



STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 198TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Rosita C. Youngblood



Winter 2014

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Dear Neighbors,

As we begin a new year, and set our sights on the weeks and months ahead, I want to provide you with some information regarding many issues I have been working on in Harrisburg and in Philadelphia.

First and foremost, as a result of legislative redistricting, the lines of the 198th Legislative District have changed. The process of redrawing the boundaries of Pennsylvania's House and Senate districts takes place every 10 years following the U.S. Census to ensure that you are adequately represented in state government. These new legislative districts will take effect in December 2014.

Please feel free to stop by my office at 310 W. Cheltenham Ave. in Philadelphia, or call 215-849-6426 if you have any questions about redistricting, or to inquire what district you will fall into come December 2014. And, as always, please contact my office for free help with any state-related matter.

It is an honor to represent you as your advocate in the state legislature, and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve many of the communities in Northwest Philadelphia. As your state representative, I am proud of the work we have done to address the issues you and your family care about and to promote legislation to improve the well-being of the residents of Philadelphia.

I wish you and your family all the best for a happy and healthy New Year.

Sincerely,

Rosita C. Youngblood

Rep. Rosita C. Youngblood

Voter ID law blocked by Commonwealth Court Decision is major victory for voting rights in PA

A state judge struck a victory for voting rights and blocked the implementation of Pennsylvania's "voter ID" law – a voter suppression scheme that would have disenfranchised millions of Pennsylvania voters.

Commonwealth Court Judge Bernard McGinley placed a "permanent injunction" on the voter ID law, stating that the law would place significant and unreasonable burdens on our fundamental right to vote. Judge McGinley wrote in his opinion that, "...voting laws are designed to assure a free and fair election; the voter ID law does not further this goal."

So, for now, the voter ID law will NOT be in effect with respect to in-person voter ID requirements at the polls for ANY upcoming election. The evidence that this law was nothing more than a voter suppression scheme to deny the votes of urban, poor and senior voters was evident, and this ruling by Judge McGinley proves this case. Pennsylvania's voter ID law was one of the strictest in the nation, and in turn would have undermined the very root of our democracy.

While this ruling is a victory in the battle for voting rights for ALL Pennsylvanians, the war against voter ID is not over. Unfortunately, the ruling by Judge McGinley will most likely be appealed by Governor Corbett and his administration – setting the stage for a fight in the State Supreme Court in the coming years. Although we should celebrate this ruling as a step forward to protect our voting rights, we must stay vigilant in our opposition to politically motivated voter suppression. I will keep you posted of future developments on this issue.



Thousands of Pennsylvania voters rallied in Harrisburg to oppose the state's voter ID law. The law was struck down by Commonwealth Court, a major victory for all voters in PA.

Priority #1: Funding our schools!



As the state continues to fail our students by not providing adequate state funding for public education, I have been working with many of my colleagues to “think outside the box” and come up with alternative ways to help our struggling school districts.

Currently, I am working with state Rep. James Clay of Philadelphia

on a package of bills that could generate roughly \$500 million a year for public education by simply removing outdated tax exemptions and implementing a small, modest fee on all forms of gambling winnings.

The package of bills includes:

HB 1968 – would establish an additional 5 percent fee on all gaming winnings in the state; revenues would be deposited into the Public Education Improvement Fund to be used as additional revenue for public education statewide.

HB 1969 – would remove the tax exemption in the State Lottery Law relating to lottery winnings. Current law specifies that lottery prizes must be exempt from any and all state and local taxes. Pennsylvania is one of only two states that exempt lottery winnings from state income taxes.

HB 1970 – would remove the tax exemption in the Tax Reform Code relating to Pennsylvania lottery winnings. Currently, the Tax Code specifies that Pennsylvania lottery prizes are exempt from the state’s Personal Income Tax. All other forms of gambling winnings, however, are still subject to the 3.07 percent PIT.

In addition, I strongly support reinstating a funding formula for public education that provides a more fair, equitable and adequate way to fund Pennsylvania’s public schools. A funding formula created in 2007 under the state’s “Costing-Out Study” was in effect for three consecutive budget years, but was abandoned by the governor in his first year in office – the same year funding for public schools was slashed by nearly \$1 billion.

