

## House Republican Press Release

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### Harkins Supports Governor's Education Reforms



#### *Proposed Tax Increases in Governor's Budget are Excessive*

HARTFORD- State Representative John Harkins (R-Stratford) today expressed support for Gov. M. Jodi Rell's proposal for the state to pay an average of 50 percent of local public school operating expenses. The proposal was part of the Governor's biennial budget which she submitted to the legislature today. The Governor's proposed budget recommends an increase in state aid to education by \$1.1 billion over the next five years to a total of \$2.7 billion.

"The state's average share has dropped as low as 38 percent, and in some towns, it is down to 10 percent or less," said Harkins. "This is a bold and significant commitment to education which is going to be important for Stratford and Connecticut."

Recent trends in education funding have shown state support for education is diminishing and the burden shifting to local property taxes, said Rep. Harkins, who serves on the legislature's budget-writing Appropriations Committee. He noted that under this plan Stratford would receive an increase of \$3,947,706 in FY 07-08, for a total of \$20,562,332 that year. In FY 08-09 Stratford receives an additional \$2,657,604 for a total of \$23,219,936. "This is a significant and critical increase in the state's commitment to Stratford," said Harkins.

Also, under the Governor's proposed budget, the state Department of Education will begin to implement a new accountability system, including new state benchmarks for academic and behavioral accountability. Under these benchmarks, the state will intervene when schools and districts underperform. Gov. Rell is recommending \$25 million in additional student financial aid for both public and independent colleges. This will help eliminate barriers to student access to education in Connecticut.

"That's the good news in the budget," said Harkins. "The bad news is that she is recommending a broad increase in the state's income tax, and her budget breaks through the Constitutional spending cap. We have over \$500 million in estimated surplus funds this year, while Connecticut residents are struggling with enormous raises in energy costs. I don't support raising taxes under those circumstances."

Harkins noted that the Governor has provided a good framework to begin the debate on the budget. “We have four months ahead of us,” he said. “We will be examining all aspects of this budget, and hopefully we can arrive at a final product that will be a good budget for Connecticut.”