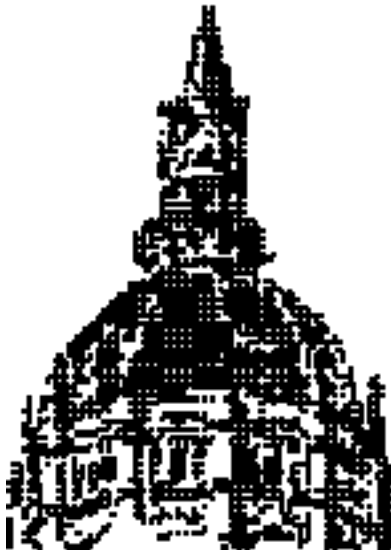


Office of Legislative Research
Connecticut General Assembly



OLR MAJOR ISSUES

2005 Major Issues Report



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TO OUR READERS

Every year, legislative leaders ask the Office of Legislative Research (OLR) to identify and provide brief descriptions of important issues that the General Assembly may face in the coming session.

OLR compiled this report on the major issues for the 2005 session in consultation with the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) and the Legislative Commissioners' Office (LCO). Except for the Appropriations Committee issue descriptions, which were written by OFA, the issue descriptions in this report were written by OLR analysts.

This report represents the professional, nonpartisan views of the OLR, OFA, and LCO staffs of what the upcoming legislative issues will be. It does not represent staff suggestions or recommendations. We identified issues based on interim studies; research requests; nonconfidential discussions with legislators, other legislative participants, and executive branch agencies; and subject matter knowledge.

We list issues according to the committee in whose jurisdiction they primarily fall. But, since more than one committee may consider aspects of the same issue, descriptions may overlap. Please contact OLR for additional information about these or other potential issues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Aging/Human Services.	4
Appropriations.	5
Children/Human Services.	6
Commerce	6
Education.	6
Energy and Technology.	8
Environment.	9
Finance, Revenue and Bonding.	10
General Law.	11
Government Administration and Elections	12
Higher Education and Employment Advancement	13
Housing.	13
Human Services/Public Health	14
Insurance and Real Estate.	14
Judiciary.	14
Labor and Public Employees	15
Planning and Development	15
Public Health	16
Public Safety	17
Transportation	17

AGING/HUMAN SERVICES

State Response to Medicare Prescription Drug Law

A 2003 federal law establishes a voluntary prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries (seniors age 65 and over and younger disabled people). Its first step is a temporary federal drug discount card program that runs until January 2006. Legislation in 2004 coordinated the discount cards with the state ConnPACE program, which helps lower-income seniors and disabled people who are not eligible for Medicaid with their prescription drug costs.

In January 2006, the second phase of the new federal program begins. It consists of a permanent prescription drug program that (1) allows Medicare beneficiaries to enroll in private, federally subsidized prescription-only plans or in a Medicare HMO that covers drugs; (2) requires the plans to offer at least a standard package with specified premiums, copayments, annual deductibles, and coverage thresholds; and (3) provides varying levels of extra federal help for enrollees with low incomes and assets and those eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid.

In 2005, one pressing issue for the General Assembly will be

how to coordinate the second phase of the federal drug benefit with ConnPACE. Those with full eligibility for both Medicare and Medicaid, who were excluded from the temporary discount cards, will be included in the next phase. In fact, they will see Medicare undertake primary responsibility for their prescription coverage. But there may be gaps compared to their current Medicaid coverage, which the state may want to fill.

If the General Assembly wishes to guarantee people in ConnPACE and Medicaid continue to receive at least their current level of assistance (as it did with the discount cards), it may need to pass legislation to fill in potential gaps the federal program might create.

