



YOUR REPORT

from State Representative

ROBERT FREEMAN

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Schools would be required to keep EpiPens on hand for student food allergies under Freeman bill

Rep. Freeman has introduced a bill that would require schools to maintain a stock of epinephrine auto-injectors and permit authorized personnel to administer them.

Modeled after a 2011 Illinois law, the bill (H.B. 1210) is designed to save the lives of children with food allergies in the event of life-threatening allergic reactions.

“The number of children with reported food allergies has increased dramatically over the past two decades, with many unaware that they even have a food allergy,” Freeman said. “By requiring schools to maintain a supply of EpiPens, my legislation can save the life of a child experiencing anaphylaxis.”

Studies have shown that between 16 and 18 percent of children with food allergies have had allergic reactions because they’ve accidentally ingested the food allergen while at school. And, up to 25 percent of severe allergic reactions occurred in children with no prior history of life-threatening allergies.

Freeman said his legislation builds on a law passed in 2010 that permits a student with severe allergies to carry an epinephrine injector with the approval of the student’s doctor and parents.

“Some schools already have EpiPens available, but this is not the case for every school in all 500 of our districts. This bill would fill that gap and offer this safety net for children who have not been diagnosed with a food allergy or forget or misplace an injector,” he said.

“Food allergy reactions may include hives, runny nose or abdominal pain, while others may be severe or life-threatening. EpiPens deliver medicine quickly, effectively slowing down the reaction until emergency personnel can arrive. That is why it is so crucial for schools to have EpiPen supplies on hand.”

Freeman seeks greater transparency in campaign financing

Rep. Freeman has introduced legislation that would require Pennsylvania House and Senate candidates to file campaign expense reports at more frequent intervals in order to create a more transparent record-keeping process during an election year.

“The change would provide earlier disclosure and greater transparency on who is contributing to candidates for the General Assembly,” Freeman said. “This is information voters should have access to earlier in a campaign than they currently do.”

Current law requires candidates to file just 10 days before the election. Freeman said that filing comes so close to the election that the information about where a candidate is getting their contributions tends to get lost in the last week of campaign literature and other information. His bill would require an additional expense report to be filed six weeks before the election.

“This would put everything on the table and allow voters to see who is backing which candidates and what they stand for, or more importantly, who they stand with,” Freeman said.

The measure (H.B. 1175) was referred to the House State Government Committee for consideration.

House approves Freeman bill to give municipalities more resources to maintain parks

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives approved a bill in June introduced by Rep. Freeman that would give municipalities greater flexibility in targeting recreation fees to benefit all of the residents of their communities.

Municipalities receive recreation fees from new development, but under current law, that money only can be used for building a park in that development, usually resulting in an underutilized pocket park. Freeman’s bill would permit municipalities to use the money to operate, maintain or expand any recreational facilities within the municipality.

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Freeman introduces bill to make health insurance more affordable

Rep. Freeman has introduced legislation that would make health insurance more affordable for Pennsylvanians.

The State Workers' Insurance Fund within the Department of Labor and Industry was established by law many years ago to provide a workers' compensation program for Pennsylvania businesses that could not access workers' comp insurance in the private sector. It is only permitted to sell workers' compensation insurance. Freeman's bill would expand its offerings to include health insurance.

"By allowing SWIF to offer health insurance, it would make a quality insurance product available to Pennsylvanians at a lower cost than current rates because of its lower administrative overhead, and it would create more competition within the health insurance market," Freeman said. "In addition, by making this available in the insurance market, it

would serve as a yardstick by which to measure the fairness of rates charged by private health insurance companies.

"Health insurance rates are increasing at twice the rate of inflation. I believe that this proposal will effectively bring health care policies back to an affordable range for the average Pennsylvanian. It would offer a less costly alternative to the current private insurance health plans offered today," he said.

This new line of insurance through SWIF would not be an extra cost to taxpayers. The offering would be paid for with premiums from health care subscribers and a loan from the SWIF fund, which would be paid back.

The bill is H.B. 1526 and has been referred to the House Labor and Industry Committee.

House votes to enhance popular Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program

Rep. Freeman voted for two bills that would improve upon the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

"The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program gives hundreds of thousands of older Pennsylvanians and disabled adults relief from property taxes," Freeman said. "Although the deadline is normally June 30, it is regularly extended to the end of the year. This bill would permanently set the deadline for Dec. 31 of each year." Other provisions in this bill would enhance the program that helped more than 596,000 Pennsylvanians last year, including nearly 80,000 homeowners

who eliminated their school property taxes with their rebate."

