

Lawmakers mull funds to clear homeless camps

By Brianna Gurciullo
STAFF WRITER

The state Department of Transportation was involved in clearing 26 homeless encampment sites last year, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on hazardous waste removal and fencing.

State lawmakers are now considering whether to dedicate specific funding for those efforts.

Advocates say that as the number of people living outdoors in the state has grown, so has the presence of encampments on state property. As of January 2025, 833 individuals were living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings or encampments in Connecticut — a 45% increase from the previous year, according to an annual point-in-time count.

The DOT recently told legislators that cleaning up encampments near

highways, railways and bus lines — which it says it does for safety reasons or when a municipality requests it — “has become an increasing concern for which there is no dedicated funding source.” Instead, officials have used money in the agency’s “other expenses” account as well as bond funds for environmental remediation and road maintenance projects.

Funds continues on A4



Jacqueline Rabe Thomas/Hearst Connecticut Media

An encampment set up in the middle of winter under a bridge next to the train tracks in Hartford's North End.



Photos courtesy of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

Bishop Jeffrey Mello, center, and nine other pilgrims from the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut pose for a photo on the roof of the Maronite Guest House in Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock can be seen in the background.

‘YOU COULD HEAR EXPLOSIONS’

Connecticut pilgrims anxious to return home from Middle East trip

By Joshua Eaton
STAFF WRITER

When Bishop Jeffrey Mello first realized something was wrong, he was with nine other pilgrims from the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut at the site just outside of Bethlehem where, according to Christian tradition, angels appeared to shepherds to announce Jesus’ birth.

The pilgrims wouldn’t be able to visit the ancient Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, their guide told them. Something had happened, and the checkpoints leading out of the West Bank — one of two areas that, along with Gaza, make up the Palestinian territories — were closing.

By the time the pilgrims



The Rev. Ryan Fleenor, of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Darien, holds the camera as Bishop Jeffrey Mello, back center, and eight other pilgrims from the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut pose for a photo on the Sea of Galilee.

got back to the guest house where they were staying at St. George’s Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem, warning

sirens were going off, signaling residents to take shelter from incoming missiles and drones.

The United States and Israel had launched an attack on Iran, killing its leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several top military commanders and sparking counter-attacks by Iran on Israel and other regional U.S. allies.

“You could hear explosions,” Mello told CT Insider in a brief interview Monday night local time from Jordan, where the group is waiting for a flight back to the United States. “You could feel the rumbling after the explosions. Some people had seen shrapnel lighting up the sky as they were making their way to the shelter.”

The alarms came once or twice an hour Saturday night, Mello said, with only a couple of brief lulls. The

Return continues on A6

Westport woman: ‘Silence is incredibly difficult’

Awaits word from family members in Iran following attacks

By Cassandra Day
STAFF WRITER

WESTPORT — Kami Naraghi Evans hasn’t heard from the 40 or so members of her extended family who live in Tehran, Iran, for several days.

“We have had zero communication,” said Evans, of Westport. “That silence is incredibly difficult.”

U.S. and Israel airstrikes over the weekend killed 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, along with senior leadership.

“They are not in a confirmed strike zone, but when tensions escalate, geography becomes secondary,” Evans said. “Fear and instability ripple across the entire re-

Silence continues on A6

McCrory resigns from board amid probe

An embattled Sen. Douglas McCrory, citing a recent audit that suggests he might have been involved in fraud, resigned Tuesday afternoon from an influential public board that gives hundreds of millions of dollars in state bond money to distressed cities and towns.

McCrory, a Hartford Democrat, exited the Community Investment Fund 2030 board in a letter to Sen. Martin Looney, D-New Haven, the Senate president pro-tem. Looney and House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, serve as co-chairs of the board.

Resigns continues on A4



Dan Haar
COMMENTARY

Families push back on stricter state laws for homeschooling

By Natasha Sokoloff
STAFF WRITER

HARTFORD — The death of 11-year-old Jacqueline “Mimi” Torres-Garcia — whose remains were found in October — went unnoticed for a year because she was no longer enrolled in school. A year ago, a man set fire to his own confined space in Waterbury, saying he had been held captive for 20 years since he was pulled out of

public school to be homeschooled as a child. In 2023, a 10-year-old New London boy was found badly beaten and starving — withdrawn from school before the abuse was discovered.

Each case pushed Connecticut’s homeschooling laws into the spotlight, fueling clashes between homeschooling families who say they are unfairly villainized, and supporters of greater regulation to help prevent fu-

ture tragedies.

That tension extended into the state’s Legislative Office Building in Hartford on Tuesday, where a crowd of homeschooling families and advocates flooded a public hearing on proposed legislation that would strengthen the rules for when a child is pulled out of public school.

The hearing room was filled with dozens of people, includ-

Laws continues on A4



A hearing Tuesday on proposed legislation that has the homeschooling community concerned is filled with people in Hartford.

Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