The potential revenue that could be generated from the bills mentioned above could easily provide the necessary funding to reinstate a fair funding formula for public education across the Commonwealth, without impacting the day-to-day lives of Pennsylvania’s residents or cutting vital services and programs.

One thing is certain – something **MUST** be done to help our children succeed. I am committed to doing whatever it takes to fund our children’s future.

Transportation funding finally a reality; SEPTA, mass transit see funding boost

A \$2.4 billion transportation funding bill passed the General Assembly last month – a proposal that includes \$500 million for mass transit and an extra \$1.8 billion to aid our failing roads and bridges.

I supported the proposal, which finally ends decades of neglect that have seriously weakened Pennsylvania’s transportation infrastructure. The law will also boost our state’s economy by creating nearly 9,600 jobs and injecting \$1.25 billion into the economy over the next five years.

In addition to putting more people back to work and sparking economic growth, the transportation law provides much-needed help to mass transit agencies such as SEPTA, upon which hundreds of thousands of citizens rely for work, school and basic necessities.

With this vote, we’ve moved Pennsylvania toward a modern, safe and efficient transportation system.



Newborn screening bill will help save young lives

I am proud to have cast a YES vote this year for Hannah’s Law – a bill named after Hannah Ginion – who is a 1-year-old baby girl from Bucks County. Hannah has a disease known as Krabbe – a fatal inherited disorder that causes a deficiency of specific enzymes required for the breakdown of nutrients.

The bill, House Bill 1654, sponsored by my friend and colleague Rep. Angel Cruz, would add Krabbe and five other related disorders to the state’s required newborn screening list.

Why is this important? Nearly one in every 100,000 newborns is afflicted with Krabbe. And children born with Krabbe, and its related diseases, appear normal at birth because symptoms do not usually show until the child is between three and six months old. By the time symptoms appear, it is often too late to treat the disease. Most children diagnosed with Krabbe once symptoms have appeared do not live past the age of 2. Yet, if the disease is found prior to the presence of symptoms, the quality of life is dramatically extended.

Although there is currently no cure, screening is KEY in prolonging life for babies with Krabbe, and treatment helps to reduce the disorder’s effects.

Targeting Pennsylvania's 'sex trade'

Seeking to toughen state laws regarding sexual exploitation of children through human trafficking, I introduced legislation that would strengthen penalties and consequences for promoters and patrons of child prostitution.

My bill, House Bill 1283, would also expand the definition of "promoting the prostitution of a minor" to include advertising through any paid or unpaid medium, including advertising prostitution through social media sites such as Craigslist and Facebook. With the advent of new technology, many "pimps" have taken child prostitution off of the streets and into social media websites, creating a buffer from law enforcement and reducing visibility.

According to several studies, Pennsylvania has become a transit and source state with regard to human trafficking, with transportation hubs such as I-95, I-76, and I-84 enabling child sex promoters to move children through Pennsylvania to other metropolitan areas.

I am looking to tackle the growing epidemic of human trafficking, and specifically child sexual exploitation, from the other end of the spectrum – by targeting those who use children for financial or sexual gain. It is estimated that a "pimp" can earn as much as \$650,000 a year by exploiting as few as four children. And research has shown that targeting the demand for these children, and making the industry far less profitable, is a primary defense against the sexual exploitation of kids.



During the holidays I spoke out against the growing epidemic of human trafficking in Pennsylvania, and the need to focus on ending the sexual exploitation of children.

Bill would enhance sibling visitation rights

Bond among siblings is vital to childhood development



Studies have shown the increasing importance of sibling relationships in the development and growth of children. The bond between siblings is unique and powerful, and provides a structure that is different from other relationships that are critical to a child's social advancement – including the relationships between children and their parents, friends and peers.

That is why I introduced House Bill 642 – legislation that would recognize the

importance of sibling relationships on the emotional and psychological development of children by strengthening sibling visitation rights in Pennsylvania.

My proposal would simply provide standing in court to siblings who wish to petition for visitation rights, similar to rights granted to grandparents in similar situations. The decision to grant visitation rights for siblings would still rest in the hands of a judge.

It is important that we recognize the importance of these relationships, and allow siblings who may be separated from their brother or sister as a result of divorce, or death of a parent, to have an opportunity to go before a judge and seek to keep their relationship intact. Once sibling relationships are established, the bond is an essential part of a child's life. We need to make sure that siblings have an opportunity to keep that relationship.

