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Legislators want tabs on contractors, Brittney Spears

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SOMERVILLE - From a Brittney Spears bill to encourage use of seat belts to a construction safety site bill, local politicians have been busy championing legislation that could make a difference to Somerville.

This week, the Journal asked them what their priorities for 2007 are, and looked at the bills that have or plan to file.

Rep. Tim Toomey is the lead sponsor of 36 pieces of legislation this year, many of which focus on public safety, transportation, public service, the environment and education in Somerville and Cambridge. The Brittney Spears Bill has already seen the spotlight locally and asks that all children under 8 be secured in car seats.

In other matters, Toomey hopes to make Massachusetts' gun laws the most stringent in the nation; wants seat belts on all school buses; to give consumers the choice to purchase electricity from renewable sources; to allow municipalities greater latitude in safeguarding affordable housing; and to provide funding for youth support programs.

He also hopes to provide adequate funding to renovate and rebuild fire and police stations and establish community-based health education.

In his third term of office this year, Sen. Jarrett Barrios will be filing a comprehensive gun bill; a construction safety site bill which would affect many Somerville residents who are construction workers; and an environmental justice bill which affects densely populated areas such as Somerville.

"The biggest piece of legislation this year is our comprehensive gun bill," Barrios said. "The cycle of youth gun violence is spinning out of control. This bill is a three-pronged attack of policing, prevention and prosecution, which combined and implemented statewide, can help reduce the rise in youth gun violence by getting guns off the streets of the commonwealth."

Barrios will also be re-filing his Safe School bill to deal with the growing problem of bullying in schools, and a bill to ban teenagers from driving while using cell phones.

After filing 19 bills last week, state Rep. Carl Sciortino has covered a wide range of issues from transportation and the environment to education and public safety.

"I'm energized for the new term," Sciortino said. "Over the next two years, I see a lot of opportunities to have a positive impact on Somerville and on Massachusetts as a whole."

Education is a central component of Sciortino's legislative agenda, and two of his bills will directly affect Somerville schools.

Bills dealing with the issue of mobility, or students who move into and out of the district mid-year, and

the need create a multiple assessment system to ensure that students are prepared to graduate high school, make up his educational components.

The former was in collaboration with the Somerville School Committee.

“I want to make sure that school districts such as Somerville, with high mobile student populations, are given the resources they need to make sure every student gets enough attention,” he said. “Mobile students require additional time and attention from teachers, which can also be to the detriment of the rest of the class.”

Focusing on transportation and the environment, Sciortino also filed a bill that will have the state assume a portion of the MBTA’s debt so that the system can focus its budget on improving service and reduce the need for increased fees.

Multiple bills encouraging consumers to think green, offering tax incentives to people who install renewable energy sources or use car-sharing services such as Zipcar, are also on his agenda.

Another of his bills directly affect plans to construct a new jail in Somerville, but has statewide implications.

Less than a year after joining the State Legislature, state Rep. Denise Provost filed 13 bills as of last week, for the 2007-2008 legislative session.

These include establishing a Mystic River water quality commission; controlling speed limits; reducing human exposure to particulate matter pollution; and establishing senior citizen safety zones, to name a few.

“[My] bills giving municipalities more control over speed limits on local roads, and a bill that will create a board of registration to license naturopathic doctors,” Provost said. “It has also been a great experience collaborating with my colleagues, community members and advocacy groups to file new legislation on issues ranging from air quality, to patient safety, to the Mystic River, to college savings plans.”

Provost is the lead House sponsor of a bill that would make contributions to college savings plans tax-deductible for low- and middle-income individuals and families. “It provides incentives for people who want to plan for their children’s future,” Provost said. “The suggestion came from a constituent and makes sense to me.”

State Sen. Pat Jehlen’s priorities are local aid, education, universal and affordable health care, a safe environment, jobs that enable workers to support their families and programs that help seniors stay in their communities.

Among the 36 bills she is filing, one was jumpstarted by the 2004 Appleton Street fire that was caused by unsafe floor refinishing practices. The floor refinishing safety bill would require the training of workers and employers in the use of flammable products and less toxic product options and other safeguards. “It was a horrible event we need to learn from,” she said.

Jehlen also filed legislation to increase the property tax deferral for seniors, and legislation that would allow people to reduce unwanted communications from creditors, protect residents from unfair debt collection practices and reduce access to birth records.

“The property tax deferral is not something a lot of people know about,” Jehlen said. “It’s a great way of getting some tax relief for senior citizens and allowing them to stay longer in their own houses.”

Two of her priorities are bills that establish paid sick days and paid family leave (summaries below). Both of these measures will help provide economic security to working families in Somerville and

throughout the state.

She is also supporting the Somerville School Committee request with an act to include transitory student enrollment in the calculation of aid under Chapter 70.

New legislative year means lots of Somerville legislation

Box

Want to file your own bill?

The deadline for cosponsoring bills is January 22nd and Rep. Toomey encourages any Cambridge residents to contact his office at the State House (617-722-2692) or at Rep.TimothyToomey@hou.state.ma.us if there are specific pieces of legislation/issues you feel the representative should support. A list of some of the bills Rep. Toomey has cosponsored is available at www.timtoomey.org

