

Senate Democrats Announce Juneteenth Agenda for Special Session

Hearing the Calls from Demonstrations, Senate Democrats Unveil Wide-Ranging Policy Proposals to Address Police Accountability and Systemic Racial Inequities

Criminal Justice & Police Accountability

Banning Chokeholds & Other Unnecessary Police Actions

To combat police brutality and end dangerous and unnecessary police actions

Recently, protestors have come together to demand justice and police accountability following the death of George Floyd. On May 25, Floyd died in Minnesota. While being arrested, Floyd was held down by a Minneapolis Police Officer's knee for eight minutes and 46 seconds resulting in his murder.

In 2019, Connecticut passed a police accountability law that bans police from firing guns at moving vehicles unless there is an imminent threat to life. It also mandates the release of police video recordings within 96 hours.

The Senate Democratic caucus will continue to fight for police accountability including further restrictions against how officers confront those who commit offenses and banning use of chokeholds or neck restraints. These neck holds refer to the practice of officers using their arm or leg to restrain someone's neck. These chokeholds restrict breathing and temporarily cut off blood flow to the brain and have the potential to go horribly wrong.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to combat police brutality and end dangerous and unnecessary police actions.

Prosecutorial Reform

To empower an Inspector General to investigate cases of police misconduct and use of force

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to create an Inspector General who can assume investigations into use-of-force by police and other police misconduct cases.

Decertifying Police Officers

To decertify police convicted of misconduct

An officer who uses violence or misconduct should be appropriately disciplined with consequences that prohibit them from continuing their law enforcement career. Right now, there

is no statewide policy for officers who act in ways that unnecessarily endanger the lives of the public.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to decertify police convicted of misconduct.

Banning "No Knock" Warrants

To prevent police from executing "no knock" warrants and entering a property without notification

A no-knock warrant is a warrant issued by a judge that allows law enforcement officers to enter a property without immediate prior notification of the residents, such as by knocking or ringing a doorbell.

Following a similar law passed in Louisville, Kentucky, Connecticut would look to ban these search warrants to help protect residents in the state. The Louisville City Council banned no-knock search warrants in the wake of Breonna Taylor's death. Taylor was shot eight times by Louisville police after officers forced their way inside her home and exchanged shots with her boyfriend in an attempted drug sting. Those officers executed a no-knock warrant to enter the home of Taylor.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to prevent police from executing "no knock" warrants and entering a property without notification.

Duty to Intervene

To require police to intervene if another is engaging in brutality or misconduct

Following the death of George Floyd, a man who died while a Minneapolis officer held him down with his knee during an arrest, new policies in police departments across the state should be implemented so events like this never occur again. While the actions of the officer that murdered George Floyd were reprehensible, three other police officers were at the scene of the incident. These officers either aided in restraining of Mr. Floyd or prevented others from intervening to save his life.

Police must be accountable to stopping or attempting to stop inappropriate force used by other officers. This crucial step would help eliminate certain police misconduct.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to require police to intervene if another is engaging in brutality or misconduct.

Requiring Body Cameras

To ensure all Connecticut police are equipped with body cameras

According to the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, approximately 44 towns in Connecticut currently have police departments with body cameras. While Senate Democrats led passage of a law in 2015 to establish guidelines for body cameras and provide state bonding for local purchase of the equipment, many towns still do not have body cameras. The slow process of municipal opt-in for body cameras must be replaced with a state mandate requiring municipalities with local police departments to equip all officers with body cameras.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to ensure all Connecticut police are equipped with body cameras

“Walking While Black” & Custodial Arrest Reform

To reform arrest policies in order to curb unnecessary detentions and custodial arrests

A 2017 investigation by ProPublica and the Florida Times-Union into enforcement of pedestrian violations by the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office brought to light a truth many know all too well: black pedestrians are disproportionately targeted and ticketed for minor violations.

The report revealed that blacks received 55 percent of all pedestrian tickets in Jacksonville, while only accounting for 29 percent of the population. In addition, blacks accounted for 68 percent of all recipients of tickets issued for “failing to cross the road at a right angle or shortest route.”

This enforcement is known as “walking while black” and reflects similar data seen around reforms to enforcement around driving while black.