Available to Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older and adults with disabilities, the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program's annual income limit is \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters, although applicants only list half of their Social Security, Supplemental Security or federal Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits for the income requirements.

House Bill 468 also would increase the amount of death benefits that may be exempted when considering income for program

eligibility. Current law exempts the first \$5,000 of death benefits. The bill would increase that amount to \$10,000. The bill also would clarify current law to ensure an executor of a will could apply for the rebate on the deceased's behalf if the late individual was eligible for the program on the date he or she died.

A second bill (H.B. 1067) would make sure eligible senior citizens who are already near the top of the income limit and receive a Social Security cost-of-living increase, remain eligible for their rebate.

Both bills are currently before the Senate and awaiting action.



Resources to maintain parks

Continued from page 1

"Parks, playgrounds and other recreational facilities are important to our quality of life," Freeman said. "They promote green space in the community, safeguard the environment and give people of all ages a place for exercise and recreation. My bill would ease the restrictions on the use of the recreation fees they receive from developers so they can be more wisely used to benefit all residents in a municipality."

The bill (H.B. 1052) is pending action in the Senate.

Rep. Freeman with Patty Cunningham and her daughters Olivia and Sophia at the Speaker's Rostrum in the House chamber. The Cunninghams received a personal tour of the Capitol from Rep. Freeman this summer.



Personal Notes...

By Rep. Bob Freeman

Why I voted Against the Gas Tax increase

Dear Friends,

In November the legislature passed and Gov. Corbett signed into law a \$2.3 billion transportation bill that will result in a 28-cent-per-gallon increase in the price of gas at the pump. While there is no denying that Pennsylvania needed to address its infrastructure needs, I found this bill to be seriously flawed in a number of ways, which is why I voted against it.

To begin with, I did not feel it was fair to place the lion's share of the burden for the repair of Pennsylvania's roads and bridges on the average motorist when we have not yet levied a severance tax on the large corporate natural gas drillers in our state. These gas drillers are reaping huge profits from a Pennsylvania natural resource and they use our roads and bridges to do it. They should be called upon to pay their fair share. While a modest increase in the gas tax to underwrite part of the transportation improvement costs would have been reasonable, I felt we needed to tap the revenue from a potential drilling tax before we asked the average taxpayer to pay more at the pump. Keep in mind that a 28-cent-a-gallon increase will make the price of gas in Pennsylvania one of the highest in the Northeast, and will be felt by commuters and small businesses alike.

Among the flaws of this transportation bill was the fact

that the cap on the Oil Company Franchise Tax (OCFT) was eliminated. Removing this cap will generate increased gas prices because the oil companies will pass their costs onto consumers. Even the oil companies have said this will happen. Projections estimate this will cost consumers an added 28 cents per gallon, but if the wholesale price of gasoline were to spike dramatically, that amount could increase even further because there is no cap to limit increases.

Additionally under the bill, the cost of vehicle registrations and driver's licenses is now tied to rising inflation, resulting in ever-increasing registration and license fees without requiring a vote by the legislature. In all, more than 150 fees and fines have been increased, some exorbitantly so. For example, an extra \$150 is added to the fine for failure to obey traffic signals.

The law also changed the prevailing wage requirements, which means workers on certain construction projects will take a hit to their wages. And traveling along some of Pennsylvania's highways will become more precarious with PennDOT being granted the authority to increase the speed limit to 70 mph. People already drive too fast and too recklessly on our roads today. Do we really need to increase the likelihood of more road fatalities by increasing the speed limit?

