



# Jamie Eldridge

★ State Senator Middlesex & Worcester District ★

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**Dear Friend,**

The month of November was a very productive one for the State Senate, with the passage of an education reform bill, a criminal justice reform bill, and a bill designed to help out our Massachusetts veterans, along with measures to address the state budget crisis.



Unfortunately, formal sessions for the year ended before final action on the education and criminal justice bills could be taken. Although I have strong hopes that both bills will pass and be signed into law early next year, I would have liked to have seen us finish the job sooner – which is why I supported Governor Patrick's call for the Legislature to come back into session to finish this work.

In the meantime, our office is still hard at work on your behalf: working to move important legislation forward, reviewing bills before my committees, testifying at hearings, and helping constituents who call our office in need of assistance. As always, please be in touch if you have any questions on state government issues, or there's anything my staff and I can do for you.

With Thanksgiving just past us, I know I have much to be thankful for this year - my rapidly improving health, wonderful family and friends, and a job I love, serving the people of the Middlesex & Worcester District. Thank you for your continued support that allows me to do this.

Best wishes for a very happy, and safe, holiday to you and your family,

**Jamie Eldridge**

## **WINTER 2009 NEWSLETTER**

**Please contact me  
anytime:**

**State House**  
Room 213-A  
Boston, MA 02133  
617-722-1120

[James.Eldridge@state.ma.us](mailto:James.Eldridge@state.ma.us)

**District Office**  
255 Main Street  
Room 106  
Marlborough, MA  
508-786-3040

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# Legislative Update

Here are updates on some of the issues I've been working on this past fall and early winter:

## Education Reform

In late November, the Senate passed an innovative education reform bill establishing a new category of public schools, providing options to improve existing school districts that are underperforming, and putting the Commonwealth in better position to secure federal "Race to the Top" funds to help all public schools in Massachusetts.

I supported this bill, *An Act Relative to Education Reform*, because I believe strongly that every student in Massachusetts deserves a world-class education. Massachusetts has some of the best public schools in the country, but there are schools that continue to struggle for a variety of reasons. We owe it to the children in those schools to provide additional tools that school districts can use to turn themselves around.

Like much legislation that is passed, I don't believe it's a perfect bill. I was pleased, however, with some of the concessions we won to protect workers' right -- and on the whole, I think this bill will improve our state's education system.

## Supporting our Vets

Right before Veteran's Day, the Legislature also gave approval to (and Governor Patrick signed into law) legislation to enhance and protect benefits of Massachusetts' veterans and servicemembers.

Included in that bill, *An Act to Provide Benefits for Veterans and Servicemembers*, are improvements in voting rights for servicemembers originally included in the [Freedom to Vote Act](#), which I filed last January.

I'm pleased that the Veterans Bill included something I've been fighting for: changes to our absentee voting system to make it much easier for men and women serving in the military to vote. Too often, our cumbersome system has prevented many of our soldiers overseas from having their vote counted. This bill will help ensure that those who are protecting our democracy also have the opportunity to participate in it.

## Criminal Justice Reform

The Senate also passed an omnibus crime package in the last week of November, including CORI and sentencing reform.

Reforming our broken Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) system and sentencing laws will reduce crime and recidivism in our neighborhoods, relieve overcrowded prisons, and lower criminal justice costs. As a matter of public safety and as a matter of responsible budget management practices, this bill is sound policy, and I'm proud to have voted for it.

We often talk, on Beacon Hill, about making government more efficient. This bill we've passed does exactly that.

## Budget Transparency

One issue I have been working hard on is that of budget transparency, with a particular focus on the way certain refundable business tax credits are reported.

Right now, there is no transparency around who receives these tax credits, how much they are getting, or how many jobs they have created with the credit.

**At a time of extreme budget cuts, this is unacceptable.** Tens of millions of dollars go out in the form of refundable tax credits every year - and yet legislators, and the public, have no idea where the money is going or what effect it's having.

Myself and a group of like-minded legislators have been pushing to make this information public, to provide us with the information we need to effectively manage the public's money and a measure of accountability as to the cost effectiveness of tax credits.

During budget deliberations this year, we had many discussions on raising revenue. **But it's also important that we make sure we know how that revenue is being spent, particularly when it comes to tax breaks for corporations.** These tax breaks might be effective; they might not. The truth is that right now, we simply don't know.

Transparency and accountability are two things I will always be pushing for in our state budgeting process.