In 1997, Gail Atwater was driving with two young children in Texas when she was stopped by a police officer and none of them were wearing their seatbelts. The officer could have written a citation, but performed a custodial arrest instead. The officer handcuffed her in front of her children, put her in his police vehicle, and brought her to jail. Atwater sued and said it was inappropriate but in 2001, the Supreme Court said while the officer’s discretion was questionable, they ruled in his favor.

The broad power for officers to make a custodial arrest in the Atwater case reflects similar disproportionate enforcement by police in cases of walking and driving while black.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to reform arrest policies in order to curb unnecessary detentions and custodial arrests.

Increasing the Power of Civilian Review Boards

To provide more power to Civilian Review Boards when reviewing an investigation

Civilian Review boards are composed of citizen representatives charged with investigating complaints by members of the public concerning misconduct by police officers. Generally, the power of a civilian review board is restricted to viewing an already completed internal police investigation and have not been very effective at effecting change, thus; they should be given more power and prevalence when reviewing a case.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to provide more power to Civilian Review Boards when reviewing an investigation.

Amy Cooper Law

To charge persons who call 9-1-1 making false accusations against someone based on race, gender, or religion

In May of 2020, a white woman named Amy Cooper called police on a black man, Christian Cooper (no relation) who was bird watching in Central Park. Their dispute began because Amy's dog was not on a leash contrary to the park's rules. Christian recorded video of part of their encounter and he is largely silent while she tells police he is threatening her and her dog.

This incident is one of many examples of a white person calling the police on African Americans and creating a false accusation while invoking the person's race.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to charge persons who call 9-1-1 making false accusations against someone based on race, gender, or religion.

Better Police Training

To provide better and more frequent anti-bias training for police

All public safety officials should receive the training necessary to complete their jobs in an ethical manner while keeping the community safe. Enhanced training for police officers including a recertification on anti-bias training on a yearly basis can improve the actions of police..

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to provide better and more frequent anti-bias training for police.

Economic Opportunity

Renaissance Districts

To create “renaissance” investments in affordable housing, retail, and social services programs that are focused on the education, health, and economic development for of the residents of in that neighborhood

You might be familiar with the Harlem Renaissance of the early 1900’s, when developers built too many apartments in upper Manhattan and African Americans moved in, attracting the likes of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Louis Armstrong, Paul Robeson, Josephine Baker and Marcus Garvey to create a black cultural mecca of music, literature, art, poetry, dance, business and politics.

The idea of creating so-called “renaissance” entertainment districts in downtown areas in Connecticut, where multiple arts and cultural sites are already present, has received bipartisan support in the legislature. But private-sector groups have gone beyond that limited vision, proposing “renaissance” investments in affordable housing, retail, and social services programs that are focused on education, health, and economic development for the residents of that neighborhood.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to create “renaissance” investments in affordable housing, retail, and social services programs that are focused on the education, health, and economic development for of the residents of in that neighborhood

Supporting Minority-Owned Businesses

To provide additional support for minority-owned businesses

In the past decade, minority-owned businesses in America grew at a rate 10 times faster than the overall small business growth rate – but those same minority business owners had a much harder time accessing small business loans than their white counterparts did. Lack of assets, credit scores, credit history, and the location of the business all played into those private sector decisions not to lend.

But over the years, Connecticut state government has worked to create and fund various minority-owned business loan programs that have, as the saying goes, “been missed by traditional private-sector outreach programs.”

But it’s more than just money: these state programs also help minority-owned businesses thrive and grow in three key areas: business training and tools, public and private financing, and government contract opportunities. Our cities need a thriving small business landscape to survive and thrive.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to provide additional support for minority-owned businesses.

Expanding Workforce Development

To get more students involved in job-training programs

There's an old saying that goes if you give a man a fish, he eats for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime. This is the same approach we've been taking to workforce development in Connecticut over the past few years, and it has to continue – and be expanded.

Whether you call it classroom to shop room floor, the workforce pipeline, the Connecticut Back to Work Initiative, SkillUp CT, or some other euphemism, the point is Connecticut's manufacturing sector is rebounding, in part due an aging and retiring workforce and in part due to the number of defense contractors and subcontractors we have in this state, and the size of the federal contracts we have. Connecticut is also home to a burgeoning bioscience industry, and with an aging population, we also continue to need people trained in various medical fields, such as nurse practitioners, personal care assistants, and home health aides.

