

May 17th, 2015 - Sarah Eagan - State Child Advocate.

Subject Matter: On this week's show State Child Advocate Sarah Eagan discussed pieces of legislation that her office was backing for passage in the 2015 legislative session. One bill had to do with safe sleep practices for newborns that would require hospitals to provide written information to parents on the subject for newborns when they leave the hospital. State Child Advocate Sarah Eagan told on the show that it was very inspiring to see the legislative leadership effort and the bipartisan support this bill on child survival was getting. She says the issue is so important because in Connecticut as well as across the country, deaths of infants associated with an unsafe sleep environment is the leading cause of preventable death in otherwise healthy infants under the age of one who leave the hospital. Ms. Eagan told that in fact over the last decade in the State of Connecticut, over three times as many babies have died from the conditions associated with unsafe sleep than from child abuse.

State Child Advocate Sarah Eagan explained that when they talk about unsafe sleep they are talking about what is the best way for babies to sleep. She told that our understanding of that has changed over the years. Eagan says they are often finding babies sleeping on couches, in adult beds with comforters and pillows, and with other adults and children. She says they may also be in a crib face-down with blankets or pillows. Eagan says all of those are unsafe sleep environments. Because of this State Child Advocate Eagan told we have been losing over the last couple of years in Connecticut between 15 and 20 babies due to unsafe sleep environments, and for those families that loss can never be repaired.

So what is the best way for an infant to sleep? Sarah Eagan told that has changed over the years. She says it used to be 20 years ago everybody put babies to sleep on their stomach for fear that they may choke or vomit and choke on that during the night. But then we learned told Eagan from doctors and research that that actually wasn't the safest way and that babies are not going to choke when they lie on their back. She says "back to sleep" is much better found pediatricians and that the best position for babies to sleep in is on their backs. Sarah Eagan told that when babies sleep on their backs the incidents of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) plummets. But unfortunately she says every year thousands of babies die from parents who did not get the message for how their babies should sleep, on

May 17th, 2015 - (Eagan continued) - their backs. State Child Advocate Sarah Eagan also says the baby should sleep in a crib on their back, on a flat sheet, safely dressed (not overly so) ... and really with nothing else in the crib. Eagan says many new parents get or receive things as gifts like fuzzy teddy bears, or a big thick bumper on the crib, or a comforter. But the reality she told is that those items are fine for an older child in the crib ... but they are not safe for infants because asphyxia can occur if one of these items gets caught over their face and they are too young to remove it. Eagan says many parents may be unaware of this, so that is why this bill is so important to provide parents of newborns with this information when they leave the hospital.

Another piece of legislation State Child Advocate Sarah Eagan touched on during the show is one that looks to reduce the use and reliance on restraints and use of seclusion on children. She says these are potentially harmful and traumatic practices for children with or without disabilities in our schools. Ms. Eagan told that over the last 3 school years the state has averaged over 30-thousand reported incidents of the use of restraints and seclusion for children with disabilities which affected over 25-hundred students each year, with over 1,300 reported incidents of injury to children as a result of this use. She says this use has to be curtailed in Connecticut as it has not been shown to reduce problem behavior.

State Child Advocate Sarah Eagan also told on the show that her office has issued a public health alert on youth suicide. She explained that the Department of Public Health did a youth risk behavior survey and it found that 14% of students admitted they have seriously considered attempting suicide during the past year. Eagan says that 21% of the kids told that they were not sure who to talk to when they felt sad, empty, or anguished. She says this is a very troubling report as it also found that the average age of someone contemplating suicide has gone down from age 17 to age 14. Eagan says in this day and age there are a lot of social and academic stressors on teens. She says it's important for parents and schools to recognize this and identify teens who may be expressing despair and anguish to prevent a tragedy and get them help. Eagan told that in 2013 Connecticut had 10 youth suicides with many of those occurring just before the start of the new school year.

May 24th, 2015 - Mark Waxenberg - Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Mark Waxenberg, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association (the state's largest teacher union), talked about testing in Connecticut and what should be done about it. He explained that since 2008 Connecticut (along with some other states) adopted the SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) testing program. Mr. Waxenberg told however that teachers feel this testing program is not working at all. He says the major issue is this type of testing takes too much valuable time out of the classroom to prepare to take the test and it is causing significant disruption. Waxenberg says a lot of students are totally confused not being able to understand the questions. He says because of this it really causes them to question all of the data from this test. Waxenberg questioned whether it is because students don't really know the topic, or is it because they are totally confused and they can't answer the topic. He says they feel it's the latter.