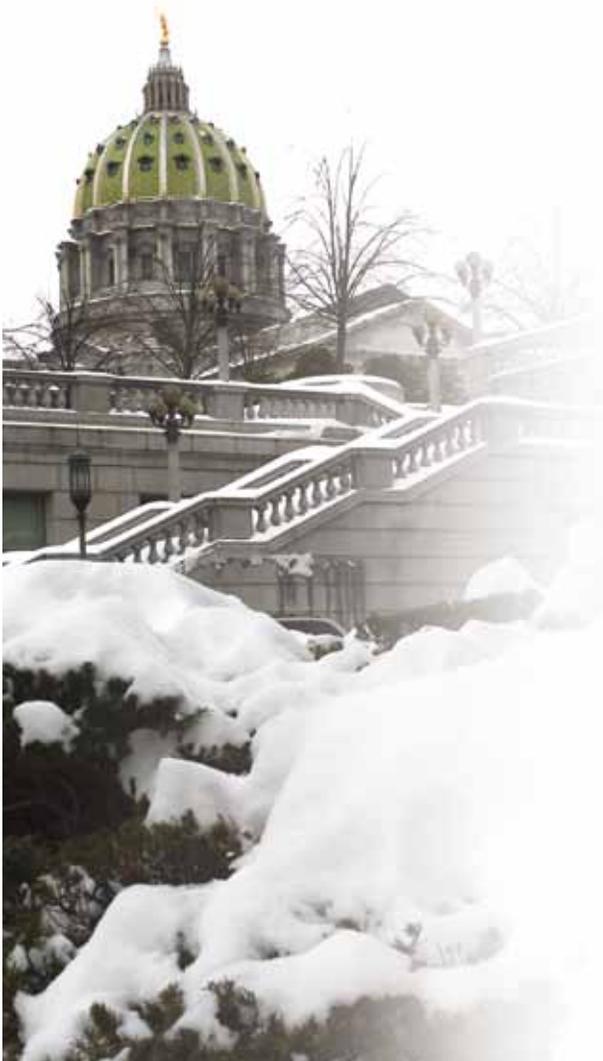
Not everything in the transportation bill was flawed. The state made a long-overdue commitment to our public transit systems, including LANTA. An extra \$400 million will help public transportation address their infrastructure needs, but even this commitment drops off after eight years.

The legislature did have alternatives. We could have floated a transportation bond to address roads, bridges and mass transit needs. Passing a natural gas drilling tax would have provided a reliable, long-term source of revenue to serve as dedicated funding to pay down the debt from that bond. This even could have provided a long-term revenue stream for public transportation after the bond was paid off. Since the Pennsylvania Constitution requires that gas tax revenue only to be used for our road and bridge network, drilling tax dollars could be dedicated over the long term for mass transit and alternative forms of transportation.

All in all I was convinced that the transportation bill was not the best that we could do. It will result in an added burden on consumers and businesses at a time when many are still trying to recover from the Great Recession. It is for all of these reasons that I voted against the gas tax increase.

Sincerely,

Bob Freeman





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- PACE (pharmaceutical assistance for qualified senior citizens)
- Voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate forms (for qualified seniors)
- PHEAA (Pa. Higher Education Assistance Agency)
- Pa.'s 529 College Savings Plan
- Requests for state informational materials
- CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) information
- Obtaining birth or death certificates
- PennDOT problems or questions – including disability license plates and placards
- Questions or problems with any state agency
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Citations from the House of Representatives for outstanding local accomplishments and important family milestones

Freeman bill would extend Main Street Program participation

The state's Main Street Program is funded through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. It provides grants to help revitalize downtown districts and for the assistance of a full-time Main Street manager who works with local officials and downtown merchants to implement a revitalization plan for the downtown. Current program participation is limited to five years.

Rep. Freeman has introduced a bill that would let communities extend their participation in the program by extending funding for administrative support for up to five additional years.

"DCED and other sources will provide funding for bricks and mortar aspects of the revitalization plan, but little in the way of grants is available for the local administering of the Main Street initiatives," Freeman said. "Administrative support is a critical aspect to the successful revitalization of a Main Street community. The role of the Main Street manager in implementing a revitalizing plan, coordinating festivals,

programs and volunteers, and basically staying on top of the Main Street initiative is critical," Freeman noted. "Without the linchpin of the Main Street manager keeping things on track, a Main Street program can lose both its focus and momentum.

"An additional year or two of support can make all the difference. My legislation would provide that to help sustain the revitalization momentum and better ensure success in restoring a traditional downtown into a stable and successful heart of the community."

Easton is one community that has benefitted from the Main Street Program, and continues to operate a Main Street office. The office has worked to promote Easton's Centre Square Farmers Market, improve the cleanliness and safety of downtown, and promote greater awareness of downtown businesses. However, because Easton's participation in the administrative aspects of the Main Street Program has reached the end of its five-year state commitment, it has to find other resources to pay for administering the program.