Not every student will go on to college, which more and more is becoming prohibitively expensive, with the correlating crippling financial debt that affects graduates for years. That's where expanding our workforce development efforts come into play: getting more students from more regions of the state involved in more job-training programs that will guarantee a successful future.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to get more students involved in job-training programs.

Educational Inequality

Minority Teacher Support and Recruitment

To address the racial diversity of our teaching staff

Imagine you're a Caucasian student in a Connecticut public school – but only 20% of your teachers are white. That's what minority students face in Connecticut's public schools: they are 40% of our enrolled public school population, but less than 9% of their teachers are persons of color.

Even worse, two dozen Connecticut school districts have all-white teaching staffs, and only 4% of the students enrolled in teacher-prep college courses in Connecticut in 2017 were black. We can and must do better, since study after study shows that kids learn and do better when they have a good role model for a teacher.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to address the racial diversity of our teaching staff.

Expanding Access to High-Opportunity School Districts

To break down the historic inequities in our public education system where a child's zip code too often determines the quality of their education

Addressing Entrenched Educational Disparities in Connecticut

To address the educational disparities highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has reignited public debate about the huge rifts in educational opportunity in Connecticut, depending on what town you live in. When schools were closed in March, students in Glastonbury were sent home with an Apple iPad to aid their distance learning. Students in Bridgeport got none. That's what we call the 'digital divide.'

Meanwhile, Connecticut's historic achievement gaps between student groups is making very slow progress. Farmington's four-year high school graduation rate is 99%; in New Britain, it's 78%. 68% of Hartford students who receive a free or reduced-price meal will graduate in four years; in New Fairfield, 97% of students who receive a free or reduced-price meal will graduate on time. We need to do better.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to address the educational disparities highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and break down the historic inequities in our public education system where a child's zip code too often determines the quality of their education.

Native American History in School Curriculums

To ensure the history of Native Americans is taught in our public schools

The story of Native Americans in New England does not begin and end at the Thanksgiving table.

Unfortunately, many public school curriculums do not fully explore the thousands of years of Native American history in our region, which precedes European colonization and the American Revolution.

The first peoples of Connecticut have their own history which continues to this day, and it should be taught in our public schools along with the African American, Puerto Rican and Latino history studies now in our schools.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to ensure the history of Native Americans is taught in our public schools.

Health Care Reform & COVID-19

Addressing Overall Health Equity Issues

To address major health disparities by race and ethnicity which result in poorer health, premature deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs

According to the Connecticut Health Foundation, while Connecticut is one of the healthiest states in the country, major disparities by race and ethnicity in health result in poorer health, premature deaths and hundreds of millions in health care costs. Insurance coverage, access to regular health care providers, access to transportation, ability to afford food and housing and neighborhood safety can all cause this gulf, but even when receiving care, black and Latinx patients receive less comprehensive treatment than white patients, in addition to the negative mental/physical health issues that arise from discrimination and racism. By improving data collection, increasing access to health coverage, supporting community health workers and promoting better guidelines and treatments, among many other strategies, the state can improve overall public health.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to address major health disparities by race and ethnicity which result in poorer health, premature deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs.

Strengthening COVID-19 Testing and Contact Tracing

To improve Connecticut's approach to key COVID-19 prevention tools and to ensure a more equitable response

As the state has increased its rates of testing and contact tracing in light of COVID-19, significant issues have arisen. Drive-up testing sites made individuals without vehicles unable to get tested. Testing site locations were limited and took months to be fully available in the state's cities. Contact tracing will continue to have issues, especially among communities with higher rates of personal contact and with more points of common contact. Improving our state's approach to these key prevention and guideline tools will assist the state's response in a more equitable fashion.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to improve Connecticut's approach to key COVID-19 prevention tools and to ensure a more equitable response.

Addressing Disproportionate Cases and Deaths of Minority Populations from COVID-19

To address entrenched health disparities and strengthen state resources in the event of future public health emergencies

In Connecticut, black residents are 2.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than white residents; additionally, Hispanic residents have seen a death rate 67 percent higher. This is the latest chasm in case negatively impacting members of minority communities. Some of this is likely due to dense communities, higher rates of pre-existing conditions and likelihood of working high-risk "essential" jobs, and that only further exposes the gulf in health resources, care and results. By working to address why this disparity exists and what caused it, we can strengthen state resources in the event of future public health emergencies.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to address entrenched health disparities and strengthen state resources in the event of future public health emergencies.

