

## House Republican Press Release

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Press Office: 860-240-8700

### Capitol Commentary by State Rep. Mary Ann Carson



#### More Noteworthy Legislation Moves Forward

The majority of Legislative Committees have reached their Joint Favorable (or “JF”) deadlines for moving bills forward that originate in their respective committees. I would like to provide an update on several of the noteworthy bills that have moved through the committee process in recent weeks.

The Legislature’s Judiciary Committee approved House Bill 1458, known as Jessica’s Law. This legislation would provide enhanced penalties for the sexual assault of children under 13, require mandatory minimum terms of imprisonment for the crimes of enticing a minor, employing a minor in an obscene performance and importing or possessing child pornography. It is named for Jessica Lunsford, a young Florida girl raped and murdered by a previously convicted sex offender in February 2005.

The Judiciary Committee also approved House Bill 5503, which is designed to protect schoolchildren from convicted sexual offenders by requiring that convicted sexual offenders reside at least one thousand feet away from a school or child care center.

The committee approved House Bill 7395, which would provide homosexual couples the right to marry. Proponents maintain the state’s landmark 2005 legislation providing the same legal protections as marriage is insufficient and without the term ‘marriage,’ there remains an inequality in this regard. Opponents argue that doing so would redefine one of our most basic social institutions.

The committee approved Senate Bill 903, which would make the penalty for failing to report a lost or stolen weapon within 72 hours that it goes missing an infraction. Last year, a harsher version of the bill, which would have made failing to report a missing firearm a crime punishable by up to one year in prison, failed during the last days of the session. This bill would also re-fund the state’s gun trafficking task force. The task force, in existence from 2001-2002, removed nearly 400 illegal guns from Connecticut streets from a variety of sources, including gang members, illegal sales via the Internet, and stolen firearms. Funding was discontinued in 2003.

The committee approved House Bill 7139, which would increase penalties for minors who purchase cigarette or tobacco products and people who sell, give, or deliver the products to them. By law, the Department of Revenue Services (DRS) commissioner assesses the penalties following a hearing.

For minors convicted of purchasing cigarettes and tobacco products, the bill would increase the maximum penalty from \$50 to \$100 for a first violation and from \$100 to \$150 for any subsequent violation. For dealers and distributors convicted of selling tobacco products to minors, the bill would increase the penalty from \$250 to \$300 for a first violation and from \$500 to \$750 for any subsequent violation within 18 months. By law, a third violation within that period also results in a minimum 30-day license suspension.

The Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee approved House Bill 6141, which would borrow \$2 billion toward reducing an eliminated \$6.9 billion shortfall in the Teachers Retirement Fund and prohibit the state from reducing annual contributions to the pension fund below the level recommended by analysts. Currently, there is \$10.2 billion in the fund, less than 60 percent of its obligations.

Since the early 1990s, Connecticut has typically failed to fully fund its teachers' retirement. It was only fully funded in 2001. Similar to a municipality's pension fund, when the state does not fully fund this account, it fails to collect on corresponding interest payments. This ultimately results in a significant cost to the state.

The Legislature's Energy and Technology Committee approved House Bill 7179, which would broaden what can be included in community cable access outreach programs. The Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) determines whether a cable TV company or a nonprofit organization will administer community access programming in the company's franchise area. If a nonprofit organization has this responsibility, this bill allows DPUC to extend the company's franchise by two years if it agrees with the organization to provide funds solely to upgrade or replace capital equipment. The bill also requires the company or nonprofit organization to consult with the local cable advisory organization on certain issues.

The Transportation Committee approved House Bill 6370, which would increase the fines for illegally using a handicapped parking space. It would increase the fine from \$85 to \$150 for a first offense and \$250 for subsequent offenses.

I look forward to providing updates on these bills, as well as additional legislation that will be moving forward in the legislative process in the coming weeks.