



A JUST CONNECTICUT: Reforming our criminal justice system, protecting consumers, and expanding voting rights

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

More Protections in Family Court

To expand the Civil Gideon pilot program, create a Benchbook for judges, and require proper training based on the Benchbook.

Protecting Victims and Changing the Statute of Limitations

To provide an opportunity for victims to pursue justice in civil court for sexual assault through a change in the state's statute of limitations.

Combating Hate Crimes & Violent Right-Wing Extremism

To finance and create a new department at the Connecticut State Police which will specialize in investigating far-right extremist groups and individuals.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Protecting Net Neutrality

To provide state-level protections for a free and open internet.

Stopping Deceptive Collections Practices

To expand the prohibitions on deceptive practices to include any unreasonable burden or requirement a creditor would place on a debtor in making payments.

Consumer Privacy Act

To allow consumers to know what personal data and information is collected by companies, and the ability to opt-out of the sale of personal information or to delete their information from the business.

Curbing Scam & Spam Robo Phone Calls

To cut spam and scam robo phone calls, emails and text messages and eliminate the ability for scammers to profit off of consumers.

VOTING RIGHTS

Increasing Access to Absentee Ballots

To streamline voting by allowing online applications for absentee ballots.

Background on Legislation Proposed

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

More Protections in Family Court

To expand the Civil Gideon pilot program, create a Benchbook for judges, and require proper training based on the Benchbook.

Two years ago, Connecticut established a two-year pilot program that provided legal representation for applicants (victims) and respondents (offenders) in restraining order matters.

Known as the "Civil Gideon Restraining Order Pilot Project", the non-profit Connecticut Legal Services received a grant to represent the victims, and the Office of Public Defenders represented the offenders.

We did this because victims of domestic violence who are represented in court by a lawyer achieve more favorable outcomes in court than victims without a lawyer. In short, lack of legal representation denies people justice, and it leave victims to remain in harm's way.

This year, the Senate Democratic caucus is committed to expanding the Civil Gideon pilot program, thereby helping more victims of domestic violence achieve justice and remain safe. We'll also look at creating new legal procedures for judges (called a "bench book") which helps them hear certain types of cases and guides them in making decisions.

Protecting Victims and Changing Statute of Limitations

To provide an opportunity for victims to pursue justice in civil court for sexual assault through a change in the state's statute of limitations.

During the 2019 legislative session, the General Assembly passed the "Time's Up," bill, which increases certain sexual harassment penalties, extends the time limits people have to file lawsuits for sexual assault, allow more time for criminal prosecution of sexual assault, and require more employer-sponsored sexual harassment training.

Before the passage of the Act, the statute of limitations (SOL) for damages arising from sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or sexual assault was set at 30 years beyond a minor's 18th birthday. The Time's Up Act expanded this extra protection for minors to those under 21 as well, and states that the SOL for all victims under 21 is 30 years beyond the victim's 21st birthday. The bill did not change the SOL for adult victims.

Section 14 of Time's Up created a task force to consider whether the SOL for civil claims of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and sexual assault should be extended and whether a look-back-window should be established. The Senate Democratic caucus will work to expand the opportunity for individuals to report incidents of civil sexual assault.

Combating Hate Crimes & Violent Right-Wing Extremism

To finance and create a new department at the Connecticut State Police which will specialize in investigating far right extremist groups and individuals.

In the past few years, hate crimes and far-right extremism have been on the rise. In 2017, the FBI recorded a sharp increase in hate crimes across the United States compared to 2016, including a 37% rise in anti-Semitic offenses and a 23% increase in overall religious-based crimes.

In 2017, there were 110 bias crime incidents reported by Connecticut police. Victims of these crimes include individuals, businesses, government, and religious organizations. Race, ethnicity, and ancestry accounts for 62% of the bias motivations and vandalism is the most frequently reported bias crime offense. The most commonly reported religious bias in Connecticut is anti-Jewish.

As a result of the increase in far-right extremism and with the federal government unwilling to protect different communities of Connecticut, the state should fund a new department at the Connecticut State Police which will specialize in investigating far right extremist groups and individuals

Data from [2017 Connecticut Bias Crime Report](#)

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Protecting Net Neutrality

To provide state level protections for a free and open internet.

Net neutrality is the principle that all Internet service providers should enable access to all content and applications regardless of the source, and without favoring or blocking particular products or websites. In November 2014, President Barack Obama recommended that the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reclassify broadband Internet service as a telecommunications service in order to preserve net neutrality. In February 2015, the FCC did just that and ruled in favor of net neutrality by reclassifying broadband access as a telecommunications service.