The Connecticut Education Association took a survey and 90% of the teachers surveyed said there's too much time taken away from real learning in the classroom and it's disrupting the process. Meantime 96% said this testing system is in no way helping learning. CEA Executive Director Mark Waxenberg says these results are very, very stark and when you get 96% that's a pretty serious number that people have to take into account when we look at testing in Connecticut. He added that this isn't teachers not wanting to be accountable for what their students have or have not learned. Waxenberg says the question is what is the best tool for accountability - not only of the teachers - but of the students. He says the testing tool that they are using right now is not going to give them the information they need to help the students succeed, and that it's not a good accountability measure for teachers as well.

CEA Executive Director Dr. Mark Waxenberg says all this testing is having a detrimental impact on children, with reactions ranging from anger and frustration to crying. He says they are hearing very troubling reports from the field from their teachers. Waxenberg told a 3rd grader was pulling her eyelashes out because she was so frustrated and nervous over taking the test. Meantime he stated a special education student said "this is too hard, I quit." Waxenberg says testing should be

May 24th, 2015 - (Waxenberg continued) - done to help students succeed and to know where his or her flaws are. He says it's not there to be high stakes and call children failures if they don't do well and that's what they are doing. He says they are impressing upon these students that they must do well or they'll be a failure. Waxenberg says that creates a big stress level that is showing with these 3rd and 4th grader's emotional responses. He says they should be doing less testing and more learning, and that parents and the public agree with them as well. Waxenberg says they want the experts in the classroom to convene, look at what's happening, and create a testing methodology for students that makes sense.

May 31st, 2015 - Joseph Cirsuolo - Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.

Subject Matter: This week on Dialogue Joseph Cirsuolo, President of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, spoke about various issues concerning school districts. First he was asked about the concerns of the Connecticut Education Association expressed on this program the previous week. They feel there's way too much testing going on in schools these days to the detriment of the learning process. But Mr. Cirsuolo doesn't agree with the teacher's union that teachers and students are totally stressed out by the testing to the point where basic learning is getting pushed aside. Cirsuolo says that's a gross over generalization of what the facts are. He told that students have been tested in grades 3 through 8 and one grade in high school ever since the mid 1980's. The one exception that Cirsuolo says he would agree with the teacher's association where there's too much testing is in grade 11. Cirsuolo says the Smarter Balance Assessment System is ticketed for this grade and he feels it really should be for grade 10. He told that in grade 10 there are no other tests, whereas in grade 11 they are taking SAT's, Advanced Placement Tests, and some kids take PSAT's which is way too much. Cirsuolo feels they will be changing this situation for 11th graders. But other than grade 11 Cirsuolo doesn't feel in general the level of testing is getting in the way of instruction. He feels that actually when kids are taking these assessment tests they are learning, and that's part of the learning process.

May 31st, 2015 - (Cirasuolo continued) -

After the Newtown schools killings in December of 2012 school safety has been a big issue. The state did a lot including making money available so that schools could upgrade through awards for security grants. Many school systems however weren't ready to say what they needed or wanted and so the deadline has been extended for a year. Superintendents President Joseph Cirasuolo feels this is a good idea. He says you want to make sure that people don't put an application together just to meet a deadline and then afterwards wish they had applied for something else. Cirasuolo says school security obviously is their most basic responsibility to keep everybody safe and they take it seriously. He says the districts do involve a lot of people in putting their plans together so this gives them another year. Cirasuolo on the show commended everyone in state government, the governor and legislature, for addressing this. He says they not only said schools need to be made more secure, they put their money where their mouth is and are supplying it. Cirasuolo told that following Sandy Hook schools have made security upgrades like limiting access to school buildings, putting in better glass and doors, and having a lot more visual monitoring of school buildings inside and out. Cirasuolo says schools have also drilled for if, God forbid, they ever have a crisis people know what to do. He says Sandy Hook raised everyone's awareness. As for armed security guards, Cirasuolo says by next year most likely no one will have them in their schools. He told that one school district had them but decided not to go with them for next school year. He did say that there are school resource officers in some school districts that have been armed for many years, though for the most part school districts are handling the security without armed guards and without resource officers.

