

2017 Plan to Strengthen Connecticut Cities



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depends on the strength of
our cities.*



The strength of our state depends on the strength of our cities. If our cities have healthy economies, strong education systems, living-wage jobs, and empowered citizens our state can be an even better place to live, work and raise a family. But if our cities are struggling, our state is in trouble.

Connecticut is a great state with much to offer all people. But the multitude of barriers to economic freedom and success in our urban communities are staggering and cannot be ignored. Transforming our state's urban areas into centers for economic development and cultural advancement with opportunities for all people is vital to move our state forward.

Many of the problems that impact our cities occur in non-urban areas of the state as well. No town is devoid of economic challenges, poverty, drug abuse or unemployment. But the high concentration of these challenges in urban areas make it all the more imperative that we look to help our cities by addressing not only the effects of these problems, but actually tackling the causes of these issues.

The following proposals offered by members of the Connecticut Senate Republican Caucus outline the first steps we believe policymakers must take to begin improving daily life in Connecticut cities. People need to have an opportunity to gradually move from state assistance to independence to climb up and out of poverty. Businesses need to see new value in expanding in our cities. Young people in our urban communities need access to job training and education programs that prepare them for living wage jobs. And those who are struggling with drug addiction, mental illness, and associations with criminal activity need to have access to quality supports to rehabilitate themselves and turn their lives around for themselves and their families.

Helping our cities should not be a partisan issue. We hope that the following proposals will be the start to a long conversation to include ideas from all individuals no matter their party affiliation. We believe that all people – of all income levels, of all races and ethnicities, and from all communities – should have the opportunity to succeed in this state and in this country. We hope to continue this dialogue with all those who agree with that core principle.



Len Fasano
Senate Republican President Pro Tempore

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Create a Ladder to Success

One of the most rampant problems in Connecticut cities is poverty. Despite our state's significant pockets of wealth, poverty statewide has not changed much in recent years and has averaged 10.5 percent in 2015. It has also remained significantly higher in urban areas. For example, also in 2015, Hartford's poverty rate was 28.3 percent, Bridgeport's poverty rate was 20.6 percent, New Haven's poverty rate was 31.5 percent and Waterbury's poverty rate was 27.3 percent. While the state's unemployment rate was 5.6 percent in 2015, Hartford's unemployment rate was 10.4 percent that same year, Bridgeport's was 8.7 percent, Waterbury's was 9.3 percent, and New Haven's was 7.5 percent.

To reduce poverty and unemployment, and thereby strengthen our cities which face poverty and unemployment rates that far exceed rates in non-urban communities, Connecticut must look at new ways to support workforce entry and empower individuals to break the multi-generational cycle of poverty. Rather than being trapped in a system in which reliance on government dependence is a necessity, people need opportunities to pull themselves up and out of poverty.

To help people access opportunities, we have to address the financial cliff in the current system that families face when transitioning from unemployment into the workforce. For example, under the current system in Connecticut a single mother with a child who is need of state services can receive up to \$30,000 a year worth of support including Medicaid, child care, food stamps and other benefits. But if that mother takes a job, she would lose all her cash benefits averaging approximately \$5,800 annually after she made just over \$16,000 annually. So while an individual may want to seek out a job, a family could actually stand to lose a significant amount on which their family depends by doing so. Essentially, in order to take a job, an individual could be faced with an immediate cliff and loss of funds, thereby putting their family at risk. Such a system leaves people feeling trapped and facing a dilemma that would challenge any family. If an individual takes a job, their family could suffer. But if they remain unemployed they can't ever climb up and out of the system.

By minimizing the reduction to benefits when an individual first goes back to work, this proposal would make people more financially stable and able to handle returning to work and losing a portion of their state benefits. The reality is that in many cases if someone who is unemployed gets a new part time job, that entry level income will not be enough to match the funding their family has come to rely on through unemployment compensation and additional support services and benefits. Eventually, once a person is back in the workforce for some time and earning more than entry level or working more hours they will be earning enough to exceed state benefits. But until that happens, the cliff one faces when starting a new job makes going back to work an impossible choice. If a person doesn't think their family can survive that cliff, then they are stuck in a cycle of unemployment and poverty. This proposal seeks to break that cycle.

