



## **A SMART AND RESPONSIBLE CONNECTICUT:** Strengthening our economy, economic competitiveness, and education system

### **ECONOMIC COMPETITION & FAIRNESS**

#### **Housing Solutions for Connecticut**

To provide for the creation of housing opportunity zones within which certain incentives are available for new construction or substantial rehabilitation of residential units.

#### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Jobs**

To expand existing and establish new incentives for large and small businesses that hire new employees under new and expanded criteria such as unemployed, low income, veterans, or disabled.

To support small businesses through cutting unnecessary regulations and red tape.

#### **Legalization, Taxation and Regulation of the Retail Sale and Recreational Use of Cannabis**

To legalize, tax and regulate the retail sale, personal growth and recreational use of cannabis by individuals twenty-one years of age or older.

### **EDUCATION**

#### **Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Education in Schools**

To provide that the teacher in-service training programs include the warning signs of mental illness, substance-use disorder and suicidal behavior in youth. To also provide mental health awareness to students in grades 6-12.

#### **Mental Health on College Campuses**

To enact the recommendations of The Taskforce on Mental Health on College Campuses.

#### **Revamping Behavioral Suspensions**

To protect students by curbing school suspensions and finding alternative behavioral solutions.

#### **Financial Literacy in Schools**

To require financial literacy instruction for pupils enrolled in grades sixth through eighth and require that a school district incorporate financial literacy instruction to pupils enrolled in those grades.

#### **Mandating FAFSA Completion**

To require the completion of the FAFSA for Connecticut high school students to increase the number of students who qualify for and receive federal financial support for college.

## **Background on Legislation Proposed**

### **ECONOMIC COMPETITION & FAIRNESS**

#### **Housing Solutions for Connecticut**

*To provide for the creation of housing opportunity zones within which certain incentives are available for new construction or substantial rehabilitation of residential units.*

There are 72 Opportunity Zones in Connecticut, part of a federal project to incentivize rebuilding American cities. These zones are located in 27 different municipalities across the state. Whether the areas are used for real estate projects, businesses or energy-related projects, developers are eligible for tax benefits if they move capital gains into an associated fund within six months of purchasing an asset. In exchange for investing, those developers can receive tax breaks through tax reductions or eliminations should they continue to support the investments.

The Senate Democratic Caucus recognizes that these Opportunity Zones are predominantly located in lower-income and dormant areas and therefore represent an opportunity for successful development and investment, supporting municipal and state revenues and rebuilding areas of the state seen as struggling. By enacting the Housing Opportunity Zones Act, Senate Democrats can provide for the creation of new opportunity zones, providing more opportunities to rejuvenate Connecticut's housing and business strength and bring new development to our municipalities.

#### **21st Century Jobs**

*To expand existing and establish new incentives for large and small businesses that hire new employees under new and expanded criteria such as unemployed, low income, veterans, or disabled. To support small businesses through cutting unnecessary regulations and red tape.*

While Connecticut has an unemployment rate under 4 percent, there are still numerous hurdles to finding employment for some people in the community. Unemployed people may struggle to find new job opportunities and may experience bias against them by hiring managers. There are similar issues impacting those with low incomes, military veterans and individuals with disabilities – bias, resources and availability of positions may negatively impact their ability to find consistent and beneficial employment.

A strong economy needs to support everyone seeking to work in it. Senate Democrats understand this issue requires attention and will work to enforce and strengthen the 21st-century Connecticut economy by providing incentives for businesses large and small that hire new employees under a variety of criteria. That may serve to counteract difficulties and roadblocks faced by individuals otherwise struggling to attain employment and strengthen our state's economy by further lowering the unemployment rate.

#### **Legalization, Taxation and Regulation of the Retail Sale and Recreational Use of Cannabis**

*To legalize, tax and regulate the retail sale, personal growth and recreational use of cannabis by individuals twenty-one years of age or older.*

*Legalization Process:* Eleven states and Washington D.C. have legalized cannabis for recreational use – Alaska, California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington – with 10 allowing cannabis production and sales with regulation and taxing. Vermont was the first state to legalize cannabis through [the legislative process](#). In 2019, Illinois enacted legalization through the legislative process.

*Taxing and Regulation:* Cannabis has been prohibited on a federal level since the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937. Alcohol was similarly prohibited for 13 years, but was repealed in favor of regulation and taxation. Colorado and other states that have legalized cannabis have followed this approach. Colorado has issued over 40,000 licenses to work directly in the cannabis industry. An economic analysis found the legal cannabis industry generated \$2.4 billion in overall economic activity in 2015. Congress has taken notice of how states are managing the legal cannabis industry. In November 2019, the House Judiciary Committee in Congress [approved legislation](#) removing cannabis from Schedule 1 of the Controlled Substances Act, [initiate a 5% tax](#) on cannabis sales in states that have legalized cannabis, and allow the Small Business Administration to issue loans and grants to cannabis-related businesses. The Marijuana Policy Project projects, following an early sales period, Connecticut would raise \$166 million per year from sales to Connecticut residents alone.