On another matter, School Superintendents Executive Director Joseph Cirasuolo discussed the cost of special education on districts. He says he has discussed with Connecticut Speaker of the House Brendan Sharkey who feels ideally it would be best for the State of Connecticut to pay for special education. This Sharkey feels would end patterns where parents seek out a better school system for their special needs child, putting a big financial burden on that school system. Cirasuolo says they definitely want to explore that with House Speaker Sharkey to implement a statewide system for special education needs.

June 7th, 2015 - Dr. Phillip Armstrong - Director of the State's Mosquito Management Program.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Dr. Phillip Armstrong, Director of the State of Connecticut's Mosquito Management Program, discussed their trapping and testing of mosquitoes now that the warmer weather has arrived. He explained that they monitor the mosquito populations at some 91 locations throughout the state. Dr. Armstrong says they visit all of the sites on a weekly rotation with mosquitoes brought into the central labs in New Haven at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. It's there says Armstrong where they test the mosquitoes for viral infection. One of the big mosquito viral infections the test for is West Nile Virus, which first came into North America through New York City in 1999. Dr. Armstrong says West Nile Virus then spread across the country and is now the dominant mosquito-borne viral disease in the United States.

Dr. Phillip Armstrong explained that if one is bitten by a mosquito for most people their body's immune system wards off West Nile Virus. But for those who contract West Nile Virus, lots of times the symptoms start out similar to a flu-like illness. He says it's accompanied with a high fever, stiff neck, fatigue, and vomiting with many people developing a rash as well. Dr. Armstrong says some people though then develop a much more serious disease ... a neurological infection which includes encephalitis and meningitis ... which is a life threatening condition.

The Director of the State's Mosquito Management Program, Dr. Phillip Armstrong says the type of mosquito that carries this disease is really the common house mosquito called *Culex Pipiens*. He says they are found in and around people's homes and breed in water that collects in storm drains, rain gutters, and wherever water collects around the home.

Dr. Armstrong told that the weather conditions that are most conducive to West Nile Virus and *Culex Pipiens* is hot, dry summers. So he says if there's a wet spring followed by a hot, dry summer in July and August, we see an increase in those *Culex Pipien* mosquitoes. Dr. Armstrong says they start trapping and testing mosquitoes on June 1st but the peak risk for West Nile Virus is the months of July, August, and September for human infection. He says about 80% of the human

June 7th, 2015 - (Armstrong continued) - infections have no symptoms, as people's immune system fights it off without any further problem. But for 20% of those that get West Nile they'll experience the fever, flu-like symptoms, and a rash. Armstrong says people over the age of 50 are at greater risk for developing severe disease from West Nile infection. Dr. Armstrong did say it could be fatal ... with most deaths occurring with the elderly, generally people over 70. He says we have had 3 deaths in Connecticut due to West Nile Virus. Armstrong told that others who have survived neurological infection and encephalitis often have residual symptoms and long-term disability due to the infection ... so it's a serious disease. Last year fortunately was a mild season for West Nile in Connecticut with just 6 human cases.

Connecticut Mosquito Management Program Director Dr. Phillip Armstrong says people should take precautions to not get bitten by mosquitoes. He told that people should limit their time outdoors at dusk and dawn when the mosquitoes are most active. Armstrong says people could wear long pants and use a mosquito repellent which contains DEET being the most effective. He says generally they don't spray to kill mosquitoes unless there's the threat of a major disease outbreak. He says they mainly get the word out to let the public know where the risky areas are so they can take personal protective measures.

Dr. Phillip Armstrong also talked about some rarer mosquito-borne viruses they test for. One of those is Eastern Equine Encephalitis, also known as Triple-E. He told that this is a very serious, very deadly disease that is transmitted by a different mosquito found in fresh water swamps in rural areas. The focal area for this in Connecticut is in Southeastern Connecticut near the Rhode Island border. Dr. Armstrong told that Triple E has a very high case fatality rate with a third of human cases being fatal and those that survive infection are looking at a lifetime of disability. Fortunately he told it's rare in Connecticut, but we did have a fatal Triple-E case in Connecticut in 2013.