The Trump Administration has fought to repeal these regulations. In December 2017, the FCC voted to repeal the regulations by reclassifying broadband providers so that they are not considered common carriers under Title II of the Communications Act of 1936. In October 2019, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals issued a 200-page decision that largely sided with the FCC on its decision to roll back several Obama-era net neutrality protections. However, the court also ruled that states could enact their own protections. In 2018, the State Senate passed a bill to restore net neutrality in Connecticut but the bill died in the House of Representatives.

The Senate Democratic caucus will work to ensure net neutrality is preserved in Connecticut and the Internet remains open and accessible to all.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/technology/net-neutrality-fcc-vote-internet-utility.html>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/10/01/appeals-court-upholds-trump-administrations-cancelling-net-neutrality-rules/>

Stopping Deceptive Collections Practices

To expand the prohibitions on deceptive practices to include any unreasonable burden or requirement the creditor would place on the debtor in making payments.

If you've ever fallen behind in some kind of debt payment, you know the routine: the calls came like clockwork, several times a week, sometimes at bedtime, with a threatening voice getting more and more intimidating with every message. Sometimes there are threats of arrest or garnished wages. There are 130,000 people in America employed at nearly 5,000 debt-collection agencies making calls to a third of the U.S. population.

Senate Democrats will propose a bill that would expand these federal prohibitions to include a ban on a debt collector placing any unreasonable burdens or requirements on you in order to pay off that debt.

Consumer Privacy Act

To allow for consumers to know what personal data and information is collected by companies and the ability to opt-out of the sale of personal information or to delete their information from the business.

In the era of big data, large corporations gather personal information on consumers often times without the person knowing the information is held by the company much less being used for profit. People around the world are beginning to see the impact of data collection and deserve a stronger level of privacy and security.

This year, Senate Democrats will follow similar action taken by California under the California Consumer Privacy Act and propose legislation to protect consumers with new privacy rights.

New legal rights for Connecticut residents would include:

- The right to know what personal information is collected, used, shared or sold, both as to the categories and specific pieces of personal information;
- The right to delete personal information held by businesses and by extension, a business's service provider;
- The right to opt-out of sale of personal information. Consumers are able to direct a business that sells personal information to stop selling that information. Children under the age of 16 must provide opt in consent, with a parent or guardian consenting for children under 13.
- The right to non-discrimination in terms of price or service when a consumer exercises a privacy right under CCPA.

Curbing Scam & Spam Robo Phone Calls

To cut spam and scam robo phone calls, emails and text messages and eliminate the ability for scammers to profit off of consumers.

In the last few years, robocalls have surged in "popularity," becoming a nuisance that can be anywhere from distracting to threatening personal information. According to FCC consumer complaint data, in 2018, Connecticut had the eighth-highest rate of complaints nationwide, with the third-most reports of unwanted calls on a per-capita basis. Robocalls waste our time, are frequently fraudulent, and make it difficult to conduct regular business, especially with number spoofing, which can make a legitimate call seem like a robocall and vice versa. According to the YouMail Robocall Index, in December, nationwide, 1,700 robocalls were placed *per second.*

The Senate Democratic Caucus will find ways to prevent robocalls in our state. The U.S. House of Representatives last month approved legislation that, if enacted, would create strict mandates for telephone carriers to block illegal robocalls and push federal agencies to combat them. Among ideas proposed include requirements for carriers to provide users with call-authentication technology and robocall-blocking features, as well as for the Justice Department to impose tougher penalties on companies found to use robocalls. With no guarantee this legislation passes the Senate, we will need to consider options like these and further standards that can prevent fraud and frustration for consumers.

<https://robocallindex.com/>

<https://www.security.org/resources/consumer-complaints-over-time/>

VOTING RIGHTS

Increasing Access to Absentee Ballots

To streamline voting by allowing online applications for absentee ballots.

Connecticut is one of only 11 states not permitting early voting, and currently, only active military members, those with illnesses, religious beliefs or disabilities preventing in-person voting, election officials working outside of their own direct polling place, and those out-of-town on Election Day can vote absentee.

From college students studying away from home, to people vacationing in Florida, to people volunteering for the Peace Corps, the Senate Democratic Caucus is aware that thousands of people who meet the legal threshold to receive an absentee ballot but an antiquated process prevents these voters from receiving a ballot through an online application process. We will introduce legislation that would create a centralized online application, making it easier for people to access and apply for absentee ballots.