passed legislation to expand this law to include water containers. Unfortunately, this important piece of legislation was not enacted into law. *SB 871—passed Senate only*

## Broadwater Liquefied Natural Gas Facility

Although we all agree that we need more energy sources in our part of the country, it is imperative that we analyze each proposal for its environmental, public health, safety, and security implications. This session, the Connecticut General Assembly created a sixteen-member task force to monitor the proposed Broadwater Energy Liquefied Natural Gas regasification unit in Long Island Sound. The task force is charged with analyzing the proposal for its broad impacts, and it will submit testimony to the federal and New York State regulatory agencies regarding the proposal. The task force will submit annual reports of its activities to the General Assembly. This task force will ensure that this project is completed in the safest manner for our environment, our citizens and our communities. *SB 1087—passed Senate only*

## CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



### School Nutrition

Our state mirrors the nationwide epidemic of obesity in children. Overweight children are susceptible to severe health problems as well as untold emotional and psychological issues. And once a child becomes obese, he or she is much more likely to become an overweight or obese adult—again at high risk of major health conditions. This session, the legislature took action to ensure that our public schools set the proper example and work with parents to help reverse this trend. Instead of nutritionally deficient snacks like chips and candy, our kids will now be allowed to purchase only healthy snacks in schools. Young children through fifth grade will have twenty minutes of recess daily, to help ensure they get at least that minimal amount of physical activity. This law makes Connecticut a leader in the fight against obesity—and it makes our schools a model for the rest of the country. *SB 1309—passed in concurrence*

### HUSKY for Adult

Several years ago the legislature expanded the successful HUSKY health insurance program for kids to some of the neediest parents in our state. We recognize the real difference health insurance makes in people's lives—physically, emotionally and financially. Over 10,000 working parents in our state were slated to lose coverage this past April. We were proud to take on the issue early this year to ensure that these parents would not lose their coverage. First, we extended coverage to the end of June. Now we've continued this worthy program for at least the next two years, with funding in the state budget. The HUSKY program works to help increase access to quality health care in our state. *HB 7000—passed in concurrence*

### Minimum Wage

Connecticut is certainly a desirable place to live and, as a result, a costly place to live. We recognize our state's high cost of living and commit ourselves each year to help our state's working families. This year we passed legislation increasing the minimum wage to \$7.40/hour in 2006 and \$7.65/hour in 2007. This will help many people statewide keep pace with inflation and be more active participants in Connecticut's economy. *HB 6228—passed in concurrence*

## Resale of Recalled Children's Products

With so many children's products on the market, it is difficult to keep current about which ones are recalled by manufacturers. In some cases, these products are resold and their 'recalled' status is not divulged. The state Senate passed legislation this session that would have helped prohibit this activity. The law would have prevented the sale, resale or lease of a children's toy or product that has been recalled. The regulation would also have addressed keeping these toys out of daycare facilities. Unfortunately, this initiative to help protect our children from dangerous products was not enacted into law. *SB 480—passed Senate only*

## Keeping Our Kids Safe on School Buses

This session the Senate passed legislation to allow the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to supplement the criminal background checks it already performs before granting a license to school bus drivers. The DMV would have been required to check the state child abuse registry to see if an applicant has a documented case of substantiated child abuse. Access to this important information is one more way we can protect students on their way to school. Unfortunately, this important initiative was not enacted into law this year. *SB 505—passed Senate only*

## Civil Unions

While married couples in Connecticut have certain responsibilities, their union also entitles them to certain benefits. Committed gay couples can be in relationships for decades and never be able to claim these benefits. Thanks to landmark legislation passed this year in the General Assembly, these couples now have an option previously only available for heterosexual couples. Same sex couples can now enter into a civil union, which entitles them to all the rights, responsibilities and privileges married couples enjoy. This first-in-the-nation law brings our state one step closer to equality for all. *SB 963—passed in concurrence*

## PROTECTING SENIORS



### Independent Transportation Networks and Funding Dial-a-Ride

Many senior citizens decide to stop driving but still need to get to stores, appointments and social events. This mobility is key to their desire to remain in their own homes and communities, and to retain independence and dignity. This session, the General Assembly proudly passed legislation that will help four towns create regional transportation systems in which volunteers and paid drivers would use their own vehicles to transport the elderly. Once up and running, the programs will be self-sustaining. We will also provide \$5 million in state funds to help fund Dial-a-Ride programs throughout the state. These programs can make a real difference in the lives of elderly residents of our state. *HB 7000—passed in concurrence*

