



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Vanessa Lowery Brown



FEBRUARY/MARCH 2016

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Voting is a right! What you need to know.

Pennsylvania's primary election is Tuesday, April 26

Tuesday, April 26 is Pennsylvania's primary election day. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m.

The last day to register to vote in the primary is March 28, and you can do that online at www.register.votespa.com.

In this primary election, registered Democrats and Republicans will be selecting their nominees for the November general election.

Voters will select candidates for U.S. senator, U.S. representative, state attorney general, state auditor general, state treasurer, state senator and state representative. Voters will also choose their preferences for presidential candidates and delegates to the national conventions.

Your polling place may have changed since the last election. Voters can verify their polling location at www.votespa.com.

Unless you are a first-time voter or voting at a new precinct, photo ID is not required.

All voters will be asked to consider two ballot questions. The first asks whether to increase the mandatory retirement age for judges from 70 to 75. The second asks whether the Philadelphia Traffic Court should be abolished. All registered voters can vote on these questions, even those registered independent.

For more information and a complete list of candidates, visit the Philadelphia City Commissioners election website at www.philadelphiavotes.com or call 215-686-3462.

Important 2016 Primary Election Dates

- March 28** Last day to register to vote
- April 19** Last day to apply for an absentee ballot
- April 22** Last day for county election offices to receive absentee ballots
- April 26** Election Day: Polls open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Congratulations to Philadelphia's new mayor, Jim Kenney

I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to Philadelphia's new mayor, Jim Kenney.

I and members of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, which I chair, look forward to working with him to make Philadelphia a better city for all of its residents.

His victory statement last November focused on how he believes the community can work together to improve Philadelphia.

He called for all Philadelphians to pitch in to make our city streets safer, provide adequate funding for our schools, including Pre-K and providing incentives for economic growth for all.

He concluded his victory remarks with his vision for the city, "I want a lot of things for our children, but, most of all, I want them to grow up in a Philadelphia where we all look past our differences and join together to create a better place for all of us to live. A place where we not only agree that all neighborhoods matter, but where we act on it."

Good luck, Mr. Mayor. You will have the support of the PLBC in your efforts to make Philadelphia a better place for all.

2016 Spring Fling is March 19



Rep. Brown with the Easter Bunny and children at the 2015 Spring Fling.

It is now easier than ever to register to vote!



Gov. Tom Wolf launched a website to make it easier for you to register to vote and participate in elections. You can access it by visiting: www.register.votespa.com.

The new website allows you to make updates to your voter record, such as change of name, address or party affiliation. You can also request assistance at a polling place.

This online system is more secure because the form will be transmitted directly to the proper county voter registration office for processing, compared with the traditional paper application containing personal information that might pass through several hands before you are officially registered.

The site is directly linked to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, so if you have a driver's license or PennDOT ID card, your signature on file can immediately be linked to your voter record.

If you will be unavailable on Election Day or otherwise unable to visit your polling place, you should request an absentee ballot. You must request the ballot before 5 p.m. Tuesday, April 19 and the ballot must be returned to the board of elections before 5 p.m. Friday, April 22.

You can learn more about absentee voting and download the application at <http://bit.ly/absenteeballotapp> and mail the request to Philadelphia County Board of Elections, City Hall Room 142, 1400 John F. Kennedy Blvd., Philadelphia, PA 19107. Once you receive your ballot, you must return it to the same address before the April 22 deadline.

Supreme Court ruling affects some juvenile life sentences

In January, the U.S. Supreme Court expanded a 2012 ruling that struck down mandatory life sentences without parole for juveniles. The court ruled then that all juveniles facing life in prison must have an opportunity to have their sentences reviewed.

Most states considered the ruling to be retroactive for all cases.

However, Pennsylvania was one of a few states that did not interpret the court ruling to affect old cases. Louisiana, Pennsylvania and Michigan together have more than 1,100 cases that should have been covered by the ruling.

Henry Montgomery of Louisiana, who was 17 when convicted of killing a deputy, challenged his state's position and the justices ruled, in a solid 6-3 vote, that their previous ruling was meant to be considered retroactively.

This means that any juveniles facing life in prison with no chance for parole must now be given a hearing to plead their case for a lighter sentence.

Writing for the court majority, Justice Anthony Kennedy stated that "children's diminished culpability and heightened capacity for change" cast doubt on the value of mandatory life sentences.

This is good news, and, while it only affects several hundred Pennsylvania inmates, they will get the opportunity to show that they have been rehabilitated and can hold a useful place in society.

2015 Prom safety event



Students model their prom outfits at the 2015 prom safety event. The 2016 event is scheduled for May 6-7.

Apply now for your 2015 Property Tax/Rent Rebate

The state Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for 2015 is available for residents who are 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older.

You may be eligible if your income for 2015 was \$35,000 or less if you are a homeowner, or \$15,000 or less if you are a renter.

