

Other Initiatives in FY 2004-05 Midterm Adjustments Budget Proposal

Discovery Museum in Bridgeport

The unexpended balance of funds dedicated to the Commission on Arts, Tourism, Culture, History, and Film for FY 2003-04 will be carried forward into FY 2004-05. \$2500,000 of those funds will be used as a grant to the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport. The Governor sees this struggling museum as a major asset in Bridgeport and is looking at other ways to aid the organization financially.

Underground storage tank moratorium

During the 2003 session, a moratorium was passed on applications to the commercial underground storage tank program. The budget proposes to lift the moratorium and move it to July 1, 2004. This will give the state time to work with the industry to look at cost-savings measures throughout the session. If a permanent costs-savings program can be passed during session, the moratorium on applications will be lifted. It should be noted that the state is paying some \$12 million in payments each fiscal year for the program, but there is a substantial backlog of payments due. That is the main reason for seeking cost-savings options that will allow a program to continue into the future.

Medical malpractice reform

Medical malpractice insurance premiums are rising rapidly, and health care professionals fear there is no end in sight. The American Medical Association has identified 19 states across the nation, including Connecticut, that are facing a true crisis. Premiums in these states are so high, say doctors, that they are being forced to close their practices and move to other states with more reasonable rates. This, in turn, results in a shortage of quality care in states, endangering public health and further increasing costs on the doctors who remain here by decreasing the premium pool.

There have been a myriad of federal malpractice bills out there. But given that most of the cases end up in state court, reforms at the state level make the most sense. Bills in the Connecticut General Assembly included several of the reforms advocated by the medical community. The main tenet of the reforms was the limitation of non-economic damages to \$250,000. A federal bill mirrored this proposal.

The Governor supports almost all of these initiatives, but believes the fundamental reform needed is to cap non-economic damages. As such, his bill proposes to cap such damages at \$250,000.

Limitations on drivers' licenses for aliens

The Governor is proposing legislation to limit the term of drivers' licenses and identify cards issued to aliens by the Department of Motor Vehicles to the period during which the recipient is legally entitled to remain in the United States. This step will enhance the state's homeland security efforts and help prevent Connecticut drivers' licenses and identity cards from being used to circumvent federal immigration law.

Ending child sexual exploitation

In an effort to better protect Connecticut's children from on-line predators, Governor Rowland is proposing a series of measures to revise, update and strengthen Connecticut's child sexual exploitation laws. Among the changes recommended by the Governor are measures:

- Updating existing laws to recognize and address role of the Internet and other electronic distribution systems in obtaining and distributing child pornography;
- Increasing penalties for those convicted of possessing large quantities of child pornography;
- Making the crime of enticing a minor to engage in sexual activity a felony and requiring those convicted of the crime to register as sex offenders;
- Providing administrative subpoena authority to allow state's attorneys, the commissioner of public safety and local chiefs of police to obtain telephone and internet subscriber information;
- Establishing minimum mandatory probation terms for anyone convicted of certain crimes involving child pornography or sexual exploitation; and making persons charged with importing or possessing child pornography or enticing a minor to engage in sexual activity ineligible for pretrial accelerated rehabilitation.

California standards for cars

The state Department of Environmental Protection is proposing that the so-called California Low Emission Vehicle program be adopted in Connecticut. This would replace and augment the state's current clean car program. The new emissions standards would be effective for 2008 model year vehicles sold in the state.

The measure would achieve some major environmental benefits and minimally add to the price of a car in the state. The standards would force manufacturers to meet fleet-wide emission standards. Manufacturers would also have to certify automobiles to one of four individual emissions standards. In addition, 10 percent of manufacturers sales must be advanced technology vehicles, which are also known as zero emission vehicles. Through these requirements the new standards can provide significant air toxin and greenhouse gas emission reductions and smaller but important reductions in hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide emissions.

State statutes would be changed requiring the DEP commissioner to adopt regulations implementing the new standards.

Open container law

Under federal law, states are required to enact provisions to prohibit anyone inside a motor vehicle (not just the driver) from possessing an open container of an alcoholic beverage, or consuming any such beverage in the passenger area of the vehicle while it is on a public highway or the right-of-way of a public highway or face penalties.

Since FFY 2001, the state has been required to transfer portions of its highway aid to lower-priority safety programs. This penalty has grown over time and will mean a shift of \$5.8 million in FFY 2004 from highway funding.

Given the paucity of federal transportation resources, we must enact a law that complies with the federal standard. DMV and DOT are supporting such legislation.