### Protecting Seniors in Annuity Transactions

Many seniors depend on income from annuities as part of their retirement planning. However, some of the terms and conditions of these financial products are complex and confusing and we want to protect seniors from those who would take advantage of them. The legislature enacted a law requiring the state Insurance Commissioner to adopt regulations establishing standards for the purchase of these products and procedures for making annuity sales or exchange recommendations. *HB 6622—passed in concurrence*

## HONORING THOSE WHO SERVE



### Extension of Insurance Coverage Based on Military Service

Until now, the health insurance that parents have for their children attending college full-time ended shortly after their children turned 23. But due to our military's commitments here and overseas, many students have had interruptions during their college years because they served our country in the armed forces or reserves. This legislation would correct that situation—coverage would continue beyond the 23rd birthday for a length of time equal to the students' military service. This bill was a small gesture of gratitude for our young men and women in uniform, which also promoted higher education. Unfortunately, it was not enacted into law. *SB 24—passed Senate*

### In-State Tuition for Military Stationed in Connecticut

There are a significant number of military personnel stationed in Connecticut, often living a mobile life traveling from one post to another. While they are living in our state they should be treated like one of our own. Thanks to a new law, those individuals will be treated like bona fide Connecticut residents, entitled to in-state tuition rates at our state universities and colleges. Connecticut has some of the best higher education institutions in the country, and these servicemen and women will be able to take advantage of their proximity to them. *SB 398—passed in concurrence*

### Depleted Uranium

Some of the dangers our military men and women face are not from battle, but from where they work and live. Depleted uranium is used extensively in armor plating on our tanks and vehicles used in modern combat. It is also used in ammunition as well. There is growing concern among veterans that the use of this product is not as safe as once thought. Not enough has been done to pursue and investigate complaints about the health of soldiers returning from the Middle East. The state Senate decided this session that these concerns were too important to wait any longer. The Senate passed a bill to establish a task force to look into the health impact of depleted uranium and other substances, as well as create a registry for recently returned veterans to gain medical information so we can get a better understanding of the scope of the problem. *SB 1245—passed Senate only*

## Military Assistance Bill

The debt we owe our veterans can never truly be paid in full. Our nation's most recent war on terrorism has created a new generation of veterans and a new sense of commitment to those who serve. Thanks to the newly established Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the Connecticut General Assembly is more focused than ever on helping those soldiers who have done so much for us. The state Senate passed a Military Assistance Package this year to create, expand and extend more benefits to our state's veterans. Connecticut would have offered free life insurance for those serving in the military so that the families of those who don't return will have more to rely upon. The bill also would have created a database of veterans so that the state can more effectively reach out to those in need. Similarly, the state would create a single toll-free number that veterans could call to get answers about military and other benefits. Although these worthy initiatives did not become law, the new state budget shows our continued commitment by allocating state funds to help supplement the incomes of those whose loved ones are serving our country overseas. *HB 6626—passed Senate only and budget*

## Definition of Veteran

The men and women of the Connecticut National Guard serve our state with pride. In recent years, their role in defending our nation has increased. In recognition of their service, the state Senate decided to change the definition of "veteran" to include those in the National Guard who have served after September 11, 2001. Unfortunately, this important bill to give these brave men and women the same benefits available to other veterans was not enacted into law. *HB 5890—passed Senate only*

## Indemnification for National Guard Deployed in the State

Members of our National Guard put themselves in harm's way when they are dispatched to serve our state. Currently, if these men and women are involved in an accident or in some way cause damage while executing their duties they are liable for their actions. Public Act 05-79, which takes effect October 1, says no longer can these servicemen and servicewomen be held civilly liable for damages caused while they are on duty. *SB 1010—passed in concurrence*

## HEALTH AND SAFETY



### Medical Malpractice

After receiving complaints from physicians about skyrocketing medical malpractice insurance rates, we passed a comprehensive reform package last year that unfortunately was vetoed by former Governor Rowland. This year, the legislature went back to work to address this crisis, and we passed a bill designed to limit the growth of malpractice insurance rates while protecting patients' access to quality health care. The package includes:

- Increased patient safety measures, such as requiring hospitals to use better identification procedures and protocols before surgery
- Reforms to the judicial system, such as requiring mediation between the parties to expedite these often-lengthy cases and reduce attorney costs
- A requirement that our state insurance commissioner consider companies' proposed rates before they are applied, with the power to approve, deny or modify them

This balanced approach addresses the issues brought to us by the insurance companies, doctors and lawyers involved in these cases, and most importantly, it works to improve the safety of patients in our state. *SB 1052—passed in concurrence*

### Breast Cancer Screening

Screening and early detection of breast cancer have a major impact on treatment of the disease. Most women know to get a mammogram annually if they are 40 or older, but many do not follow that advice. Moreover, for some women with dense breast tissue, mammograms are not the most effective screening tool. Ultrasound screening can be a more effective screening technique for such women, and this session we were proud to pass legislation requiring insurance companies to provide coverage for ultrasound screening for when recommended by a physician. *SB 30—passed in concurrence*