*Health and Safety Risks of Unregulated Sale of Cannabis:* The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found there were 497,000 Connecticut residents who used cannabis annually on average for 2015 and 2016. As a result, buyers can be sold cannabis tainted with harmful contaminants. Cannabis in a legal market can be regulated to be tested for contaminants, have warning labels, and child-proof packaging.

*Social Justice and Criminal Justice Reform:* The prohibition of the possession and sale of cannabis has failed in its intent to stop the sale or use of cannabis. The "war on drugs" is a similar failure and has led to a staggering racial disparity when it comes to enforcement of laws criminalizing cannabis. African-Americans were found to be 3.73 times more likely than whites to be arrested for cannabis possession, despite similar rates of use, according to a study by the ACLU. A report by the ACLU found racial disparities for cannabis possession increased in 38 of 50 states and in the District of Columbia [between 2001 and 2010](#). The proposed legislation would facilitate the expungements of criminal convictions for conduct that will now be made legal.

In 2020, the Senate Democratic Caucus will take action to legalize, tax and regulate the retail sale, personal growth and recreational use of cannabis by individuals over twenty-one years old.

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/marijuana-overview.aspx>

<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/20/house-committee-approves-bill-decriminalizing-marijuana-on-the-federal-level.html>

<https://bigthink.com/politics-current-affairs/marijuana-legalization-bill?rebelltitem=1#rebelltitem1>

<https://www.aclu.org/report/report-war-marijuana-black-and-white?redirect=criminal-law-reform/war-marijuana-black-and-white>

## **EDUCATION**

### **Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Education in Schools**

*To provide that the teacher in-service training programs include the warning signs of mental illness, substance-use disorder and suicidal behavior in youth. To also provide mental health awareness to students in grades 6-12.*

Half of all lifetime mental illnesses develop by age 14, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. When symptoms manifest, they can be jarring, scary and confusing, leading to behavior that is unusual, but can lead to punishment as much as medical help. As many as 20 percent of youth suffer from mental illness but may not know. Childhood and especially teenage years can be challenging and disorienting for even the most prepared student; a child with mental illness can suffer unduly. Those with mental illness, especially those with untreated mental illness, are nearly twice as likely to develop cardiovascular and metabolic diseases; are more likely to be unemployed; are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school; and are responsible for one of every eight emergency room visits.

Additionally, nearly half of people who die by suicide had diagnosed mental health conditions. The Senate Democratic Caucus knows that we must put safeguards in place as early as possible to inform and protect our youth. In 2020, we will work to ensure that teacher-in-service training programs will use evidence-based training to ensure teachers can a) recognize signs and symptoms of mental illness and substance use disorders, for the latter including substances including opioids and alcohol; b) refer individuals to mental health or substance use disorder services; c) ensure safe de-escalation of a crisis situation involving someone with a mental illness.

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/mental-disorders/>  
<https://www.nami.org/find-support/teens-and-young-adults>

#### Mental Health on College Campuses

*To enact the recommendations of The Taskforce on Mental Health on College Campuses.*

The stigma of mental health is finally starting to lessen as people discuss it more plainly and openly, but far too many individuals are still negatively impacted by it – and college students are among the most vulnerable. Stress and anxiety are rising on college campuses to rates of as many as 60 percent of surveyed students reporting symptoms of anxiety and 40 percent experiencing depressive symptoms, yet only 10 to 15 percent of students reported seeking assistance for these problems. As many as 75 percent of mental illnesses arise before the age of 24, but only 20 percent of students reported seeking help, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. What's worse – half of students with mental health problems who withdraw from school because of those problems never access the mental health services on their campus.

In 2019, the Senate Democratic Caucus took action, creating legislation forming a task force studying current policies and procedures in place to prevent and/or treat mental illnesses in students. The task force will further recommend policies regarding how to approach this issue in February. Upon those recommendations, lawmakers will work to counteract this growing mental health crisis and protect the future generations of Connecticut's workforce.

[https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Publications-Reports/Survey-Reports/College-Students-Speak\\_A-Survey-Report-on-Mental-H.pdf](https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Publications-Reports/Survey-Reports/College-Students-Speak_A-Survey-Report-on-Mental-H.pdf)  
<https://www.nami.org/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2012/College-Survey-50-Percent-of-College-Students-with>

#### Revamping Behavioral Suspensions

*To protect students by curbing school suspensions and finding alternative behavioral solutions.*

Connecticut students are four times more likely to be thrown out of a class for an emotional disturbance than the average student, with one-third of these students suspended or expelled during the 2017-18

school year. Black and Hispanic students in Connecticut are disproportionately more likely to be suspended than white students. In the 2017-18 school year, one in seven Black students and one in 10 Hispanic students received at least one suspension compared to one in 25 white students suspended. Black students make up less than 3 percent of all students in Greenwich, yet they received 15 percent of suspensions and expulsions in Greenwich Public Schools.