Strengthening Telehealth

To expand telehealth services used during the COVID-19 pandemic

Access to doctors is an issue for some minority communities, especially ones relying on public transportation. According to statistics, in 2016, about one in three Hispanic Connecticut residents in 2016 did not have personal physicians. To cover this distance, expanding telehealth may bear fruit. By allowing access to medical care digitally, patients can receive regular checkups and inquire about minor illnesses, possibly catching conditions well before they could require further health safeguards in the future.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to expand telehealth services used during the COVID-19 pandemic

Capping Insulin Costs

To cap exorbitant insulin costs and provide patients access to emergency insulin supplies

Diabetes is one of the most prevalent diseases in health care exposing the disparity between white and black patients. In the United States, black adults are nearly twice as likely as white adults to develop type 2 diabetes – and that trend is rising since the 1990s. Various factors for the health disparity did not just include health and body factors but neighborhood, psychosocial, socioeconomic and behavioral factors. In Connecticut, black residents with diabetes are nearly four times as likely to have amputations due to diabetes and are more than twice as likely to die. Ensuring affordable access to insulin will help reduce these factors for all, but especially benefit minority communities.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to cap exorbitant insulin costs and provide patients access to emergency insulin supplies.

Supporting Community Health Workers

To fund community health workers who are an essential liaison between the health care and social services systems

Community Health Workers essentially work as a liaison between health care and social services systems, working directly with members of their communities to support public health. In 2019, legislation affirmed a certification program for Community Health Workers, ensuring their wider use, formally recognizing them and creating better support platforms to support their work. By funding CHW programs and paying the men and women working inside their communities, we can provide an even greater support for this important work.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to fund community health workers who are an essential liaison between the health care and social services systems.

Health Care Data Collection and Reporting

To expand data collection and reporting by race, gender, and other guidelines in order to expose health disparities and better guide health policies

As seen in preliminary and early COVID-19 statistics, the disease had an adverse effect on minority groups compared to the general population. This may be influenced by the disease impacting different people in different ways, but expanded data collection and reporting by race and gender, among other guidelines, could expose similar disparities and guide health policies better suited to respond to them. This could allow for future focuses toward preventing negative health outcomes before they happen and generally improve state public health outcomes.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to expand data collection and reporting by race, gender, and other guidelines in order to expose health disparities and better guide health policies.

Nursing Home Safeguards

To increase protections and strengthen procedures for nursing homes

With more than 60 percent of COVID-19 deaths having occurred in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, the state's initial response – and especially the response of care home owners – was nothing less than disastrous. We must implement new, stronger safeguards over nursing homes to prevent future waves of the virus, in addition to flu viruses and other illnesses, from causing as much damage. These safeguards can take many different forms – ensuring locations have access to PPE, ensuring infectious residents are grouped separately from non-infectious

ones, having a response plan in place to quickly limit the damage of any virus exposure inside – new guidelines in place will ensure no future disasters result and protect the vulnerable populations in these homes.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to increase protections and strengthen procedures for nursing homes.

Curbing Junk Health Insurance

To regulate the practices of so-called “junk” health insurance policies which deliberately target minority communities and people who have lost their jobs

"Junk" health insurance, generally a term used for short-term, limited-duration health plans, has received plenty of scorn in recent years. With COVID-19 continuing to harm and kill patients every day, and many residents having lost health care due to layoffs, it is more important than ever to end these deceptive practices.

We must better regulate health insurance to fight back against these purposely limited plans. Buyers may not know the limitations of their coverage until they need medical care. These plans do not just harm their buyers; they financially and medically harm the state when those buyers are forced to receive care through emergency networks.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to regulate the practices of so-called “junk” health insurance policies which deliberately target minority communities and people who have lost their jobs.

Protecting Workers

To ensure everyone injured on job, especially those impacted by COVID-19, get increased protections, including workers' compensation

Even before COVID-19 began spreading, Connecticut's workers compensation programs left much to be desired. With risk of serious illness coming from everyday tasks at work, the urgency is especially noticeable.

18 states have legislation in place making sure individuals injured on the job receive compensation. As one example of the potential changes available, Minnesota passed legislation allowing for workers compensation benefits for any peace officer, firefighter, paramedic, health care worker, correctional officer, emergency medical technician or certain child care worker who contract COVID-19. Illinois similarly passed legislation providing workers compensation to workers at essential businesses. Such a step would keep the individuals who kept our economy moving during the worst of the pandemic in good standing.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to ensure everyone injured on job, especially those impacted by COVID-19, get increased protections, including workers' compensation.