You can obtain information about the program on the state Department of Revenue's website at www.revenue.pa.gov.

Applicants must count all sources of income toward the limit, but only half of any Social Security, Supplemental Security or federal Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits

toward their total income.

The maximum property tax or rent rebate for most qualifying Pennsylvania residents is \$650. Additionally, Philadelphia residents with an annual income under \$30,000 may qualify for a 50 percent increase in their refund.

The state will begin mailing rebate checks July 1.

I also wanted to remind you that applying for this rebate is free. If any company offers to help you file – for a fee – tell them no. Applications and free help applying are available through my district office.

Tax news you can use

Just a reminder that the deadline to file your income taxes for 2015 is April 15, 2016.

The Philadelphia Department of Revenue has teamed up with the Campaign for Working Families to offer free tax preparation services for families who earned less than \$53,000 last year, and individuals who earned less than \$20,000 in 2015.

You can access the list of locations online at <http://is.gd/Philafreetax> or call the Campaign for Working Families directly at 215-454-6483 to let them direct you to the nearest facility.

The AARP's Tax-Aide foundation also provides free tax preparation service for low- to moderate-income taxpayers throughout the Philadelphia region. You can search for nearby locations by Zip code at <http://bit.ly/aarptaxaidesearch>.



Rep. Brown joined volunteers from the Greater Bibleway Temple and the Sigma Fraternity to provide Thanksgiving meals for local residents.



Rep. Brown and children in their Halloween costumes at the 2015 Fall Festival.

In May, Rep. Brown and other Philadelphia representatives welcomed students, alumni, faculty and friends of Lincoln University to the Capitol.



Protect yourself from ID theft when you do your taxes

When you work on your tax forms, you are dealing with a lot of private information that could expose you to identity theft issues.

The W-2 form and the tax forms you complete require Social Security numbers for all dependent family members covered under the tax filer's return.

Social Security numbers and addresses are important to identity thieves, so if you are throwing out paperwork from your taxes – or even older tax forms – be sure that you shred anything that contains your name, address and Social Security number.

Most important is this statement from the IRS in its online taxpayer guide to identity theft:

The IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by email to request personal or financial information. This includes any type of electronic communication, such as text messages and social media channels.

In other words, if someone claiming to be from the IRS calls, emails or texts you asking for payment, it is most likely a scam. If you owe money, the IRS will first contact you via U.S. mail. If you believe someone contacting you is pretending to be the IRS, contact the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at 1-800-366-4484.

You can read the entire guide at <https://www.irs.gov/uac/Taxpayer-Guide-to-Identity-Theft>.



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Rep. Brown's 2016 Spring/Summer Calendar of Events

- MARCH 5** Summer Camp Fair (TENTATIVE)
Please contact my office for the exact date and time
- MARCH 9-10** Mobile Office - Property Tax/Rent Rebate
(Residents of Mount Olivet)
- MARCH 19** Spring Fling (TENTATIVE)
Please contact my office for the exact date and time
- APRIL 9** Philadelphia citywide Spring Clean-Up
- APRIL 16** 190th District Image Awards
Christian Stronghold Church
- MAY 6-7** Prom Safety Event
Greater Bibleway Temple
- JUNE 26 - AUG. 1** Summer Reading Program

In addition, I will be scheduling more Senior Services Open Houses at the local senior residences throughout the year. Watch your bulletin boards and resident information to see if I will be visiting your residence.

Subject to change

SAVE THE DATES!

I need you to act now to stay connected

Pennsylvania House rules prohibit when I can contact you leading up to a state House election.

Though you might already be receiving my email alerts, there is a 60-day period preceding the upcoming April 2016 primary election when I will be prohibited from sending legislative emails to you unless you have opted in to continue receiving them.

Please visit my website, www.pahouse.com/Brown, to sign up for email alerts on important information, including legislation being considered in Harrisburg. On my website, click on the "Contact" tab on the top bar, click on the "Sign up for Emails" link and fill in your information.

The 2016 190th Legislative District Image Awards will be presented on April 16

Please submit your 2016 Image Award nominees

I will be hosting the 2016 Image Awards program on April 16. This annual event recognizes local women who make a difference throughout our community.

If you know any women who deserve this honor, please download a nomination form at <http://bit.ly/2016imageaward> or you may pick up the form from my office. **Please return the completed form to my office no later than February 26.**

You may also email the form to 190imageawards@gmail.com or fax it to: 717-772-2384.

Please contact April James at 717-783-3822 if you have additional questions.



Rep. Brown with some of her 2015 Image Award honorees.

My office can help you with:

- Pennsylvania prescription-drug assistance programs for senior citizens (PACE, PACENET & PACE Plus Medicare)
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Birth and death certificates
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Consumer complaints
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups

You can also visit my office and use our computers to register to vote, update vehicle registrations, look for and apply for jobs and complete other online state applications.