Meriden Public Schools have taken steps to decrease high rates of discipline for students of color. "Hall monitors" have been rebranded as "climate specialists" who will check in and ask students how they are, instead of calling out behaviors, such as wearing earbuds. Also, each high school in Meriden hosts youth dialogue sessions at least three times a year for students to have the opportunity to provide feedback to administrators. Administrators attribute these strategies for an 82 percent drop in suspensions and 93 percent drop in expulsions.

California enacted legislation in 2019 to curb suspensions in favor of alternative methods for addressing student actions, including disrupting student activity and defying authority of teachers and school officials. The legislation extended a prohibition on suspension of students enrolled in K-3 to include grades 4-8. The Multi-Tiered System of Support is intended by the legislation to be an option for supporting students. The system aims for students to develop their social and emotional skills, and understand the impact of their actions.

Students who are removed from the classroom for a minor or non-violent offense lose valuable learning time, especially at a young age. The Senate Democratic Caucus will take action to curb school suspensions and find alternative behavioral methods so Connecticut students, particularly students of color, are not at risk of losing time in the classroom.

<https://www.greenwichtime.com/local/article/CT-seeks-cuts-in-higher-suspension-rates-for-13655722.php>  
[http://custom.statenet.com/public/resources.cgi?id=ID:bill:CA2019000S419&ciq=ncsl5&client\\_md=07ebeda9d126e39bc77931861417c39e&mode=current\\_text](http://custom.statenet.com/public/resources.cgi?id=ID:bill:CA2019000S419&ciq=ncsl5&client_md=07ebeda9d126e39bc77931861417c39e&mode=current_text)

### Financial Literacy in Schools

*To require financial literacy instruction for pupils enrolled in grades sixth through eighth and require that a school district incorporate financial literacy instruction to pupils enrolled in those grades.*

Financial literacy provides individuals with an understanding of how to manage and build wealth, including learning how to create a household budget and determine how to buy a house. Yet, only 22 states require high school students to take a course in economics and fewer states (17 states) require high school students to take a course in personal finance, according to a 2018 report by [the Council for Economic Education \(CCE\)](#). The report found personal finance and economic education resulted in a reduced amount of personal debt, more likely to have emergency savings, and individuals less likely to use high cost methods of borrowing. In 2019, [New Jersey enacted legislation](#) directing the New Jersey State Board of Education to require school districts to have financial literacy instruction taught in grades 6-8. The instruction includes budgeting, credit, and investment.

In the 2019 legislative session, Connecticut lawmakers considered SB 852 and HB 6625. SB 852 would have included personal financial management in the public school curriculum and established a pilot program for the teaching of personal financial management in certain school districts. HB 6625 would have added to the high school graduation requirements a course in financial literacy. The course may have included, but not limited to, an understanding of checking and savings accounts and loans. An

understanding of loans and investment could influence an individual when considering long-term financial decisions, such as taking out loans for college tuition. Connecticut graduates had the highest average student debt upon graduation in 2018, according to the [Institute for College Access and Success](#).

The Senate Democratic Caucus believes financial literacy is necessary to support the long-term financial health of Connecticut's current and future young residents. In the 2020 legislative session, lawmakers will support legislation requiring financial literacy instruction for students in grades 6-8 and require a school district incorporate financial literacy instruction to students enrolled in those grades.

<https://www.councilforeconed.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018-SOS-Layout-18.pdf>

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/financial-services-and-commerce/financial-literacy-2019-legislation.aspx>

<https://ticas.org/our-work/student-debt/>

<https://www.courant.com/the-thread/hc-thread-student-debt-older-millennials-20191202-o2yiwyu63zcfzhqaszjojjgwdi-story.html#//>

#### Mandating FAFSA Completion

*To require the completion of the FAFSA for Connecticut high school students to increase the number of students who qualify for and receive federal financial support for college.*

The FAFSA, or Free Application for Federal Student Aid, is a vital piece of the puzzle for many students seeking higher education. Many students are eligible for financial aid, whether need-based or unsubsidized, can strongly benefit from filling out a form, as it will provide them with increased access to financial aid and allowing them to benefit from programs they may not otherwise discover. It does not just provide a benefit to students, but to the state an applicant lives in – that information leads to increased representation for the state on federal forms, and therefore helps that state attain more financial aid.

The Senate Democratic Caucus believes that every student should know the opportunities available to them. That's why, in the 2020 legislative session, we will support legislation mandating students complete the FAFSA. Some students may find out they can afford to continue their education. Others may learn there are opportunities available to them they did not know existed. Their state benefits by receiving more federal educational aid. It benefits every party involved.