Long-term Care Issues

The legislature may explore how to save the state money by helping people stay out of nursing homes and other institutions. Some proposals may increase the number of people who receive long-term care through home care and “consumer-directed” personal care assistance (where the client chooses his own personal care assistant and functions as the employer, instead of having to go through a home health care agency). Other proposals may further assist people with

disabilities already in nursing homes to move back into the community and address quality of care and staffing in nursing homes and home care. Other continuing issues include (1) resources for a legislatively required, Connecticut-specific comprehensive long-term care needs assessment and (2) enhancing the nursing home admission prescreening process to better protect elderly residents from younger residents with mental illness.

APPROPRIATIONS

Possible spending reductions may be considered in a variety of existing state agency programs and accounts, including municipal aid, to keep appropriations within the constitutional spending cap and balanced with revenues in FYs 2006 and 2007.

Structural Deficit

Faced with structural deficits in FYs 2006 and 2007 (exceeding \$600 million based on OFA's current services estimates and \$1 billion based on agency requests) and spending cap problems, the General Assembly will need to consider various spending reduction and revenue enhancement alternatives. The structural deficits largely result from (1) the use of \$382.7 million in one-time revenue sources to balance the budget in FY 2005,

(2) the increase in the maximum property tax credit from \$350 to \$500 which will cost \$105 million in FY 2006 and subsequent fiscal years, and (3) a higher growth rate in expenditures versus revenues.

Spending Cap

In addition to the structural deficit, OFA's current services estimate exceeds the state's spending cap by \$515.8 million in FY 2006 and by \$710.5 million in FY 2007. In the current fiscal year (FY 2005), the state's appropriations are \$129.1 million under the cap. If this year's expenditures were raised by this amount, then the current services estimate would exceed the cap by \$381.6 million for FY 2006 and by \$571.5 million for FY 2007.

State Employee Collective Bargaining

Approval of state employee collective bargaining agreements and arbitration awards may put additional pressure on the FY 2006 and 2007 budgets. Of the 33 contracts, 16 (covering slightly more than half of state employees) are settled and funded and include a one-year wage freeze, and 17 have not agreed to any wage freeze. Preliminary estimates indicate that an additional cumulative cost of approximately \$124.5 million over FY 2005 through FY

2007 could result if a one-year wage freeze is not extended to the 17 remaining contracts.

CHILDREN/HUMAN SERVICES

Child Poverty Council

The 2004 legislature created a council charged with developing a plan to reduce child poverty in Connecticut by 50% over the next 10 years. The council has been meeting for the last few months to develop strategies to achieve this goal. The council must submit its plan to the legislature by January 1, 2005. It is anticipated that the plan will include legislative recommendations, many of which could have a significant fiscal impact.

COMMERCE

Business Tax Incentives

A federal appeals court recently struck down Ohio's investment tax credit on the grounds that it interfered with interstate commerce. While this decision does not bind Connecticut, it might cause the legislature to revamp Connecticut's business tax incentives to protect them from a similar challenge. The decision could also reignite the debate about whether the incentives actually induce businesses to make investments or only reward them for investments they would have made anyway.

Outsourcing

Relocating data processing and call center operations to India and other countries could reduce business costs and prices. But outsourcing these functions also means layoffs. For this reason, the legislature may again debate outsourcing's benefits and costs and try to devise ways to mitigate the latter.

Base Closing

The possibility that a federal commission might recommend closing the Groton submarine base could trigger discussions about what the state can do to keep the base and bolster defense industries. To play it safe, legislators might look for ways to further diversify the southeast region's economy and make it less dependent on the base for business and jobs.

EDUCATION

Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grants

In 2004, the General Assembly abolished the ECS cap and appropriated money to begin phasing out its effects. This year, each capped town is set to receive just over 23% of the difference between its FY 2004 grant and its full FY 2005 ECS entitlement. In addition, no town can receive less than 60% of its

full entitlement. But despite the formal abolition of the cap, towns still object to their ECS funding levels. Consequently, the General Assembly is likely to see proposals to fully fund ECS grants for the 107 towns that currently receive less than the formula says they should.