LADDER TO SUCCESS:

To create a ladder to success, we must accelerate entry into the workforce by instituting a phase out for benefits under Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), Care4Kids* and Unemployment Compensation, instead of people simply sharply losing benefits once they reach a certain pay threshold.

By reducing the challenges a family would face from a sharp drop off in unemployment benefits, this proposal seeks to encourage workforce reentry and help make more people able to afford to go back to work and begin earning again so they can eventually move their families off of state assistance completely. This would lead to future long-term savings to the state and a better quality of life for many families.

Phasing out benefits instead of a sharp elimination of benefits will help remove the impediments to earn more in wages and provide peace of mind to individuals who are fearful of taking a job and losing benefits that their families have come to depend on. This is common sense public policy that would contribute to economic growth and help break the multi-generational cycle of poverty.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION

[Senate Bill No. 774](#) An Act Extending Temporary Family Assistance Benefits to Encourage Employment

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That section 17b-112 of the general statutes be amended to permit an extension of not more than twelve months in temporary family assistance benefits for individuals who have found work but would otherwise have their benefits terminated because their income exceeds ninety per cent of their temporary family assistance benefits.

Statement of Purpose: To provide an incentive for temporary family assistance recipients to obtain employment.

[Senate Bill No. 276](#) An Act Concerning Child Care Assistance for Working Parents

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That section 17b-749 of the general statutes be amended to require the Commissioner of Early Childhood to open enrollment for child care subsidies to parents who earn not more than seventy-five per cent of the state-wide median income.

Statement of Purpose: To provide support to working parents whose incomes exceed fifty per cent but not seventy-five per cent of state-wide median income.

[Senate Bill No. 599](#) An Act Concerning the Unemployment Reduction Amount

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That section 31-229 of the general statutes be amended to decrease the unemployment reduction amount.

Statement of Purpose: To increase unemployment compensation benefits for individuals working part-time.

*We also propose modifying the state budget to reinstate recent reductions to Care4Kids. This will immediately help 4,000 families that earn between \$26,760 and \$44,000 to once again receive child care assistance that was eliminated on July 1, 2016.

Build a Stronger, Safer Community

Everyone in our cities deserves a safe place to live, work and raise their families. Statistics show that when compared to suburban and rural areas in our state, cities face higher crime rates. For example statewide murder and manslaughter offenses increased by 3.6 percent from 2014 to 2015. But in Hartford, those offenses increased 68 percent during the same period of time. In Bridgeport, murder and manslaughter offenses increased 73 percent.

It is clear that more must be done to address issues surrounding crime, public safety and rehabilitation of former offenders throughout our state, and especially in our cities where those needs are magnified by high crime rates.

In order to strengthen urban communities, Connecticut should expand its community policing efforts to foster better relationships between law enforcement and the public. Connecticut also must pursue policies to strategically expand mental health and substance abuse treatment to former offenders who are reentering public communities including urban areas to help people find success in their recovery and reduce recidivism.

COMMUNITY POLICING:

Community policing has shown that much stronger and healthier relationships are built between police officers and communities if officers meet and interact with the public. The goal of such interactions is to make it clear that the role of a local officer is to be a community protector helping the public and keeping the community that they share a safe place.

We believe Connecticut needs to encourage community policing as well as diversifying police forces especially in our cities. We want to encourage more police officers to work outside of cruisers and get onto a beat, traveling through communities by walking or bicycling. As part of these efforts, we also believe the state must encourage conversation between police and private and non-profit sector groups such as hospitals, mental health facilities, churches, and local business groups in order to foster more community engagement and interaction. By encouraging police to work with those groups to assess the specific needs of local neighborhoods we believe we can help to better prevent crime. We also believe Connecticut must encourage police departments to explore partnerships with clergy to organize home visits with young people in our cities who are at risk for criminal activity. By working with people who are already trying to provide intervention support and facilitate parental action when appropriate, police can play a bigger role in prevention efforts to curtail problems such as juvenile crime and drug abuse.