### Infertility Coverage

A child can bring so much joy to the world, but for tens of thousands of couples in Connecticut with fertility problems, conceiving a child of their own has been impossible. Infertility is a disease, often treatable, but which generally is not covered by health insurance plans. This session, the state Senate voted to require insurance companies to pay for certain fertility treatments. This bill may help many couples in our state achieve their dream of having children. *SB 508—passed in concurrence*

### Stem Cell Research

Medical innovations are changing the way we approach health and illness. New cutting-edge research has the potential to discover treatments and cures for debilitating diseases like diabetes, Parkinson's disease, certain cancers and multiple sclerosis. This remarkable research involves the use of embryonic stem cells. This session, the legislature took action to place strict limits on stem cell research conducted in our state—and to ban human cloning—while sending the message that Connecticut supports research

that is conducted ethically and professionally. Moreover, we will invest \$100 million over ten years in this research in an attempt to attract research scientists to our state. This legislation and our commitment will bring new, high-level jobs to our state, and—more importantly—the research conducted here could save lives. *SB 934—passed in concurrence*

## Organ Donation

Medical technology has made it possible to improve and save lives with organ and tissue donations. Decisions about donations can be made after someone dies, but that decision often falls to the family to make at a difficult time. This bill allows state residents to designate their choice to donate their organs on state identification cards obtained at the state Department of Motor Vehicles. Having one's donation wishes known facilitates the donation process, which can make a real difference when time is critical.

*HB 6717—passed in concurrence*

## Food Allergies

Over 11 million Americans have food allergies, and the prevalence and severity of those allergies are on the rise. People with food allergies have enormous difficulty eating in restaurants, because they may not know all the ingredients in the foods they wish to order. While food-allergic adults, and parents of food-allergic children, must take responsibility for asking about ingredients in food, they may be unaware of other foods cooked nearby, which can lead to cross-contamination. This bill requires that people licensed as qualified food operators in Connecticut have proven knowledge and understanding of food allergies. This important bill can help raise awareness of the issues surrounding food allergies and may help save lives. *HB 6770—passed in concurrence*

## Mercury Warnings

Although fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet, almost all contain traces of mercury. While this small amount of mercury would have little effect on adults, some levels can potentially be harmful to fetuses and young children. It is important that the public, especially pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children be educated about which fish and shellfish to avoid and which contain smaller amounts of mercury. The state Senate passed legislation that would have required establishments that sell raw fish or shellfish for off-premises consumption to provide pamphlets concerning the level of mercury in their products. Unfortunately, this public health initiative to spread the word about the hazards of mercury for women and children was not enacted into law. *SB 876—passed Senate only*

## Restaurant Safety & Choking

Connecticut restaurant employees and restaurant operators are now required to be familiar with signs that a person is choking and with the appropriate steps to aid a choking victim. Restaurants will also be required to post signs for employees that explain how to recognize that a person is choking and the proper first aid actions to take. The law will make restaurant patrons safer throughout the state.

*HB 6804—passed in concurrence*

## Requiring Mobile Home Parks to Provide Notice of Health and Safety Standards

Homeowners have the right to know when there are potential health and safety risks in their surroundings, but until now, residents of mobile home parks were not necessarily made aware of such risks by the owners of the park. That's why we passed legislation that will require mobile home park owners to notify their residents if there is a violation, or potential violation, of an environmental law enforced by the state Department of Environmental Protection. *HB 5661—passed in concurrence*

## Give Immunity to Schools and Care Providers for Use of Cartridge Injectors

Quick reactions to allergic reactions can mean the difference between life and death. If someone hesitates to act on the victim's behalf because of concerns about civil liability, the results could be disastrous. This legislative session we passed a bill to help protect these good Samaritans. Now when someone at a camp or a daycare facility uses a cartridge injector to help save the life of someone in their care, they can do so without the fear of prosecution. *HB 6286—passed in concurrence*

## Carbon Monoxide Detectors in New Houses

According to the federal government, carbon monoxide poisoning kills over 200 people every year. Mandatory smoke detectors in new home construction have saved countless lives by letting people know of fire in their homes. The General Assembly recognized that lives would also be saved by the use of carbon monoxide detectors. Starting October 1, 2005, all new residential construction in Connecticut will not only requires the installation of smoke detectors, but also the installation of carbon monoxide detectors. *HB 6894—passed in concurrence*

