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State Representative

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149th Legislative District



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Pushing for reopening PA safely

Dear Neighbor,

Thank you all for your patience and hard work in recent months. I know that this has been a very difficult time for all of us as the COVID-19 pandemic forced our community to make sacrifices we'd never imagined, as we all worked together to stay home and slow the spread of the virus. As you know, this was required to prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed, scale up our testing capabilities, obtain medical supplies and to put in place appropriate safety measures.

Montgomery County was among the first and hardest-hit counties in Pennsylvania. But because of your efforts, our county was moved to the green reopening phase on June 26.

And in June, Pennsylvania was one of just three states in the country that had seen a downward trajectory of COVID-19 cases for 42 days, according to CDC data.

While we all wanted to reopen as soon as possible, the numbers demonstrate resisting the reckless approach taken by those attempting to politicize the pandemic was the best course of action. Following Gov. Wolf's responsible, comprehensive, phased reopening approach, based on science, was the safest and most economically responsible plan for the long term.

Throughout this process, I've advocated for ways we could reopen safely, without jeopardizing our community's health. I pushed for ways to support small businesses and help sectors like construction, real estate and outdoor recreation reopen with mitigation efforts in place to keep our loved ones safe.

Restoring consumer confidence is critical, but as we are now seeing in other states, reopening too quickly or without proper safety measures in place will cause an increase of COVID-19 that could undo the progress we've made – even before a potential second wave arrives.

In the green reopening phase, many restrictions are lifted, but the virus is not gone, and it is critical that we still monitor public health indicators, continue to increase our testing capabilities and ensure we continue to move in the right direction.

So, please, keep up the good work. Remember to wash your hands and clean surfaces frequently, practice social distancing and wear a mask when you are out.

We're all in this together. Stay safe.



STAY UP TO DATE!

For the latest on COVID-19 in Pennsylvania and our community, please visit the following websites.

Health Department: health.pa.gov

Montgomery County website: www.montcopa.org

Governor's website: www.governor.pa.gov/process-to-reopen-pennsylvania/



My mask protects you; Your mask protects me

As we reopen our economy, it remains critical that we continue our efforts to protect each other and keep the spread of COVID-19 to a minimum.

Wearing a mask is still required when entering a business, anywhere in the state, unless you have a health exception. Multiple studies support the wearing of masks and show that it can help us reduce transmission of the virus.

It's unfortunate that something as simple and effective as wearing a mask has become part of a culture war, but we must remain vigilant against this virus. For most of us, wearing a mask is a small inconvenience, and it could help save the lives of our more vulnerable community members. Let's work together to keep each other healthy!

Emergency declaration remains critical to recovery

Without a strong federal response to the global pandemic, our governors filled the void. Governor Wolf issued and then renewed his declaration of a disaster emergency on June 3, and this remains a critical piece of our recovery efforts, despite efforts by the majority party to terminate it. During the time of emergency, we need one leader, the Governor, to make decisions. While as a legislator, I am a member of a coequal branch of government, the General Assembly is a deliberative body and cannot react quickly enough to fight a virus that we still don't know enough about.

We always need to work together for us to be at our best, and I supported the strategy implemented by the Governor and his public health advisors to put in place safeguards for our workers as well as our community, and create safe industry-specific protocols while we reopened in a phased approach. There has been a lot of pressure from special interests to reopen quicker, even during the height of the pandemic, but I voted against any attempt to rush reopening recklessly and dangerously. I felt it was irresponsible for those who attempt to play politics while putting the health and welfare of our children, seniors

and most vulnerable at risk to pursue a resolution that would terminate the disaster emergency, because it would have a devastating

impact on our recovery and the reopening process. The public confusion these efforts created have been harmful enough, but if it were successful the consequences could be grave.

Terminating the disaster emergency would jeopardize aid for our communities, remove National Guard assistance from our nursing homes, make it harder to get personal protective equipment into the hands of health care workers and other essential employees who need it, undo changes we made to expand unemployment compensation, and more. The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency has said the declaration is still needed to continue the response to the pandemic and ensure local, county and state governments are eligible for federal reimbursement of related costs.

After the resolution passed the House and Senate, some of my colleagues claimed that ended the guidelines for businesses, but that's simply not true. The orders affecting businesses through the reopening process were made by the Department of Health and would not change if the emergency declaration were terminated.

Article III, Section 9 of the Pennsylvania Constitution clearly states that any concurrent resolutions go to the governor for his signature or disapproval, and he said he will not sign this resolution. The matter is now before the court system. *This decision is expected shortly – sign up for my regular email updates and I will circulate a summary of the decision.*

Please, continue to follow the guidance coming from state agencies and medical experts. We don't want to see our case numbers spike and set us back in our progress.