June 14th, 2015 - Meg McCabe - Director of Safe Kids Connecticut.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Meg McCabe, Director of Safe Kids Connecticut, discussed summer being trauma season for kids. She told that it's the time of year when kids are most likely to end up in hospital emergency rooms as they are more active doing things because they are out of school. One of the things they may be doing is riding their bikes and by state law they are required to wear a helmet. Ms. McCabe told that it's extremely important for a kid, and for that matter an adult as well, to wear a helmet when they are on anything with wheels, whether it be a bicycle, scooter, skateboard, or rollerblades. She explained that helmets are proven to be 85 to 88 percent effective in reducing head injuries if there is a crash. McCabe says that a head injury can cause a concussion, a serious brain injury, and even death. She told that parents need to buy their child a helmet that fits snug, and not buy one too big with the feeling that they'll grow into it. McCabe says it's also important for parents to set a good example and wear a helmet themselves. She says if parents are wearing a helmet then their kids are more likely to wear one. McCabe also noted that aside from getting a new helmet that fits right as a child gets older, parents also need to change the helmet if their child is ever in a crash, because the integrity of the helmet could have changed.

A problem in the summertime that can occur with the warm weather is drownings where kids are around water. Safe Kids Connecticut Director Meg McCabe told on the show that kids need to be watched constantly near water. She says full adult supervision is key with no distractions, be it the pool or a body of water. McCabe says she also encourages parents to have their kids sign up for swim lessons. She says it's really important that a child learns how to tread water or float on their backs. McCabe says these are two very basic swimming techniques that can save their life in a situation where they are exhausted or struggling in the water.

Another problematic situation that has been occurring in this country more and more is people leaving their child in a hot car ... which can cause death. In fact last year in Connecticut in Ridgefield a father totally forgot about his toddler in the back seat, left the little boy in the hot car, and tragically the little boy died. Meg McCabe says in the United States every 8 to 10 days a child dies from heat stroke in a vehicle. She says the bottom line however is this is totally preventable.

June 14th, 2015 - (McCabe continued) - McCabe says a child should never be left alone in a car ... not even for a minute. She says they encourage people to put something important in the backseat like their cellphone, so they'll check the backseat for it and not forget that their child is back there too. McCabe says for anyone that sees a child left alone in a vehicle to call 9-1-1 because that call could save that child's life. She told that in 10 minutes the temperature inside a car can increase by 20 degrees and can become an oven. McCabe says this is severely dangerous for a child because a child's body heat can increase 3 to 5 times faster than that of an adult and can result in death. She urged people to go to the website www.wheresbaby.org for more on this crisis situation.

June 21st, 2015 - Vincent Candelora - Republican State Representative from North Branford, and Deputy State House Republican Leader.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Deputy State House Republican Leader Vincent Candelora was the guest. In an unusual situation the state budget was passed in the legislature's regular session but hasn't been signed yet by Governor Dannel Malloy. There has been a huge swirl of controversy surrounding the budget because of taxes in it that affect businesses, hospitals, and others. Deputy House Republican leader Vincent Candelora says what this budget represents is a complete failure in the process. He told that part of the reason there's so much controversy surrounding the budget is because many of the proposals ... especially the tax package, was put forth without any public hearings. Representative Candelora says now we are seeing a retroactive attack on all of these policies because nobody got to weigh in on them through public hearings when they should have had that chance. So he told how the process was done backwards, they pass a budget and now the public is weighing in ... especially businesses with some who have threatened to leave Connecticut because of the proposed unitary tax. Representative Candelora says he himself was outraged when he saw the tax package because he knows how devastating it would be to the economy in Connecticut and it doesn't surprise him that they are seeing all this outrage.