There may also be proposals to increase the ECS foundation amount from the current \$5,891 per student - well below the almost \$9,000 that districts spent on average to educate each student in FY 2004. A higher foundation would give every town a bigger grant but would also require the state to increase its total ECS appropriation (currently \$1,562,870,000).

Special Education Costs

Although school districts are responsible for providing special education and related services to eligible students, the state is supposed to pay costs for any student that exceed five times his school district's average per-pupil spending for the preceding year. For example, if a district spent an average of \$9,000 to educate its students, it would be responsible for the first \$45,000 of special education costs for any student and the state would pay any additional or "excess" costs.

A 2001 law reduced the special education excess cost threshold from five to 4.5 times a

district's average per-pupil expenditure for the preceding year. (Using our example, the change would reduce the local contribution from \$45,000 to \$40,500.) The change was to take effect on July 1, 2002. But in 2002, the legislature postponed the effective date to July 1, 2003 and in 2003, it put it off to July 1, 2005. The General Assembly also capped the total amount the state could spend for excess special education costs by requiring a proportional reduction in the grants if total grants to all towns exceeded the appropriated amount.

The General Assembly will likely face pressure to increase appropriations to both fully fund the excess cost grants and to implement the higher state contribution on July 1, 2005 as scheduled.

No Child Left Behind and School Accountability

As more schools face sanctions under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law for failing to make enough annual progress toward reading and math proficiency for all students, the state will be required to provide remedial help and alternative programs for students at these schools. In 2004, eight schools were cited for failure to make adequate progress for a fifth consecutive year. Under

NCLB, if these schools fail to reach required achievement levels in 2005, they face one or more of the following sanctions: (1) closure and reconstitution as a public charter school, (2) replacement of most or all staff, (3) takeover by private management, (4) state takeover (if allowed by state law), or (5) some other fundamental reform.

To address achievement deficits at these and other schools, the General Assembly may consider proposals to increase the number of spaces in school readiness programs for low-income children in inner cities, raise the quality of those programs, and provide more and better pre-school facilities. Other likely proposals include increased financial aid to cities to support new teachers and financial incentives to both retain good teachers at, and attract highly qualified teachers to, schools in priority districts. The state may also be asked to help pay for programs to extend the school day or year at failing schools.

Finally, there may be requests to change state laws to allow or facilitate state takeovers of failing schools or school districts, or the reconstitution of failing schools as charter schools.

ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY

Electric Transmission Lines

Legislation passed last year requires placing new electric transmission lines in residential and other sensitive areas underground, unless doing so reduces the electric grid's reliability. The proposal for the Norwalk-Middletown transmission line calls for the Norwalk-Milford segment to be buried and the Milford-Middletown segment to run overhead.

The Independent System Operator-New England, which operates the regional transmission grid and whose approval is needed to build new lines, has raised concerns that burying so much of the line could jeopardize reliability. But placing more of the line overhead may require the utilities to acquire more property to accommodate a wider right-of-way. On the other hand, a consultant retained by the Connecticut Siting Council has suggested that part of the Milford-Middletown segment could be placed underground without jeopardizing reliability. Finally, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which will determine who will pay for the transmission line, has indicated that it will require Connecticut consumers to pay for the added costs of placing the line underground, rather than spreading these costs among all New England consumers.

In light of these developments,
the legislature may revisit
transmission line siting laws.

Electric Rates

Connecticut Light & Power has proposed a rate increase of approximately 17% starting next year to offset higher purchased power and transmission congestion costs. CL&P's rates will also increase in spring 2005 when a credit reflecting a settlement of CL&P's payment of previously incurred transmission congestion costs expires. If the 17% rate increase is approved, rates may go up as much as 35% between now and April 2005. Although it appears that the state has little jurisdiction to deny the rate increase, there may be pressure on legislators to address electric rates, particularly in light of price increases for other forms of energy.