Update on COVID-19 and nursing homes

In June, a universal testing order went into effect for nursing homes, requiring all nursing homes to complete initial baseline testing by July 24. This requirement should have been made much sooner, but it is my understanding that the lack of testing supplies available made a requirement like this impossible.

This has been very difficult for those with loved ones living in facilities. The Health and Human Services departments recently issued updated guidance requiring long-term care facilities to meet several prerequisites, related to planning and testing, before moving into a 3-step reopening process. Each step of the reopening process includes specific criteria for dining, activities, non-essential personnel, visitors and more.

Find more information at www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Nursing-Homes.aspx.

Recently adopted legislation outlining how Pennsylvania will spend federal CARES Act relief funds included \$692 million for long-term living programs, including funds for health care collaboratives, nursing homes, personal care and assisted living programs and more.

As our communities continue to recover, we'll need to pay special attention to our nursing homes and long-term care facilities and ensure they have the resources and support to care for our most vulnerable residents.



Category	Funding Amount
Worker Protections	\$150 MILLION
Business + Local Government Relief	\$870 MILLION
Education + Early Childhood	\$347 MILLION
Health Care	\$30 MILLION
Food + Shelter	\$225 MILLION
Services for Vulnerable Populations	\$980 MILLION

CARES Act
HOW PA WILL USE OUR FEDERAL FUNDING TO HELP PENNSYLVANIANS DURING COVID-19

Passing a budget – but not a complete one

Typically, the House and Senate, along with the Governor's administration, spend the month of June negotiating and debating the state budget for the following fiscal year.

This year we were done far more quickly – but we were unable to put together a complete, sound budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

With reduced and uncertain revenue estimates, and uncertainty over additional federal relief to the states, the legislature sent the governor a \$25 billion plan, which he signed, that only funds critical programs and services for five months. Come November, we'll have to determine how to fund services for the rest of the year.

The only exception to the temporary, short-term budget, is education, which was funded for a full year – but at last year's funding level. For our schools facing increased costs and challenges brought on by the pandemic, that is essentially a cut to their budgets.

While I did not support the central bill in the budget package, there were other elements that I advocated for and was able to support that will help our communities get through this challenging time.

We passed a plan that ensures federal CARES Act money will go to work for our communities, businesses and families. I'll keep pushing to put your needs first as we see more of how the pandemic has affected Pennsylvania and work to finish the rest of the budget.

11th annual 'There Ought to be a Law' contest



This was the 11th year of my annual "There Ought to be a Law" essay contest, which drew around 500 entries from area fifth-grade students.

I host this contest in an attempt to spark an interest in government and politics for students. The contest challenges them to write a persuasive essay about a law or change they think would make their school, community or state a better place.

I'm always inspired by the results! We are lucky to have such compassionate and intelligent students in our community.

This year's winner was **Bella McPherson** from Upper Merion Area Middle School, who proposed to have schools use all-natural cleaning products instead of harmful chemicals.

The winner is typically invited to visit the Capitol and be recognized by the House of Representatives.

In addition to the winner, the following students were named finalists:

- Peter Beh** – Penn Valley Elementary School
- Alexandria Confino** – Upper Merion Area Middle School
- Maya Gavrin** – Gladwyne Elementary School
- Rachel Gavrin** – Gladwyne Elementary School
- Tuvya Gross** – Caskey Torah Academy
- Chananya Halpern** – Caskey Torah Academy
- Alyssa Hill** – Upper Merion Area Middle School
- Lucie Jiang** – Penn Valley Elementary School
- Vivienne Kwait** – Gladwyne Elementary School
- Mia Mobley** – Mother Teresa Regional Catholic School.
- Anja Montich** – Upper Merion Area Middle School
- Maximilian Niesciore** – Penn Valley Elementary School
- Cecilia Peterson** – Penn Wynne Elementary School
- Julia Prosnitz** – Penn Valley Elementary School
- Ava Santonastasi** – Upper Merion Area Middle School
- Sheridan Zeiss** – Upper Merion Area Middle School

Task force to examine racial disparity of COVID-19

Reports from around the country show that black and minority communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

In Pennsylvania, we've struggled for demographic data on COVID-19 cases, though that information is now being reported.

Gov. Wolf and Lt. Gov. John Fetterman created the COVID-19 Response Task Force for Health Disparity that is looking into how the pandemic has affected the state's minority and vulnerable populations, and I look forward to seeing any recommendations that task force makes.

