



State Representative | 135th Legislative District **STEVE SAMUELSON**

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Winter 2022

Samuelson co-authors law raising PACENET prescription income limits

Income limits for the PACENET prescription drug program increased by \$6,000 in February under a new law that I co-authored with Rep. Wendi Thomas, R-Bucks.

This bipartisan legislation expands access to prescription medications for our seniors by building upon the proven PACE/PACENET program and expanding eligibility.

The law is expected to increase enrollment for the state's Prescription Assistance Contract for the Elderly Needs Enhancement Tier, known as PACENET, by about 20,000 people this year and raises the income limits to \$33,500 for a single person and \$41,500 for a married couple.

The new law provides financial incentives for PACENET enrollees to also sign up for federal Medicare Part D prescription coverage. Additional funds generated by increased participation in the federal prescription program will be used to pay for the increased PACENET income limits.

PACENET income limits have increased by \$10,000 over the last few years.

- The \$6,000 increase under this new law took effect February 21.
- In 2018, I co-authored similar legislation with Rep. Frank Farry, R-Bucks, which raised PACENET income limits by \$4,000.



Rep. Samuelson with PA Department of Aging Secretary Robert Torres, ABOVE, and Gov. Tom Wolf, BELOW.



Call my office at (610) 867-3890 to get an application for PACE/PACENET or to set up an appointment so that we can help you enroll.

Governor Wolf's budget proposal invests in education

On February 8, Governor Tom Wolf presented his proposed state budget for 2022-23 in an address to the General Assembly. The Governor's spending plan for the coming year includes historic investments in education from pre-K to higher education.

The budget focuses on underfunded school districts like the Bethlehem Area School District and proposes a significant boost in state funding in two areas – a \$1.25 billion increase in Basic Education funding to be delivered through the Fair Funding Formula and \$300 million in Level Up funding specifically targeted to underfunded districts.

Through bipartisan legislation enacted in 2016, the General Assembly adopted a Fair Funding Formula to be used to distribute state education funding for local schools. Since then, however, only new state funding has been allocated through the fair funding formula and as a result in the current year only 14% of overall basic education funding is appropriated using the Fair Funding Formula. The Bethlehem Area School District receives about \$20 million less in state funding than it would if all education dollars were allocated through the Fair Funding Formula.

If the Governor's proposed budget for 2022-23 were enacted, the Bethlehem Area School District would receive \$12.1 million more in Basic Education funding as well as \$4.8 million in Level Up funding.

Governor Wolf has proposed a bold plan for education. These investments in our schools, if enacted through the budget process, can bring fairness to state funding, increase opportunities for our students and provide relief for property taxpayers.

The Governor's budget also proposes a \$60 million increase for Pre-K Counts and a \$10 million increase for Head Start.

For higher education, the budget proposes \$200 million for a needs-based scholarship program for students at Community Colleges or State System schools like East Stroudsburg and Kutztown who commit to stay in Pennsylvania after graduation. The budget also proposes funding increases of 15.7% for State System schools, and 5% for Community Colleges and State-Related schools like Penn State, Pitt, Lincoln and Temple.

Governor Wolf also is proposing using \$225 million of the money Pennsylvania received under the American Rescue Plan for a COVID Relief Small Business Assistance Program to provide grants to help small businesses still struggling with the impact of the pandemic.

Under Governor Wolf's proposed budget for 2022-23, the Bethlehem Area School District would receive the following increases in state funding:

Basic Education	\$12,134,006
Level Up	\$4,814,673
Special Education	\$1,644,020



Last year on the South Side of Bethlehem, I joined Gov. Tom Wolf for a tour of The Factory which provides resources to help start-up companies. The tour was led by Keith Caldwell, a partner in the business.

Rep. Samuelson holds South Side office hours with office of Congresswoman Susan Wild

On the third Thursday of every month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., I hold office hours on the South Side at the Northampton Community College Fowler Family Southside Center.

My staff and I are joined by the staff of U.S. Congresswoman Susan Wild in the lobby of the college's South Side campus, 511 E. Third St., Bethlehem. Stop by to see us and get information on state and federal programs and benefits. Upcoming dates are:

- Thursday, March 17 ■ Thursday, April 21
- Thursday, May 19 ■ Thursday, June 16

As always, you can contact my District Office at 104 E. Broad Street, Bethlehem, at any time for assistance with state programs and benefits. Our phone number is (610) 867-3890.

