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Wilton Bulletin

Connecticut to usher in new slate of laws Oct. 1

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In four days, Connecticut will have more than 100 new laws on its books coming into Sunday, Oct. 1. These public acts were passed by the state legislature and signed into law by Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

The laws range from attempting to curb underage drinking to health insurance mandates to roadkill.

Drinking

When the underage drinking law comes into effect, it will fine anyone who allows a minor to drink alcohol on their property. Police will still need probable cause to enter private property. Previously, police were not able to enter private property, it was only illegal for those under 21 to possess alcohol on public property.

The first offense is an infraction that carries a \$146 fine. Adults could be fined up to \$500 and/or imprisoned for up to one year for other offenses. Minors found in possession of alcohol get an infraction for the first offense, more than one other offense will bring fines between \$200 and \$500.

State Representative John Hetherington, Republican from the 125th District, said he supports the underage drinking law.

"I think that there is a great deal of concern about underage drinking and I think the concern is well placed," Mr. Hetherington said in a phone interview Tuesday. "The law ... doesn't really resolve the question of drinking on private property as far as the police are concerned."

He said the state law does not resolve the question of drinking inside a person's home. If police are not told they could come into a home they suspect underage drinking is going on in, they cannot enter without a warrant.

"The police can make if they see an underage person drinking on the front lawn," Mr. Hetherington said. "That's a very tough issue because we don't want to have people's homes searched unwarranted." But, it's a good step he said.

"I think it's a step in the right direction. It sets a clear direction as far as public policy is concerned," Mr. Hetherington said.

There are some exceptions to the state law. Parents can allow their children and spouses can allow their husband or wife to drink alcohol under their supervision. Minors can also consume alcohol as part of religious observances.

In Wilton, the town had elected to enforce an underage drinking ordinance passed by the Board of Selectmen on June 5.

Since then, three people under 21 have been issued infraction tickets for drinking alcohol on private property.

The exceptions in this ordinance includes: those who possess liquor in the course of their employment, those who possess it on the order of a practicing physician, or those who consume it as part of a religious service. Fines will be imposed at \$92.

Colleen Fawcett, a councilor at Wilton Youth Services, was a co-chair of the committee that helped create the Underage Drinking Ordinance in Wilton.

She said the committee was aware the state was working toward creating a law to help combat underage

drinking, but no one knew what the law would cover, nor if it would pass.

"Both mesh well in all respects," Ms. Fawcett said Monday.

She cautioned to say stopping underage drinking wouldn't just happen on the legislative front, but in all aspects. However, this is a good step forward, she said.

Besides attempting to curb underage drinking, there were two other laws involving being intoxicated:

- Those who drive snowmobiles or all-terrain vehicles under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol will be subject to same penalties as those who drive under the influence in other vehicles.
- Outlaw selling, purchasing or owning machines that allow the user to get a buzz by inhaling an alcohol-infused mist. Violators may be fined up to \$1,000 or be sent to prison for up to six months.

For health

Come Oct. 1, health insurance carriers will be required to cover neuropsychological testing for children who had undergone chemotherapy or radiation after being diagnosed with cancer, and check for cognitive or developmental delays.

Liz Salguero of Liberty Street helped lobby for this law as part of her work with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. She said the group met in the summer of 2005 and in May 2006, Gov. M. Jodi Rell signed it into law. "I'm very proud of that," Ms. Salguero said.

Ms. Salguero's son, Carlos, 7, was diagnosed with leukemia about five years ago, and will be five years cancer-free in January, since then the family has been active in promoting the fight against cancer.

"We're very fortunate because we could afford to pay for that," Ms. Salguero said. She said it was worrisome that Carlos could be affected by the radiation, but test showed he was fine.

But, a lot of families don't have access to the tests that can reach costs of \$3,000. Ms. Salguero said doctors are sometimes reluctant to push for the neuropsychological tests because of the costs could add extra pressure to the families.

"Research is all showing that if you wait for symptoms to show, you've really missed a huge opportunity to help those kids," she said. After Oct. 1, the testing will be part of protocol.

Mr. Hetherington said he supported mandating insurance covers neuropsychological testing, but was concerned about how many mandates that will be placed come Oct. 1.

"I do have serious concerns about the number of insurance mandates that we enact because they increase the insurance cost for everyone," said Mr. Hetherington. "Some of them are driven by very narrow interests." Other laws affecting health coverage include:

- health insurance carriers must cover ultrasounds for women who have a high risk of getting breast cancer because of family history or their personal history;
- now, licensed physical therapists will be able to treat patients directly, without a referral from another health care practitioner.

Other laws

- Require the state Department of Children and Families to notify the grandparents of a child when that child is taken from a parent. The state must use their best efforts to contact the grandparents within 15 days of removing the child.
- Allows certain pets, with approval from a veterinarian and the state, to be exempt from rabies vaccinations.
- Call for public input on a new name for the state Department of Mental Retardation.

- Allow drivers to keep any deer, moose or black bears they kill or seriously injure in an accident after the animal has been inspected by local police, state police or conservation officer and a wildlife kill report has been issued. If the driver does not want the animal, anyone may take it.

Information: cslib.org/06actsOct.htm

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