

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. D'Amelio to Support increased Funding for Statewide Firearms Trafficking Task Force in 2008



Unit's Success in 2007 Directly Related to Funding Hike from Previous Year

Operating with substantially more funding than it has received in years, the Statewide Firearms Trafficking Task Force had a banner year in 2007 and could be even more successful in 2008 if the state legislature provides it with more resources this year, state Representative Anthony J. D'Amelio said today.

Representative D'Amelio, R-71st District, said he will work to increase special state funding for the task force from \$400,000 to \$500,000 for the 2008-2009 fiscal year when the legislative session gets underway February 6th.

The two-year state budget approved during the 2007 legislative session authorized \$400,000 in special funds for the unit in 2007-2008 and another \$400,000 for the 2008-2009 fiscal year. It is the largest allocation it has received since it was funded at \$500,000 in 2001 and in 2002, the first two years of its existence, Representative D'Amelio said.

“As a legislator who strongly supports the Statewide Firearms Trafficking Task Force and voted for the bill that created the unit during the 2000 legislative session, I was especially pleased to learn that it had once again proved its effectiveness in getting illegal guns off the street and putting those who illegally sell firearms to criminals behind bars,” Representative D'Amelio said.

“I remember the successes the task force had from 2000 through 2002 when it was funded at \$500,000 annually. During those years, 450 illegal guns were taken off the street and nearly 100 people were arrested, Representative D'Amelio said. “When the Public Safety Committee was considering increasing the task force's budget in early 2007, their original proposal was to fund it at \$500,000 for both years of the state's two-year budget.”

“If we add another \$100,000 to the task force's budget for 2008-2009, increasing its funding to \$500,000, it would be no more than the amount originally proposed last year. It would be well worth the expense if it makes the unit even more successful than it has been during the current fiscal year. I believe the additional dollars will mean fewer illegal guns in Waterbury and other Connecticut cities and more lives saved,” Representative D'Amelio said.

“Gun control laws, while well-intentioned, inconvenience law-abiding gun owners and have not been particularly effective at taking illegal guns off the streets. In contrast, the gun trafficking task force focuses its attention where it should be - on arresting individuals who illegally sell guns to criminals and confiscating illegally-acquired firearms. It has a proven record of success. We can improve on that record by giving the task force the funding it needs to add more officers to the unit and enabling it to expand its operations,” Representative D’Amelio said.

Between January and November of 2007, the gun trafficking task force confiscated 656 illegal firearms and arrested 37 people on gun trafficking charges. That compares to 24 seizures and 33 arrests in 2005, when the unit was operating only on funding from within the Department of Public Safety’s operating budget and on modest federal grants. Special state funding for the task force was eliminated in 2003 because of a state budget crisis and remained at lower levels until it was restored to \$400,000 annually for the 2007-08 and 2007-09 fiscal years, Representative D’Amelio said.