Rules reform needed to bring openness, transparency to legislative process

This Legislative Session, I have joined with several colleagues to advocate for House Rules reform legislation designed to support procedural rules that provide a more transparent and collaborative legislative process.

These proposed changes to House Rules would bring fairness and balance to the legislative process, improve the working of House committees, and ensure that bills with broad bipartisan support get a vote.

We are committed to openness and transparency. These rules changes would increase opportunities for public input on legislation, reduce partisan gridlock and ensure that the House and its committees stay focused on the needs of our constituents. We need to eliminate legislative roadblocks to allow for more open debate.

I have introduced House Resolution 30, which would guarantee that any proposed legislation sponsored by more than the 102 members required to pass a bill in the House would get an up-or-down vote in the House. This change would prevent an individual leader or committee chair from bottling up bills that are clearly a top priority for the people. Other proposed House Rules changes would:

- Ensure that bills with at least 20 co-sponsors from each party are debated and voted in committee.
- Require that bills proposing Constitutional amendments have a public hearing.
- Allow 24 hours between the time a bill is amended until the time a final vote is taken in the House.
- Streamline the process for discharging a bill that is being held in committee.

Pennsylvania Homeowner Assistance Fund open for applications

Pennsylvania was awarded \$350 million in COVID-19 relief funds for homeowners from the U.S. Treasury for the newly created Pennsylvania Homeowner Assistance Fund.

The fund supports Pennsylvania homeowners whose household income is at or below 150% of the area median income who are struggling with financial hardships because of the COVID-19 pandemic. PAHAF will use these funds to provide eligible Pennsylvania homeowners with needed assistance to prevent and/or ease mortgage delinquencies, defaults, foreclosures, displacement, and utility disconnection.

Applicants who are eligible will meet the following criteria:

- Household income is equal to or less than 150% area median income. Note: PAHAF program priority will be given to households at or below 100% AMI.
- Homeowner owns and occupies the property as their primary residence.
- Homeowner experienced a financial hardship because of the COVID-19 pandemic after January 21, 2020 (including a hardship that began before January 21, 2020 and continued after that date).
- Homeowner cannot receive the same assistance for mortgage payment, mortgage reinstatement, property charges, and/or utility payment from another federal, state, local, nonprofit, or tribal source.
- Homeowner's first mortgage is a conforming loan and meets the federal limits for the year in which the loan was taken.

To learn more about eligibility, how applications are being prioritized, and the assistance available, and to review the documents required to apply, visit <https://pahaf.org/>.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program can help

If you're struggling with rent or utility payments, you can apply for help through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

The program can provide up to 18 months of assistance for past-due rent or utilities dating back to March 2020, or for future payments. It can also help with housing-related expenses such as relocation, security deposits, and application fees.

To qualify, a household must be responsible for paying rent and must meet the following criteria:

- One or more household members has qualified for unemployment benefits, had a decrease in income, had increased household costs, or experienced other financial hardship due to or during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- One or more household members can show a risk of homelessness or housing instability.
- The household income is at or below 80% of area median income (\$45,850 for a single-person household, \$52,400 for two people, \$65,500 for a household of four, and \$76,000 for a household of six). Resources like bank accounts and cars are not relevant to eligibility.

Tenants or landlords may apply for ERAP. Tenants do not need their landlord's permission to apply.

In our area, ERAP is administered by New Bethany Ministries, 313 W. Fourth St., Bethlehem. To learn more, residents should contact the organization at (610) 691-5602 or visit <https://newbethanyministries.org/>.

Eagle Scouts recognized by Rep. Samuelson

I am honored to regularly attend Eagle Scout ceremonies and present House of Representatives Citations to Boy Scouts in our area who have achieved the rank of Eagle. Here are some of our community's newest Eagle Scouts.



Nicholas Finnegan of Bethlehem Township, Troop 317



Jacob Scheirer of Bethlehem, Troop 329



Treyton Messman of Bethlehem, Troop 362



Zane Landis of Bethlehem, Troop 329

Swim coach Reik Foust celebrated for 600 wins

Our community recently honored Reik Foust of Bethlehem for surpassing 600 wins as a swim coach over a stellar 35-year career. Reik is currently the swimming and diving coach at Liberty High School and coaches at the Bethlehem YMCA. Over the years, he has coached at least eight swim teams in our community, including 10 years coaching at Freedom High School.