ENVIRONMENT

Farmland Preservation and Farm Viability

The legislature may consider several proposals on farmland preservation and farm viability. Among the issues it may tackle are (1) new incentives for municipalities to preserve farmland, (2) creation of a Farm Investment Program and increased funding for farmland preservation, (3) encouraging

individuals to preserve farmland through tax breaks and other incentives, and (4) helping farmers better market their products.

Wood-Burning Furnaces

The legislature may take up the growing use of outdoor wood-burning furnaces, for which no emissions standards now exist. Among the possibilities are banning the installation of new furnaces until the Department of Environmental Protection can draft emissions regulations and requiring a minimum height for smokestacks.

Long Island Sound Protection

Legislators will likely continue to study ways to protect Long Island Sound's natural resources while at the same time ensuring the state has an adequate supply of electricity and natural gas.

Climate Change

In 2004, the legislature required the state to start reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As a first step, the Governor's Steering Committee on Climate Change is to submit a comprehensive climate change action plan to the Environment, Energy & Technology, Transportation, and Commerce committees by January 1, 2005.

The plan must include policies and programs needed to reach the state's 2020 emissions goals. The committees will review the plan in January and may consider legislation arising from it.

FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING

State Taxes

A November 12, 2004 OFA forecast projects a General Fund surplus of \$251 million for FY 2005 followed by deficits of \$604 million and \$701 million for FYs 2006 and 2007, respectively. This fiscal outlook may lead the General Assembly to consider revenue increases in the coming session.

Possible revenue increases could include a so-called "millionaire tax" to raise the tax rate on income over \$1 million above the current 5%. The General Assembly may also consider a new state estate tax that is not tied to the federal tax. The state already has such a "decoupled" tax on estates valued at \$1 million or more, but it is temporary and applies only to deaths that occur between July 1 and December 31, 2004. The General Assembly may consider proposals to extend this tax or make it permanent.

The General Assembly may also consider tax reductions, including proposals to exempt some or all public, private, or military pension income from the state income tax.

Tax Expenditures

State law requires OFA to periodically compile a list of state "tax expenditures." Tax expenditures are tax exemptions, deductions, credits, or preferential rates for particular activities, situations, types of taxpayers, or types of goods or services. Tax expenditures reduce the amount of tax revenue that would otherwise be collected.

In the coming session, the General Assembly may consider proposals to (1) reduce or eliminate particular tax expenditures, (2) evaluate the benefits and costs of particular tax expenditures, or (3) require those benefiting from tax expenditures to make the benefit public.

Municipal Revenue Diversification

Property taxes are the main source of revenue for cities and towns. But with high property taxes becoming an increasingly

contentious issue for municipalities and the legislature, the General Assembly may consider allowing towns to raise revenue in other ways.

One possibility is the municipal real estate conveyance tax. In 2003, the legislature temporarily increased the municipal real estate conveyance tax rate from .11% to .25% of a property's sale price. In addition, it allowed 18 towns to increase their rates to .5%, and 16 of them did so. The increases expire July 1, 2005. The General Assembly may see proposals to further extend the higher rates or make them permanent.

Also in 2004, the General Assembly required retailers, when they remit sales tax revenues to the state, to report the town in which each taxable sale occurred. The General Assembly could see bills to allocate a portion of sales tax revenues to the town where the sales occurred or to allow towns to impose their own sales taxes.

GENERAL LAW

Internet Wine Sales

A growing number of small wineries throughout the country advertise their products on the Internet and want to ship wine directly to consumers. They are promoting model legislation to allow direct shipment and have

challenged state regulatory schemes in court as unconstitutional. All states regulate the sale of all kinds of liquor within their borders. They use the system to prohibit sales to anyone under 21 and to collect excise taxes. They assert that the 21st amendment empowers them to regulate alcohol sales within their borders. The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the association's challenge on December 7, 2004 and will rule on the issue during 2005. The legislature may be asked to consider legislation based on the wine grower's model legislation.

