

Chapter Spotlight: Connecticut SSN Starts Column in Local News Outlet

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“The Connecticut Mirror focuses sharply on state politics and public policy, and runs a popular public forum that lets non-journalists address timely issues of statewide and national importance. You can see, then, why we would value so highly commentary rooted in hard data, objective research and documented facts. That made partnering with SSN scholars from the state's universities a no brainer.” – Paul Stern, CT Mirror Viewpoints Editor

For scholars looking to share their research with key stakeholders, writing an OpEd doesn't just crack the window of opportunity – it pushes it wide open. And that window is all the more likely to open when the work is a team effort. Enter local media partnerships: mutually beneficial collaborations between local media outlets and SSN chapters. As part of these partnerships, the media outlet continually receives compelling OpEds written by local researchers. In return, the research and policy ideas of these SSN chapter members find greater exposure as they are disseminated to that outlet's audience. The latest chapter to secure a media partnership is Connecticut SSN – and their collaboration with [The Connecticut Mirror](#) is already reaping the rewards.

While the official partnership is quickly proving beneficial, the relationship with the nonprofit, nonpartisan digital news outlet developed slowly. Chapter leader [Kerri Raissian](#), Associate Professor of Public Policy at University of Connecticut, remembers attending an SSN event in 2019 and feeling inspired when hearing about the success of Maine SSN's long running partnership with the [Bangor Daily News](#). In 2020, Raissian became involved with a state-wide vaccination exemption debate and started writing her viewpoints in the [CT Mirror](#). Other chapter members began writing OpEds for the online-only newspaper as well, and Connecticut SSN immediately noticed how easy the outlet was to work with.

Aside from being approachable, the *CT Mirror* appealed to the chapter for two primary reasons: first, its nonpartisan stance, which aligns well with



Kerri Raissian

Connecticut SSN. As Raissian put it, “They’re very ‘here are the facts’ which made them a good match for us. We both just want to think about issues and evidence and facilitate a policy discussion.” Second, Raissian underscored that it’s a policy-focused outlet that’s actively read all across the state rather than being tied to a particular region of Connecticut. Some of its most active readers are local and state policymakers – exactly the audience Connecticut chapter members are hoping to reach.

With these assets in mind, the chapter decided last year to take the plunge, despite initial anxiety over the time commitment. They met with *CT Mirror* CEO Bruce Putterman and Viewpoints Editor Paul Stern. “We all sat and talked together about what the partnership would look like, and we just started submitting our pieces,” Raissian said.

Stern shared:

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Playing off the name of the outlet, the chapter calls their column [Scholars Reflections](#), and those reflections are submitted on a manageable timeline. “We committed to having some good content in the legislative session and then continuing to comment on policy issues during the election cycle as it relates to Connecticut,” Raissian said.

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Connecticut SSN's column

Taking advantage of the current legislative session, Connecticut SSN didn't waste any time forging valuable connections: during the summer and fall (prior to the start of the legislative session) the chapter emailed local legislators letting them know about their column and asked if there were any topics they would want the scholars to comment on. Many replied. Raissian shared an example: "Representative [William Petit](#) expressed interest in COVID guidelines. And though we didn't have a Reflection about legislation currently before the Assembly, we did have one about hospital visitations during COVID, which was still responsive to his request."

[Suzanne Marmo](#) (Sacred Heart University), [Kerry Milner](#) (Sacred Heart University), and [Shannon Lane](#) (Yeshiva University) wrote the [piece](#), drawing on their research to argue that not much benefit is derived from limiting hospital visitations during COVID surges. Instead, they wrote, hospitals need to enforce visitation practices to benefit patient well-being, while keeping everyone safe.

Raissian emphasized the diversity of voices, backgrounds, and expertise chapter members bring to the column:

"We have nurses, therapists, economists, historians. And we've got a range of topics: COVID hospitalizations, expanding school choice, the EITC, higher education. And we're also really bringing out the different voices from Connecticut institutions as well."

Chapter leaders create a sense of camaraderie and teamwork by offering some initial editing support to members submitting to the *CT Mirror* for the first time. "I've been fortunate to have been coached by the folks at SSN and I've attended OpEd trainings. So I just try to take that wisdom and pass it on," Raissian remarked.

After the publication of each piece, Connecticut SSN makes sure to send it to relevant policymakers. And, moving forward, they plan to create databases of legislative assignments to know which legislators are serving on which committee. "That way, when a piece comes out it's not only sent to legislators, but entire committees as well," Raissian said. The chapter hopes this will result in more conversations with policymakers about their legislative priorities and how research can play a role in their work.

Building these relationships even further, Connecticut SSN looks forward to putting together an informal meet and greet with legislators and the governor's office in the future.

Learn more about the Connecticut chapter [here](#).