

Area legislators offer bills on concrete, education, term limits

By Eric Bedner

ebedner@journalinquirer.com

HARTFORD — Area legislators say they are introducing a variety of bills this session, including those aimed at crumbling foundations, term limits for state office, and requiring back seat passengers to use seat belts.

Reps. Kurt Vail, R-Stafford, and Thomas Delnicki, R-South Windsor, are co-sponsoring two bills intended to provide relief for homeowners with crumbling foundations and to prevent the issue from occurring again, the first of which has been proposed before.

The bill would further define the phrase “peril of collapse” in homeowners insurance policies, which would require insurance companies to provide prospective coverage for deteriorating foundations.

While the state Supreme Court is considering a case that will define the term “collapse” in homeowner policy language, Vail said legislators shouldn’t wait to act because the decision could not turn out in favor of homeowners.

“I still think instead of state taxpayers paying for it, the onus should be on insurance companies,” he said.

The second foundation-related bill would implement the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recommendations for quarry standards.

At the least, Vail said, if the bill receives a public hearing, the amount of acceptable pyrrhotite in aggregate could be better determined.

And, Delnicki added, all quarries in the state need to be held to the same standard.

Likewise, Reps. Christopher Davis, R-Ellington, and Jeffrey A. Currey, D-East Hartford, said they will continue to push for solutions to the crumbling foundation issue, including tweaking language to last year’s bill to make condominiums eligible for financial assistance through the state’s captive insurance company.

Vail also is proposing a bill that would implement a 12-year term limit for all state officials, but admits it’s not likely to gain much traction.

“I don’t anticipate it getting much support in this building,” he said. “People want to protect their

Currey is looking to tweak the Education Cost Sharing formula to make free and reduced-cost lunch programs more equitable, as well as potentially establishing minimum school district sizes.

With 83 districts with fewer than 2,000 students, he said, “I think we need to talk about a consolidation of districts.”

Currey also is seeking to change a legal policy that enables people to claim “gay panic defense,” a strategy used by defendants accused of violence toward a person who is presumed to be making unwanted same-sex sexual advances.

“You can kind of compare it to a moment of temporary insanity,” he said. “I think we need to take that off the books. ... In the heightened climate that we’re in right now I think it’s important to remove any potential loopholes.”

Rep. Michael Winkler, D-Vernon, has introduced a bill that would require rear passengers to wear seat belts, saying that without them, people “turn into projectiles.”

He also is proposing legislation that would clarify that municipalities can use utility poles, citing towns that attempted to establish free WiFi but were told they couldn’t by the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority.

Several legislators, including Davis, who is the ranking member of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee, said their personal bills are secondary to balancing the budget, which is facing a \$1.7 billion deficit next fiscal year.

Vail said the focus should be balancing the budget without raising taxes.

Davis added that he is looking forward to working with Gov. Ned Lamont, specifically in terms of increased economic development.

Winkler said he would support paid family medical leave, increasing the minimum wage, and legalizing marijuana.

Rep. Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, co-chairman of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee, said he is “laser-focused” on the revenue side of the budget. But he added that among other things he wants to find a more reliable monetary source for municipal economic