A "Case" of Wine

In 2001, the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) repealed the state regulation that determined the number of bottles that could be in a case of wine based on bottle size. The definition was part of the state's regulation of wine sales, which also includes a prohibition against alcoholic liquor wholesalers giving retailers quantity discounts. Since the repeal, some wholesalers have been creating extremely large "jumbo" cases and DCP has investigated at least two wholesalers for violating the quantity discount prohibition, fining one and dismissing charges against the other. The wine wholesalers' association has filed suit to appeal the dismissal. As a result of the dispute, the

legislature may be asked to limit the size of a case of wine.

Consolidating Liquor Permits

The Program Review and Investigations Committee is studying whether to recommend revising the liquor permit system to reduce the number of different types of permits in order to free resources to enforce the prohibition against selling to someone under age 21. The General Assembly may act on the committee's recommendations.

Regulation of Home Heating Oil Dealers

DCP and the attorney general are suing Owl Oil, Inc. for deceptive marketing practices. They claim the company sold consumers what appeared to be a one-year contract. But the agreement included a provision obligating consumers to buy oil for a second year at a fluctuating market rate. As a result, there may be proposals to require disclosures and guarantees in home heating oil consumer contracts.

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS

Absentee Voting

In an effort to eliminate fraud in the absentee voting process, the legislature is likely to consider a bill to adopt absentee

voting procedures based on the pilot program the State Elections Enforcement Commission administered in November 2003. That pilot limited the distribution of absentee ballot applications to town clerks, registrars of voters, and absentee ballot coordinators.

Election Day Registration

As a way to increase voters' participation in elections, a likely issue this session is Election Day registration, which allows voting age citizens to register to vote on Election Day with proper identification. PA 03-204 established this provision but the governor vetoed it.

Contracting Reform

There have been numerous reports in recent months of improprieties in the process for awarding state contracts. The governor's Contracting Reform Task Force studied this issue and submitted a final report with recommendations in early fall. The General Assembly will likely hear legislation to implement these recommendations, which include the adoption of a uniform procurement and contract code.

Another likely bill addressing this issue will be one limiting campaign contributions by businesses with state or local government contracts to candidates for state or local office.

Ethics

With numerous exceptions, the State Ethics Code prohibits registered lobbyists and people doing and seeking to do work for the state from giving gifts to state officials and employees. There will likely be proposals to tighten this gift ban.

After the termination of the executive director and general counsel of the State Ethics Commission and allegations of possible violations of the Freedom of Information Act by the commission this summer, the General Assembly will probably consider legislation to reorganize the commission.

Lastly, the legislature may once again consider bills to extend the Code of Ethics to municipal public officials and employees.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT

Tuition Increases

Rising tuition at the state's public colleges and universities is a major concern. The General Assembly may attempt to address the issue through such proposals as increased student aid, scholarships for high achieving students, and tuition freezes.

In-State Tuition for Illegal Immigrants

Following the example of other states, including Illinois, New York, and Texas, the legislature may again consider extending in-state tuition benefits to high school graduates who are not legal residents.

HOUSING

Housing Programs

Transferring authority for moderate-income rental housing from the Department of Economic and Community Development to the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, revitalizing state-owned public housing, and funding affordable housing initiatives are likely to carry over from last session as major issues. Supportive and assisted housing initiatives and lead paint remediation may also receive consideration.

Affordable Housing

The affordable housing land use appeals procedure, which gives affordable housing developers the opportunity to appeal to the Superior Court if a zoning board or commission denies a developer's application, will likely generate a number of proposals from opponents and advocates.

HUMAN SERVICES/PUBLIC HEALTH

Nursing Home Provider Tax

In 2004, General Assembly considered but did not pass a nursing home “provider tax.” Such a tax could give relief to the financially strapped industry at no additional cost to the state because the tax would be matched by federal Medicaid funds. But provider taxes generally produce winners and losers, benefiting homes that serve large numbers of Medicaid recipients the most. For-profit nursing homes pushed hard for a tax last year and are expected to do the same this year while nonprofits are again expected to oppose the tax. Federal waivers that allow certain “loser” homes to be exempt from the tax have been granted to some states, and any legislation would likely require the state to seek such a waiver.

INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE

Medical Malpractice Insurance

The General Assembly will likely consider bills to address the rising cost and reduced availability of medical malpractice insurance for health care providers and institutions. The Insurance Committee, along with the Public Health and

Judiciary committees, will consider such proposals as damage caps; enhanced Insurance Department oversight and control; and other insurance, tort, and health reforms that might affect the availability and cost of malpractice insurance.

Universal Health Care Coverage

The legislature may also consider ways to reduce the number of uninsured residents. It may consider tax credits for individuals and small employers, lower-cost plan designs, an expansion of HUSKY, and outreach to increase enrollment in existing coverage opportunities.

Contingent Commissions

In light of the recent allegations regarding the misuse of broker commissions throughout the insurance industry, the General Assembly could consider bills that require disclosure of commission schedules, establish conflict of interest prohibitions, define a broker’s fiduciary duty to his clients, and penalize violators.

JUDICIARY

Death Penalty

The legislature may consider proposals dealing with the death penalty. On January 26, 2005,

the state is scheduled to execute Michael Ross. Ross' execution would be the state's first since 1960. The General Assembly may see efforts to abolish or modify the death penalty or to change the pardons process, either before or after the scheduled execution date.

Same-Sex Relationships

The legislature is likely to consider bills authorizing committed, same-sex partners to either marry or enter into civil unions that confer rights afforded to married couples. It may also take up bills (1) limiting marriage to unions of one man and one woman and (2) specifying whether same-sex relationships formalized elsewhere will be recognized in Connecticut.

Bail Reform

In 2004, the Program Review and Investigations Committee studied the bail industry and recommended legislative changes. The legislature may consider proposals on this topic again in 2005, including bills addressing licensing and oversight requirements for surety bail agents and professional bondsmen, fees charged for bonds, and collection of forfeited bonds.

Prison Overcrowding

The legislature will probably consider bills to address prison overcrowding. Included may be proposals to expand alternative sanctions and treatment, especially for defendants and inmates with addictions or mental disabilities, and to give courts more resources and options for handling nonviolent offenders.

LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

Manufacturing Jobs

Like many states, Connecticut has been steadily losing manufacturing jobs over the past 20 years. Legislators will probably propose bills aimed at slowing or reversing this trend. Legislation may attempt to reduce manufacturers' cost of doing business here, improve worker training and productivity, or provide incentives for companies to stay or expand in Connecticut.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Smart Growth

States across the nation are looking for ways to allow new homes, shopping malls, and office parks while preserving farms, forests, and other open spaces. Connecticut's five-year Plan of Conservation and Development tries to strike this balance by directing state

agencies to spend development dollars in areas where roads, sewers, and other supporting infrastructure already exist. But the legislature may again debate proposals to strengthen the plan by restricting infrastructure funds to already developed areas and better coordinating local, regional, and state planning. It may also authorize new planning practices that allow developers to integrate different but compatible uses in the same plan.

it to a private developer. Critics say that private development serves no public purpose while defenders claim new developments build the tax base and add jobs.

Property Tax Reform

In 2004, the legislature allowed towns to postpone scheduled property tax revaluations, which would have captured significant increases in the assessed values of homes and thus increased taxes for homeowners. In 2005, the legislature may consider longer-term solutions, such as homestead exemptions, income tax credits for property tax payments, local option sales taxes, and development impact fees.