COMMUNITY REENTRY REFORM:

Drug abuse must be treated as a public health issue, not just a criminal issue. While someone can serve time for a crime, unless they are truly rehabilitated and treated for their addiction, no amount of time incarcerated can resolve a drug problem. That is why Connecticut needs expanded support in providing substance abuse and mental health treatment to former offenders reentering communities.

People deserve a second chance. To reduce recidivism, and to give former offenders an opportunity to truly turn their lives around, Connecticut needs support services for those reentering the community after serving out a sentence. Specifically, we propose expanding drug treatment and testing after release and exploring state partnerships with nonprofits and faith-based groups to assist with community monitoring of individuals recently released in certain high risk neighborhoods including Connecticut cities.

We propose implementing a “gatekeeper” pilot program in New Haven and New London to provide pre-prosecution alternatives to incarceration. Under the proposed pilot program, participating courts would use a “gatekeeper” approach with those on a criminal docket to identify and track those who are vulnerable to crime due to circumstances including homelessness, a history of substance abuse or mental illness. Rather than prosecuting these at-risk individuals, the program would direct them to intensive assistance to address the issues they face. The goal would be to stabilize these individuals as opposed to incarcerating them. Support would include housing, substance abuse counseling, and treatment for mental health issues. If alternative methods fail to rehabilitate individuals, the ability to reinstate charges would remain.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Senate Bill No. 237 An Act Establishing a Pilot Program to Provide Enhanced Community Services to those in the Criminal Justice System

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That the general statutes be amended to provide that: (1) The Chief Court Administrator shall establish a pilot program to serve the geographical area courts for New Haven, New London and Norwich in the judicial districts of New Haven and New London in identifying and tracking the homeless, addicted or mentally ill persons entering the criminal justice system; (2) the office of the state's attorney for each such judicial district shall screen in order to identify and track persons arrested who are homeless, drug addicted or mentally ill for intensive assistance, and shall refer such persons to diversion programs, counseling, treatment, housing assistance and reentry programs in an effort to stabilize such person and prevent future arrests of such person, provided the office retains the discretion to dispose of any case in any manner, with a focus on alternatives to incarceration and that the court shall maintain jurisdiction over the cases to ensure compliance with any ordered treatment or counseling; and (3) the Chief Court Administrator shall establish policies and procedures to implement the pilot program established pursuant to subdivision (1) of this act and, on or before February 1, 2018, shall submit a report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to judiciary, in accordance with section 11-4a of the general statutes, concerning the implementation of the pilot program.

Statement of Purpose:

To provide enhanced community services to those in the criminal justice system to address their physical, mental and community needs, assist in community reentry and avoid recidivism.

Unite Economic Growth & Education Opportunity

One of the most important ways we can help our cities is by encouraging businesses to grow jobs and invest in a workforce to fill those new positions. In order to thrive, a city needs a vibrant economy with a healthy job market and an eager well trained workforce. The following proposals address these needs by reforming how the state incentivizes brownfield remediation in urban areas and combining business incentive programs with a requirement to invest in education and job training in local high schools and community colleges.

7/7 BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM:

To develop viable communities with economic growth, a reduction in blight and simultaneous increase in the value of taxable property, we propose a brownfield redevelopment incentive program. Specifically, to incentivize developers to remediate brownfield sites in urban areas, the "7/7 Program" will simplify the administrative process and offer a tax incentive package to employers willing to invest in new development on brownfield property. For redeveloping a brownfield site and agreeing to specified employment commitments and partnerships with local schools, employers will receive 100% exemption from the state income, sales and use, or corporation business taxes generated at the revitalized property for 7 years. For contaminated property the employer will also be able to deduct 60% of the remediation cost over the 7 years following the 7 year 100% tax exemption.