Given all of the harsh feedback on the budget Governor Malloy and the Democratic majority leaders were trying to come together with adjustments to the

June 21st, 2015 - (Candelora continued) - budget they'd look to pass in a special session to satisfy businesses. Deputy House Republican Leader Vincent Candelora when asked about this replied that it's more of the same as Governor Malloy works with nobody as he always wants things the way he wants them. Candelora says Malloy is not one who is open to other ideas, so you have a budget that is negotiated behind closed doors, without public input and without Republican input ... which is not good for the State of Connecticut. He says he'd actually like them to scrap everything and start budget negotiations with Republicans in the room. Candelora says he's actually heard from some of his Democratic colleagues who have "buyer's remorse" with their vote on the budget because they are starting to see it play out with hospitals laying off or threatening to lay off some of their workers. Meantime on the other side there are human and social service groups and organizations saying don't take anything away from them to satisfy businesses and hospitals. Representative Candelora says that's why we are seeing some paralysis within the Democratic Party trying to cobble this budget together and get enough votes lined up to pass it.

One of the big concerns Representative Vincent Candelora says they need to be paying attention to is the anemic growth in Connecticut's economy ... only at .6%. He says economists are coming out saying that Connecticut is going to have stagnant growth over the next couple of years, so the state is lagging far behind. Cangelora also told that another part of the unspoken story here is that they are raising taxes to balance a 2-year budget ... but 2 years from now the state is looking at almost a billion dollar deficit. He says Connecticut can ill afford to lose any businesses and their jobs. But he also says the state has been on an irresponsible path thanks to the Democrats' policies and needs to right the ship for the long run and get on a sustainable growth path.

June 28th, 2015 - Brian Flaherty - Senior Vice-President of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue show Brian Flaherty, Senior Vice-President of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association was the guest. CBIA was the loudest voice in calling for changes in the original budget passed by the Democrat-controlled legislature. There have been business tax increases before, and while CBIA and some companies have complained about them, things never got to the level they got to with this tax increase package. Several companies like GE came out with statements saying if some of these taxes become law they may have to consider moving out of Connecticut. Brian Flaherty told that this tax package came 4 years after the largest tax increase in state history and the passage of other workforce mandates that raised the cost of doing a job. Now with the 2015 budget the legislature produced a budget that restored many of the cuts that the governor had proposed in his budget and to pay for it put the burden on businesses through taxes. Flaherty explained that 700-million dollars or nearly half of the increase in taxes, is coming from business taxes. He told these included changes to the sales tax, taxing business services, and changing the way corporations are taxed. Flaherty says that put a burden on the workforce that already is more expensive to grow and maintain here in the State of Connecticut. He says this was the straw that broke the camel's back so to speak.

Governor Dannel Malloy, in response to the complaints about the tax increases in the original budget that was passed by the legislature, changed some things. One of those was maintaining the tax on data processing at 1 percent, instead of having it rise to as much as 6 percent. CBIA Senior Vice-President Brian Flaherty told that change had the broadest impact on businesses across the state. He says if the governor didn't make that change it would have priced many businesses right out of the marketplace. So Flaherty says what Governor Malloy did was reopen the budget and rollback some of the onerous taxes on businesses ... especially the computer and data processing tax keeping it a 1 percent. Flaherty however told that while Connecticut is now one of 23 states that does not have a unitary combined corporation income tax and makes the state attractive for businesses being headquartered here ... that soon will no longer be the case. The unitary tax was delayed until 2016 in the revised budget adjustments. He says that could be determinative as to whether some of these big or even small or medium

June 28th, 2015 - (Flaherty continued) - size corporations decide to stay and grow here or look to leave to other states.

CBIA Senior Vice-President Brian Flaherty told on the show some kind of dramatic change needs to occur here in Connecticut, as every budget cycle is a crisis one with deficits and tax increases. Flaherty says in fact after this 2-year budget cycle there are already fiscal outlooks that project the State of Connecticut will be looking at an 800-million dollar deficit 3-years out. He says one of the things that the governor and the legislature need to do is work on sustainable spending reforms like in the areas of long-term care and corrections reforms, as the population of inmates in the state is going down. Flaherty says the state needs to make reforms to drive costs down and run the state in a smarter fashion. He says there's only so much in taxes and bad budgeting a state can take. Flaherty says the state cannot just keep budgeting by looking immediately in front of it ... the state needs to look further down the road. He says unfortunately there's always just short-term thinking with 1 or 2 year budgets and 2 year election terms for office instead of long-range thinking and planning for the state.