The task force reinforced the requirement that race and ethnicity be reported for patients tested for coronavirus, and compliance has risen. The group has also highlighted the need for accessible testing and worked to support community outreach.

The PA House Democrats are pushing for a "Just Recovery" moving forward from the pandemic – a recovery that works for everyone. This means addressing some issues that were around before this public health crisis, like the need for a living wage, a quality education for all kids, and affordable and accessible health care for everyone. Numerous bills have been introduced, and I'll keep you posted on their progress.

Real ID, PennDOT extensions

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has postponed the enforcement date for Real ID by one year to October 1, 2021, in response to COVID-19 and the national emergency declaration.

PennDOT temporarily paused the issuance of Real IDs due to COVID-19, but pre-verified customers can still apply for Real ID online.

For driver licenses, photo ID cards and learner's permits scheduled to expire between March 16, 2020, and July 31, 2020, the expiration date is now extended until July 31, 2020. Driver licenses and photo ID cards may also be renewed online at any time.

The King of Prussia Driver License Center at 143 South Gulph Road, King of Prussia reopened with limited services on June 5 and in-person services are now beginning to be available.

Find more on how COVID-19 has affected PennDOT operations at www.pennDOT.gov.

Information about Real ID can be found on PennDOT's website, under the Real ID section: www.penndot.gov/REALID.

Making sure voters can make their voices heard - safely

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many changes to the primary election as we worked to ensure voters could still make their voices heard – safely.

Act 77 of 2019 brought voting reforms to Pennsylvania, including no-excuse mail-in voting, which was available for the first time in the primary. Because of COVID-19, an unprecedented number of people turned to the new mail-



in option, in order to maintain social distancing while they exercised their right to vote.

The House and Senate worked in bipartisan fashion to postpone the primary to June 2 and allowed counties to consolidate polling places, relocating those that would have been in places like senior centers. Legislation also allowed counties to begin processing and tabulating mail ballots beginning at 7 a.m. on Election Day, rather than after the polls close at 8 p.m.

Still, the primary was unlike any other. Nearly 1.5 million mail-in or absentee ballots were cast in Pennsylvania, 17 times the number that voted absentee in the 2016 primary, when approximately 84,000 absentee ballots were cast. The Montgomery County Board of Elections set up drop-off sites for ballots, for those who were worried about getting their votes in on time, and Governor Wolf extended the period for some counties, like ours, to count those votes.

In the weeks after the primary, the General Assembly passed H.B. 2502, which the Governor signed as Act 35 of 2020, requiring the Department of State to publish a report on the June 2, 2020, primary election. This will help us identify the many issues that we need to try address before the November election. I will continue to work with the county Election Board. We simply must do better so our elections run smoothly, and every vote is counted.

For more information on voting in Pennsylvania, visit www.votespa.com.

Unemployment Compensation claims surge

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a historic surge in the number of people seeking unemployment compensation in Pennsylvania.

Since mid-March, nearly 3 million Pennsylvanians filed for unemployment benefits. Unfortunately, a decade of Republican legislative leadership left our unemployment system woefully underprepared for handling such circumstances and the department continues to struggle through these challenges. The department's staffing was cut by more than half since 2011.

The department worked to hire and train new workers and bring back retirees, but backlogs have lasted.

In addition to regular unemployment, the federal CARES Act expanded unemployment benefits through new programs, including:

- Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, for gig workers, self-employed workers and independent contractors.
- Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, an additional \$600 per week for unemployment recipients through July 25.
- Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, which provides an additional 13 weeks of benefits for those who have exhausted their regular 26 weeks of coverage.

For the latest updates, visit the state's Unemployment Compensation website at www.uc.pa.gov to find out if you are eligible for benefits. The site has been updated regularly and contains answers to frequently asked questions.

If you are having difficulty with the process, please feel free to reach out to my office and my staff and I will attempt to assist you.



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Working for you!

My staff and I have worked remotely during the COVID-19 mitigation efforts. While that created some challenges, we handled hundreds of constituent matters and thousands of emails. To best serve our constituents, we will be phasing in

a safe and responsible reopening of the district office.

Drop-in visits are still unavailable, but call my office at 610-768-3135 if you need assistance. Please leave a detailed message if we do not answer.



My Office Can Help You With:

- Car registrations, special tags, handicap placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Pennsylvania income tax questions
- Consumer complaints
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate questions
- Questions about the state lottery
- PACE prescription discount cards for senior citizens
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Liquor Control Board concerns
- Information about federal, state and local government agencies

Any issue with state government!

NOTARY SERVICES

Free notary services are available for constituents at my district office! Appointments are required. Call 610-768-3135.