Friends, current and former swim team members, parents and fellow coaches came out to honor Reik at a surprise ceremony following the Liberty-Freedom swim meet in early February.

Through the years, Reik has coached and inspired swimmers and divers of all ages. Our entire community wishes Coach Reik many more years of success!



Need help heating your home?

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps families pay their heating bills in the form of a cash grant. Households in immediate danger of being without heat may also qualify for crisis grants.

The cash grant is a one-time payment sent directly to the utility company/fuel provider to be credited on your bill.

Call my Bethlehem office at (610) 867-3890 to get a LIHEAP application or to schedule an appointment so that we can assist you in applying. Applications are also available at the Northampton County Assistance Office, 201 Larry Holmes Dr., Easton. For more information, visit: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/LIHEAP.aspx>.

Need help with water bills?

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program was launched in 2022 to help Pennsylvanians maintain access to drinking and wastewater service.

Assistance is available for families who have past due water bills, had their service terminated, or received a notice indicating that their service will be terminated in the next 60 days.

Households can receive LIHWAP grants for both drinking water service and wastewater service. Grants are issued directly to water service providers, and families must meet income requirements. As you prepare to apply have the following information ready to submit: Proof of income for the applicant and all household members and a recent water bill.

2021-2022 Income Guidelines

To be eligible, one's total household income must fall within the following categories based on household size.

Household Size	Income Limits Cash/Crisis Program
1	\$19,320
2	\$26,130
3	\$32,940
4	\$39,750
5	\$46,560
6	\$53,370
7	\$60,180
8	\$66,990
<i>Each Additional Person ADD \$6,810</i>	

Call my office at (610) 867-3890 to schedule an appointment so that we can assist you with applying. More information is available online at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Waterhelp>.

Apply now for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is dedicated to helping eligible Pennsylvanians receive rebates on property taxes or rent paid in 2021.

Each year, my office in Bethlehem helps hundreds of people apply for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate. Call us at (610) 867-3890 to schedule an appointment at my office at 104 E. Broad St., Bethlehem, so that we can assist you in preparing and completing your application.

You will need to bring your 2021 income statements so that we can make copies to submit with your application. Depending on whether you own or rent, you will need to bring receipts of property taxes paid in 2021, or a rent certificate completed by your landlord. Claimants must reapply for rebates every year because they are based on annual income and property taxes or rent paid each year. Call us with any questions about the Property Tax/Rent Rebate.

The program, first created in 1972, is open to Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older.

The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters. Remember that half of Social Security income is excluded when calculating total income.

Thank you, health care workers

In late January, I was proud to vote to invest \$225 million of federal American Rescue Plan funds where they can do the most good – helping nurses and health care workers here in Pennsylvania. This money will help overworked nurses, help deliver better patient outcomes, and help build a healthier future. This is a great first step, and we look forward to working in a bipartisan manner to do more!

■ \$100 million will be provided to hospitals in the state to provide needed retention and recruitment funds for direct care staff.

■ \$110 million will be provided to behavioral health residential and inpatient providers, hospitals that serve a high number of Medical Assistance clients, critical access hospitals and certain rural hospitals for retention and recruitment.

■ In addition, the Student Loan Relief for Nurses Program announced by Governor Tom Wolf last fall has been flooded with applications. This new law added \$15 million for student loan forgiveness that can be provided to nurses in various settings.



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Winter 2022

Ways my district office can serve you:

- ➔ PennDOT issues – vehicle registrations, special tags, disability parking placards, titles and driver’s license applications
- ➔ Information on financial assistance for higher education
- ➔ Obtaining and completing state forms
- ➔ Unemployment compensation and workers’ compensation
- ➔ Birth and death certificates
- ➔ Benefits with Department of Human Services
- ➔ Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- ➔ Requests for literature – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- ➔ Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- ➔ Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- ➔ Consumer complaints
- ➔ Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- ➔ Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications
- ➔ PACE/PACENET prescription-drug cards for seniors
- ➔ Reduced vehicle registrations for qualified seniors