Tackling Insurance Premiums

To examine and regulate expected insurance rate increases during a time of economic distress and record insurance company profits

Even as insurance companies profited during the pandemic as their expenditures on elective procedures and similar spending was significantly reduced, expectations are that insurance rates will skyrocket in the near future. In a time of significant job loss and work reduction, not to mention many clients on Access Health CT who may not be able to afford that kind of price hike, it is imperative to put protections in place. By limiting maximum rate increases and creating subsidies for individuals needing reinsurance, Connecticut can ensure residents aren't unduly impacted by spiking rates.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to examine and regulate expected insurance rate increases during a time of economic distress and record insurance company profits.

Housing, the Environment, Voting Rights, and Recognition

Increasing Affordable Housing Opportunities

To increase access to and the availability of affordable housing, especially in areas with disproportionately low amounts of affordable housing

With housing costs rising faster than incomes – in 2017, half of renters paid more than 30 percent of income on rent – affordable housing is a vital tool to help residents. Policy ideas such as eliminating single-family zoning to allow for multifamily units and lower rents are one such idea. Expanding access for townhouse, duplex and apartment construction could go a long way in adding housing availability. Adjusting tax rates to charge more for land and less for structures encourages increased construction. Increasing access and availability of housing subsidies would allow residents to have more opportunities in moving and provide them with greater flexibility and variety of areas to live.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to increase access to and the availability of affordable housing, especially in areas with disproportionately low amounts of affordable housing.

Addressing Unequal Zoning Restrictions

To address the major impact that local zoning laws contribute to housing discrimination

Individual zoning decisions by towns have a long history of contributing to segregation. Regulating multi-family homes, use of a property and imposing similar restrictions on residents and construction can effectively zone out certain people, contributing to discrimination. Essentially, "exclusionary zoning" can effectively restrict members of a community to those able to afford certain requirements in housing; "inclusionary zoning," in contrast, can lead to better outcomes. These zoning restrictions can be changed and mandated to counteract what is essentially codified policy excluding people. Lifting restrictive housing restrictions can remove barriers to individuals joining communities.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to address the major impact that local zoning laws contribute to housing discrimination.

Addressing Environmental Injustice

To tackle the racial inequities exacerbated by pollution and emissions, which disproportionately impact minorities

Compared to white children, black children are five times more likely to need emergency treatment for asthma, and Hispanic children four times more likely to need that care. Why is that?

It's because people of color are much more likely to live near polluters and breathe polluted air. Particulate matter – the natural and manmade microscopic suspensions that are air pollution – has been linked to lung conditions, heart attacks, premature deaths, asthma, low birth weights and high blood pressure.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to tackle the racial inequities exacerbated by pollution and emissions, which disproportionately impact minorities.

Expanding Access to Absentee Ballots

To provide increased access to absentee ballots for voters and election workers concerned about their health and safety during the coronavirus pandemic

With the threat of COVID-19 pervasive in our lives and the possibility of a second wave of infections lingering, Connecticut voters deserve the safety and security of a safe means of voting.

In Wisconsin, when primary election voting moved forward in April without precautions, researchers found that at least 72 new infections were likely caused by close interactions at the polls. Voters should not have to choose between safety and their rights, especially as 16 percent of Connecticut residents are over the age of 65, meaning at least 1 in 6 voters are susceptible to severe complications from a COVID-19 infection. By allowing absentee ballots to be sent by

mail, Connecticut can ensure that its residents remain safe while able to exercise their civic duties.

Senate Democrats will propose legislation to provide increased access to absentee ballots for voters and election workers concerned about their health and safety during the coronavirus pandemic.

Juneteenth as a State Holiday

To establish Juneteenth, June 19, as a state holiday

On June 19, 1865, the Union announced that the Civil War was over in Galveston, Texas, with leaders proudly proclaiming the end of slavery. With that historical context, Senate Democrats will propose legislation declaring June 19 as a state holiday, commemorating the freedom of millions earned that day and the end of humans being held as property. Forty-nine of fifty states recognize Juneteenth in some way, and Connecticut recognized it as a ceremonial date in 2003, but declaring it a state holiday will allow for its historical significance to be truly recognized each year.