Eminent Domain

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to hear a New London eminent domain case may cause legislators to take a second look at this significant governmental power. They may consider the conditions under which the state or a town can properly take land by eminent domain and transfer

PUBLIC HEALTH

Stem Cell Research

California voters' recent approval of a \$3 billion ballot measure to fund stem cell research in the state along with New Jersey's creation of a state-supported stem cell institute are prompting other states to take action on this issue. Connecticut considered but did not enact legislation in the 2004 session that would have signaled the state's support for stem cell research. Legislation will most likely be introduced in the 2005 session that makes clear to research scientists, physicians, and other interested parties that the state is hospitable to stem cell research and encourages their presence and research activity within the state.

Prescription Drug Reimportation

As spending on prescription drugs continues to increase for governments and individuals, some are turning to foreign countries, particularly Canada, to purchase medications. A number of states are pursuing a variety of avenues to either directly access prescription drugs from foreign sources or enable their citizens to get information about ways to acquire prescription drugs.

The federal government raised questions about the safety risks of importing prescription drugs from foreign countries. Some states, despite the lack of federal support, are pushing ahead with reimportation plans. Illinois is pursuing contracting with a pharmacy benefit manager to establish an on-line clearinghouse of state-inspected and approved pharmacies and wholesalers in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. Vermont has actually sued the federal Food and Drug Administration over the reimportation issue. The General Assembly may see legislation on drug reimportation in 2005.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Veterans

The war in Iraq, the continuing struggle in Afghanistan, and a recent *Hartford Courant* report on the fees charged to veterans at the state Veterans' Home have put veterans' issues in the spotlight. As a result, the legislature may address these and other veterans' issues.

Homeland Security

The legislature may again consider proposals to address emergencies involving terrorism. It may also consider legislation relating to funding, staffing,

resource allocation, and the structure and responsibilities of the new Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, established in 2004.

TRANSPORTATION

Motor Vehicle Emissions Inspection Program

The state's motor vehicle emissions inspection program has been in disarray since July 2002 when the General Assembly decided to replace the troubled centralized inspection system with a decentralized system using motor vehicle dealers and repairers to conduct inspections. The new system operated only from October 2003 to April 2004 before it was suspended amid concerns over test accuracy and irregularities in how tests were being conducted by some inspection facilities. The program was restarted in November 2004, but remains controversial because some believe it is unnecessary, although federal law requires it. Any new questions that arise from the restarted program may lead to calls for its elimination, though certain federal sanctions could result.

Highway Safety Issues

Highway safety issues continue to be a high-interest area for the legislature. Certain

restrictions on the number of passengers newly licensed 16- and 17-year-olds may transport went into effect on January 1, 2004. Some think these new requirements do not go far enough and there is likely to be interest in adopting additional restrictions, such as a nighttime driving prohibition. Others believe these restrictions are ineffective and may seek to revise or repeal them.

Among the other proposals likely to attract renewed interest in 2005 are initiatives regarding cell phone use while driving, distracted driving, drunk driving, speeding, the efficacy of the driver retraining program, broadening the reach of the child restraint law, and banning use of miniature motorcycles known as “pocket bikes.”

Agency Contracting Ethics and Motor Vehicle Document Integrity

Issues have arisen over some of the Department of Transportation’s (DOT) contracting practices and the alleged illegal sale of drivers’ licenses by some Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) employees. In response, the governor required the DOT commissioner to centralize and directly

supervise all contracting. She also required creation of a document integrity unit in the DMV to establish and enforce strict standards for issuing licenses, identity cards, and registrations. Despite the governor’s actions, these areas are likely to receive additional scrutiny from the legislature in 2005 with new legislative requirements a possible result.

Highway Congestion, Funding Transportation Initiatives, and Implementing the State Transportation Strategy Board’s Proposals

Highway congestion, particularly along I-95, continues as a high-profile issue. Funding identified initiatives to reduce congestion becomes particularly critical in the face of constrained state resources and the likelihood of shrinking federal aid for Connecticut as Congress continues to wrangle over the multi-year federal transportation authorization bill. Two proposals likely to generate both interest and debate involve implementing and funding New Haven-Hartford-Springfield commuter rail service and “congestion pricing” on I-95 in Fairfield County through electronic tolls.

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