Legislation would further protect unwanted newborns

In October, members of the state House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill I sponsored that would strengthen the state's Safe Haven Law to help protect unwanted newborns.

The legislation, House Bill 1090, would allow police stations to serve as safe havens in Pennsylvania, providing an additional outlet for parents to place their newly born babies into protected custody. Currently, only hospitals are approved under state law to serve as safe havens.

I introduced this bill after being contacted by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, which told me about a new mother who was unable to care for her newborn child and left her infant with Philadelphia police officers. The mother believed she was doing the right and moral thing and abiding by the state's Safe Haven Law. Although the police did not press any charges against the mother, city officials concluded that the law only allows a newborn, up to 28 days old, to be dropped off at a hospital.

This is why my bill is so vitally important. We want to encourage parents to seek assistance from law enforcement, as well as hospitals, when they are unable to care for their newborn child, as opposed to leaving them out with the trash.

The bill is now before the state Senate for its consideration and approval.

Remembering Rev. William H. Gray III

This past summer, Pennsylvania lost one of its shining stars with the passing of former Congressman William H. Gray III.

Congressman Gray devoted 35 years to pastoring Philadelphia's Bright Hope Church, spent 12 years as an influential and groundbreaking member of Congress, steered the United Negro College Fund to unprecedented heights, led the charge in Congress to oppose apartheid in South Africa, and became a special advisor to Haiti in 1994 at the request of President Bill Clinton.

Any one of these accomplishments would have provided an exclamation point on an influential life well lived in the interest of helping others. For one man to amass them all is a true testament to a titanic contribution to humanity.

I was privileged to honor the Rev. Gray, and his litany of accomplishments, in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 2012, while he was still alive. I am grateful that we had the opportunity to express to him, in person, the impact he had on so many people. He will forever remain one of the most influential people I have ever had the honor to know, as a mentor and friend. He will be sorely missed.



On June 13, 2012, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives unanimously adopted a resolution honoring the life and contributions of William H. Gray III. Sadly, Congressman Gray passed away this summer. Pictured with me are Pennsylvania House Speaker Sam Smith, William H. Gray III, Rep. Louise Williams Bishop, the Rev. Kevin Johnson of Philadelphia's Bright Hope Church, and Tony Ross of the United Way.

Honoring Betty Ann Townes — community leader and activist

Betty Ann Townes, a longtime resident, community leader and political activist in Philadelphia, unexpectedly passed away on Dec. 3, 2013. Not only was she was an active member of our community in Northwest Philadelphia – serving as a block captain, ward leader, state committee person and political liaison for city government – she was a philanthropist who used her talents as a restaurateur as a way to help others.

Her soul food restaurant “Knappy Knicky’s,” which opened in 1993 at Wayne Avenue and Seymour Street in Germantown, was known for its “chitlin hoagies,” great food and family service. But the community also considered her restaurant to be a safe haven and a resource for anyone in need of food, clothing, jobs or shelter. Betty Ann started a culinary arts training program beside her restaurant that educated young people, as well as those who found themselves unemployed, in the art of cooking.

To honor Betty Ann and all that she has done for our community, I introduced legislation to name a portion of Wayne Avenue, between Cheltenham Avenue and Clarissa Street, the Betty Ann Townes Memorial Highway.

Donate diapers to families in need

Across the county, one in three mothers finds it difficult to provide diapers for her children, mainly because most public resources, such as food stamps and medical assistance, do not help offset the costs of these needed items.

That is why I am proud to announce that my district office, located at 310 W. Cheltenham Ave., is partnering with the Center for Leadership, Development and Advocacy to accept donated diapers on a year-round basis. Diaper donation events are critical in providing these essential materials to families in our community.

If you have any extra diapers, or want to contribute to this worthwhile cause, please stop by my office or call 215-849-6426 for more information.



Around the District





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COME VISIT OUR CONSTITUENT SERVICE OFFICE!

**We are located at:
310 W. Cheltenham Ave.
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Phone: (215) 849-6426**

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WE CAN HELP YOU WITH:

- Applications for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program
- PACE/PACENET prescription assistance for senior citizens
- PennDOT forms, information or concerns
- Voter registration and absentee ballots
- LIHEAP applications

These are just some of the services my office provides. If you need more information or assistance with any state program or issue, please make my local office your first point of contact.