Senate Bill No. 623 An Act Establishing the 7/7 Program to Encourage the Redevelopment of Brownfields and Underutilized Property

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That chapter 588gg of the general statutes be amended to establish a program providing a series of income, sales and property tax incentives to property owners for redeveloping and utilizing brownfields and real property that has been abandoned or underutilized.

Statement of Purpose:

To establish a "7/7" program to encourage the development of brownfields and underutilized property.

PIPELINE FOR CONNECTICUT'S FUTURE:

As part of the 7/7 Brownfield Redevelopment Program, participating businesses would be required to meet specified employment commitments and partnerships with local schools to qualify for tax relief incentives. This would include a requirement to work with local school districts and community colleges to develop a curriculum to train students specifically for local job opportunities at that business. This program would allow companies to fill vacant positions in their workforce with an employee trained specifically for that job while providing direct employment opportunities for Connecticut youth as well promoting entrepreneurship among high school students.

We need to start preparing our children for jobs of the future and change the structure of our education system to match the new needs of today's workforce, particularly in the state's urban centers. The "Pipeline" program would seek to begin this process.

This program would be modeled after the initiative that is currently underway in towns like Wallingford and the Platt Technical High School in Milford where local manufacturers are working collaboratively with the superintendent of schools in their joint effort to help students who may not be interested in attending college to graduate with a specific, manufacturing related career path in mind and ultimately to be employed by the participating companies. The programs entail both industry-specific class time as well as cooperative work placements. In addition to the work performed at the local high schools, these programs also provide incubator space for entrepreneurs to work collaboratively and innovatively with students.

It's important that we recognize that not all students will go to college or pursue an advanced degree. But that doesn't mean they shouldn't have the opportunity to attain a good paying, highly skilled job. By developing opportunities for students to focus on real career paths as early as possible, we can help show all students their value, their talents and their potential to be successful right here in Connecticut.

Explore New Approaches to Education & Empowerment

Clearly giving money to city hall does not always directly improve the lives and well-being of city residents. From 2011-2016, over \$6 billion of state taxpayer revenue was provided to the cities of Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and Waterbury. During this same time period, the poverty rate continued to climb and food stamp utilization in the state increased by approximately 60,000. The city of Hartford which alone received close to 33%, or \$2 billion of the \$6 billion total, also realized a significant increase in their unemployment rate and is currently living through an unsettling spike in their homicide rate. Also in Hartford the state spends more per student than in any other city or town in Connecticut, which expenditures averaging \$13,793 per pupil (the state's average expenditure per student is \$5,078). Yet between 2010 and 2014 when Hartford's student enrollment grew by 2.89 percent it was central office staffing that grew by 66.7 percent that same year. Teachers only increased 4.2 percent. Funding continues to be eaten up by administrative costs before it can make it to our students.

Continuing to do the same thing and throw more money at the problems we see in urban areas is not a solution. We need to think innovatively and empower residents to decide what they need as a community to prosper. We also have to look at new ways to address the challenges our schools and children are facing. To tackle these problems we hope to further explore the following concepts:

- **Pair Open Choice with Development Incentives at Low Performing Schools** - It is currently voluntary for local school districts to provide intradistrict open choice programs for their residents. The state should consider the impact of requiring municipalities to provide open choice to residents so that if there is a lower performing neighborhood school that a parent does not want to send their child to they can choose another school in district for their child's education. But this can only work if there is a plan to help the struggling schools that parents are moving their children out of. Therefore, we propose that when a school loses 20 percent of their children to another school, the state should incentivize teachers to work at the lower-performing school with enhanced salaries. In addition, the state should research and determine the top three reasons why that particular public school has lost such a significant amount of local children, thereby allowing the school administrators and teachers to effectively map out a plan for improvement.

