



## Chapter Spotlight: Connecticut SSN Brings Researchers and Policymakers Into the Same Room

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Dominik Doemer

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For years, Professor [Kerri Raissian](#) has dreamed of bringing researchers and state legislators into the same room to connect and find avenues for collaboration. And earlier this year, as co-leader of the [SSN Connecticut chapter](#), she made this dream a reality. In partnership with State Representative Jaime Foster and the Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Policy, Raissian helped to organize a day of research presentations for legislators that ended up bringing together over 150 participants in the Connecticut Capitol.

Dubbed the "Moving Beyond Implications" conference, the event came together in a flurry after Representative Foster and Raissian connected while serving on a panel at the University of Connecticut in the fall of 2023. Rep Foster was well positioned to help the Connecticut chapter bridge the gap between academia and policymakers because she herself holds a PhD in Nutritional Sciences from UConn and works as a research scientist at the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center.

Over the course of a few short months, Raissian raced to put out a call to researchers, asking them to submit topics they would be interested in presenting on to Connecticut policymakers. Any topic was fair game, so long as there was a clear connection to Connecticut and state policy. In total, 15 researchers ended up being selected to present their work and write a short policy brief that could be given to participants. The program and research briefs were also made [available online](#).

"It was nice to try to convince people that policy was related to them, no matter what their area of study is, because all areas of study can inform evidence based policymaking, even the ones we might not just automatically think about, or that have policy in the name," said Raissian.

The conference was split into four main tracks, organized by topic: Public Health and Human Services; Judiciary, Public Safety, and Security; Energy, Technology, and Environment; and Children and Education. This allowed attendees, who ranged from state policymakers and their staff, to agency representatives, and even Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz and members of the Governor's office, to attend presentations tailored to their interests and purview. With time for questions built in, each presenting researcher had a chance to respond directly to the policy actors who were best positioned to leverage their findings for policy change, building relationships that can strengthen the connection between academia and policy in Connecticut for years to come.

The event garnered attention from individuals who happened to be in the building that day, drawing in attendees from various backgrounds, including journalists. At the event, numerous networking opportunities were incorporated to facilitate connections among academics and researchers including structured breaks for lunch and coffee, as well as a networking session at the end of the day. By organizing smaller groups, the event fostered more intimate conversations and meaningful exchanges among attendees.

As Raissian and Foster wrote in a [column for \*The Connecticut Mirror\*](#) shortly after the event concluded, a key takeaway from the conference was: “We need more opportunities like this one.” Policymakers in Connecticut are eager to draw on the latest research to implement policies that can improve the state. And researchers in Connecticut have a wealth of information to offer and a deep expertise in analyzing policies and other interventions. As Raissian and Foster explain:

“Effective policy requires both perspectives, and more accurately, it requires ongoing conversations with policymakers and researchers. As we approach the 2024 legislative session — a ‘short’ session — fostering these quick connections is even more pertinent. And now, because of this conference, Connecticut’s policymakers have formed new relationships with researchers from across the state.”

In the short span since the conference, connections have already been made between policymakers and academics on topics including Medicaid waivers lowering recidivism rates and do-it-yourself indoor air purifiers for Connecticut STEM students. The Office of Policy and Management also committed to sharing state data with academics on American Rescue Plan-funded pilot programs.

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz reflected on the event in Raissian and Foster’s column:

“One of the benefits of a part-time legislature is that our representatives can come from all walks of life and from a wide range of careers. That variety of experience can then bring a unique perspective to the way we do things or how we look at legislation — often for the better. As a research scientist for the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center, Dr. Foster knows first-hand the importance of research — and as a legislator, State Rep. Foster has seen the extraordinary results that can come from turning relevant research into evidence-based policymaking. It was an honor to participate in this first-of-its-kind conference, and I’m looking forward to seeing the results.”

Raissian emphasized the support that the Scholars Strategy Network provided for this event. The SSN staff edited the policy briefs and, prior to the conference, SSN organized a pre-workshop for presenters, acquainting them with the Connecticut legislative process. Additionally, SSN conducted a last minute training session to better prepare scholars for their conference roles. “The other lesson here is — I mean we all know SSN National is a wonderful resource — but if you need help with something like a training opportunity, don’t hesitate to ask [SSN], because if they can do it, they will,” Raissian noted.

Looking ahead, the Connecticut SSN chapter is already planning the next conference, for December 2024 ahead of the January 2025 legislative session. With a longer time-span, there is ample time to plan ahead and consider which research topics will be of most interest to Connecticut’s policy leaders. For Connecticut-based academics looking to get involved, reach out to chapter co-leader Kerri Raissian.