## Protective Orders

Victims of domestic violence are vulnerable members of our society. Protecting them from further violence and threats are a priority of the Connecticut General Assembly. This year the state legislature passed significant legislation to further extend protection to those in jeopardy. This bill increases the penalty for violating a restraining order from a Class A Misdemeanor to a Class D Felony. This means that a criminal who violates these orders could face up to 5 years in jail. This bill further protects victims of harassment by allowing judges to issue protective orders for people convicted of harassing someone if the judge believes the safety of the victim is in question. *SB 34—passed in concurrence*

## Notification of the Victim Advocate When a Prisoner is Released

One of the roles of the Office of the Victim Advocate is to notify victims when prisoners are released from prison. This year the Connecticut General Assembly further extended this notification system to those prisoners on furloughs in programs to reintroduce them to society. Protecting victims by keeping them informed is one way to keep Connecticut safe. *SB 1280—passed in concurrence*

## Giving Law Enforcement Access to Phone and Internet Records

While modern technology has given law enforcement new tools to fight crime, it has also created new challenges that must be overcome. Because of concerns about the privacy of customers, communications companies have been reluctant to give law enforcement the information they need to track down criminals. Thanks to a new state law, these companies are now able to give these officials basic information without revealing personal e-mails or phone conversations, striking a balance between public safety and our right to privacy. Now Internet predators and other such perpetrators can't use modern science to hide from the long arm of the law. *SB 1356—passed in concurrence*

## TRANSPORTATION



### Cell Phones

There will be new restrictions on cell phones to deal with distracted driving and help reduce safety hazards on Connecticut's roadways. Legislation passed this year bans the operation of a motor vehicle while the driver is using a cell phone unless the driver utilizes a hands-free device on the phone. The law further restricts mobile phone usage by completely banning their use by school bus drivers and drivers under 18, except in emergencies. This bill doesn't stop at cell phones but also puts additional penalties for those drivers who have committed a violation while engaged in a distracting activity that interferes with driving. *HB 6722—passed in concurrence*

### Child Restraints

Booster seat legislation should improve safety for young children riding in motor vehicles. Car crashes continue to be the leading cause of death among young children. While seat belts in cars have saved countless lives, they don't provide adequate protection for small children—the shoulder belt can't be adjusted in most vehicles to a position that won't result in potential injury to small children. Booster seats are the best way to transport children who are too big for a car seat but can't fit safely in a shoulder belt. Current state law requires that children under the age of 4 or under 40 pounds in weight be secured in a child safety seat. Starting October 1, Connecticut will mandate a child restraint system for all children under the age of 7 or under 60 pounds. *HB 6660—passed in concurrence*

### Restrictions on Mini-Motorcycle

The legislature has moved to deal with the problems caused by growing number of mini-motorcycles on the streets of Connecticut. Many youths too young to get a driver's license but seeking the freedom of driving have started buying mini-motorcycles or so-called "pocket bikes." Because of a loophole in our laws regarding motorized vehicles, these motorcycles are not required to be registered, nor are the operators required to have a driver's license. These vehicles are being driven on sidewalks and roads terrorizing pedestrians and creating safety hazards. These bikes are so small that often, automobile drivers can't see them, and accidents can result. Local law enforcement and city officials have been frustrated by the inability to restrict their use and control their abuse. Thanks to a new law, these vehicles are banned from use on any public road, sidewalk or public land. These mini-motorcycles will be restricted to private land where the operator has permission to use them. *HB 6744—passed in concurrence*

## Under 18 Driver's Licenses

Protecting our newest drivers continues to be a priority for the General Assembly and that has prompted some new guidelines for teen drivers. This session, legislation was passed to prohibit 16- and 17-year-old drivers from driving between 12:00 midnight and 5:00 a.m. unless they are going to or from work or school, or for religious or medical reasons. The bill further ensures our most inexperienced drivers are given more on the road training than in the past. *HB 5446—passed in concurrence*

## Transportation Initiative

Progress is being made to upgrade Connecticut's transportation system to reduce the critical problem of gridlock on our roads. Traffic congestion costs our citizens time, money and gas. This problem increases our dependency on foreign oil while contributing to pollution. The legislature, along with the governor, formed the Transportation Strategy Board to thoroughly examine and prioritize transportation projects that will help control traffic, promote economic growth and preserve our quality of life. This year the legislature will take the first step to implement this plan with Connecticut's biggest investment in transportation in two decades. Furthermore, we will make the biggest investment in mass transit in state history. Over the next decade we will invest hundreds of millions of dollars in fixing Interstate 95, one of the most congested highways in America. At the same time we will purchase 382 new rail cars for the Metro North railroad. These new cars will replace rail cars well past their life expectancy, modernize a fleet that has been plagued by reliability concerns, and expand the capacity of one of the most successful commuter rail lines in the country. *To be taken up in Special Session.*