- **Remarket the Existing Community School Program** - To encourage a ground-up approach to solving perceived educational issues in a community, we believe there should be a conversation about focusing on the state's community school program. Current state law allows local or regional board of educations to establish a community school which is a public school that participates in a coordinated, community-based effort with community partners to provide comprehensive educational and wrap-around services to students and families. Expanding the marketing of this program may prove to be a useful tool in increasing community empowerment.
- **Develop a "Community Empowerment" Budgeting Program** – Implementing a community budgeting program will give more decision making authority to the broader community as a whole. It will provide an investment directly into Connecticut's municipalities by directly funding programs that are deemed important by those who reside in the community. All too often state monies flow to a municipality and the benefits of these funds are not directly felt by the residents of the community. For example, the provisions of the Municipal Revenue Sharing Account adopted in the last biennial budget poured millions of dollars into municipalities without any requirements of how the money will be spent. In the end, these funds can simply be used for political cronyism by hiring additional staff at town hall. This action does not help the single mother with three kids living just down the street. Nor does it help the junior in high school that is doing all that he can do to graduate and make a living. This recommendation targets those monies going to municipalities for either enhanced PILOT reimbursement or general state sales tax sharing and requires that the funds be used by municipalities in the following way:

As is provided in current law, the funds will flow through the city as is required, but the municipality would also be required to spend the monies as follows:

- 35% will be spent on priorities of the Community Investment Boards (CIBs) as approved by a vote of the municipality;
- 35% will be spent on priorities of the municipality; and
- The remaining 30% will be made available for expenditure if the CIBs and municipal officials can agree on the expenditure;
- If the municipality and the CIBs cannot agree, the 30% will remain with the state.

Community Investment Boards would be comprised of all stakeholders in a community including residents, businesses, local religious leaders, community development corporations and other community groups. For municipalities with large populations, there could be one board for every neighborhood since the strengths and a weakness of each neighborhood varies and a city-wide program may not allow for the neighborhood-centric model that we are looking to create.

Participation from all community stakeholders ensures a homegrown method of solving one's problems. If it is additional job training, drug rehabilitation, after school or child care programs that are seen as critical for a neighborhood, and if assistance is ultimately provided, the local residents will be empowered to effectuate change.

- **Remarket the Existing Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Program** - The Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) program encourages individuals and businesses in distressed

neighborhoods to work collaboratively to prepare and implement a strategic plan to revitalize their neighborhood. Pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes, once a municipality establishes a zone and a neighborhood committee is established and submits complete plans to the Office of Policy and Management, the state will assist in the revitalization of the neighborhood by providing comments on the proposed plans, coordinate state agencies to support the plans of the NRZs, and expedite the review of requests for modifications to codes and regulations that are identified as impediments to achieving the NRZs goals and objectives.

- **Solicit “Out of the Box” Ideas** - State policymakers do not have all of the answers. Therefore, we propose exploring the creation an “Urban Challenge” website which will invite people and organizations to submit proposals for dealing with specific urban area problems. If a viable suggestion is given for a particular problem, a pilot implementation of said suggestion can be implemented in a selected neighborhood. A state entity would monitor the policy’s implementation and assess the results. In addition, the state would provide a small monetary award for “solving” a particular problem similar to Eli Lilly’s InnoCentive initiative.
- **Enact a Commission to Examine Community Non-Profit Providers** - The state’s non-profit provider system is absolutely critical for the state to provide services for Connecticut citizens in a cost-effective manner. There are hundreds if not thousands of these providers that receive state funding for various purposes through the fiscal year. There is currently no mechanism to ensure that the large sum of state resources that is provided to any given provider is spent in an efficient and cost-effective manner. As a result those providers that excel at their job are supported the same as those that may not be as effective. The state needs a healthy and robust non-profit provider network if it is to succeed with all the initiatives currently in place and those that may come into place in the future. Therefore, we propose exploring the creation of a bipartisan commission to review the various requirements that may currently be required by state agencies. This commission would further be charged with developing recommendations on a standard set of outcomes that would be required of all non-profit providers that receive state funding. Non-profit providers currently need to make different reports for different funding sources. We propose assisting the non-profits to the extent that their reporting is streamlined across at least all state agencies. Further, this proposal would ensure that monies are going to only to those providers that are doing their job well rather than supporting entities and/or efforts that are shown to not be successful.