



# Report to the People

Winter 2016

*State Representative*  
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*19th Legislative District*

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## Working hard to secure a budget deal

At the end of 2014, Gov. Tom Corbett's outgoing budget secretary said that the state faced an almost \$2 billion structural deficit heading into the 2015-16 fiscal year, because revenues weren't keeping up with expenses. Governor Tom Wolf campaigned and was elected on his message that everyone has to pay their fair share, and that making an adequate investment in education is critical for Pennsylvania's future.

Every budget is a negotiated spending plan that requires give and take from all sides for us to effectively govern for all of our citizens. Over 13 years of listening and working to improve the 19th Legislative District, I have learned that it's critical for us in Harrisburg to streamline the cost of government and make sure we spend in the most efficient and effective manner possible, while simultaneously being strategic in making investments that will improve the quality of our education system, enhance business opportunities for all, and provide for safe and continued growth within our neighborhoods.

The governor presented his budget address last March and I was ready to start working to make it a reality. I reached out to the Republican chairman of the House Finance Committee, House

Republican leadership, the chairmen of the Senate Finance Committee, and the governor's office to set up joint meetings/hearings around his proposal, so that we could begin our process earlier than what we have typically done in the past. I tried to offer the revenue package that the governor proposed so that the discussions and issues could be discussed in March and hammered out before June. I even offered an alternative plan for balancing our structural deficit, eliminating school property taxes, and providing some ongoing investments in our education system.

Despite these efforts we still find ourselves in this absolutely unacceptable position and it must end. I stand ready to compromise for a budget that resolves our long-term structural deficit; makes a substantial investment in our education system with appropriate accountability measures, to insure our children's academic performance improves as our state's investment grows; and makes sure human service organizations and safety net programs are made whole.

## Golden Luncheon for seniors coming in April

I will host my 7th Annual Golden Luncheon for area seniors from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday, April 8 at Point Park University Student Center, 5th Floor, 330 Boulevard of the Allies in Pittsburgh.

Representatives from state, county and local agencies, as well as other exhibitors, will be on hand to offer information on health care, volunteer opportunities, prescription drug plans and more.

The event will also feature free health screenings, entertainment, bingo and a free lunch. It's a one-stop shop for seniors who want to learn more about what programs and services from the state and in our area are available to them.

**Space is limited so seniors should RSVP by calling my office at 412-471-7760.**







# PROPOSAL WOULD ELIMINATE PROPERTY TAXES WHILE FUNDING SCHOOLS



For more than 30 years, plans to shift, decrease or eliminate the way we pay school property taxes have failed in Harrisburg. I crafted a proposal to finally phase out school property taxes and remove the burden of public school funding from the backs of homeowners.

My plan would increase the Sales and Use Tax (SUT) from 6% to 7% and the Personal Income Tax (PIT) from 3.07% to 4.29% in the first year. These two changes would enable homeowners to realize a statewide average 50% reduction in their school property taxes.

While recognizing that an increase in any tax is always a difficult choice, it is important to note that most homeowners would save more by cutting their school property tax bill in half, than they would pay in the increases to the SUT and PIT rates.

In years two and three, the SUT would remain at 7%, while an increase to the PIT necessary to provide a 75% reduction in year two and full elimination in year three would be determined by the Independent Fiscal Office (an autonomous, non-political entity), to ensure that the increases are not politically motivated and that hard-working taxpayers are not charged a cent above the amount required to adequately fund our schools.

The Independent Fiscal Office estimates it would cost \$13 billion to \$14 billion to replace school property taxes in Pennsylvania. My proposal is estimated to generate approximately \$14 billion by year three.

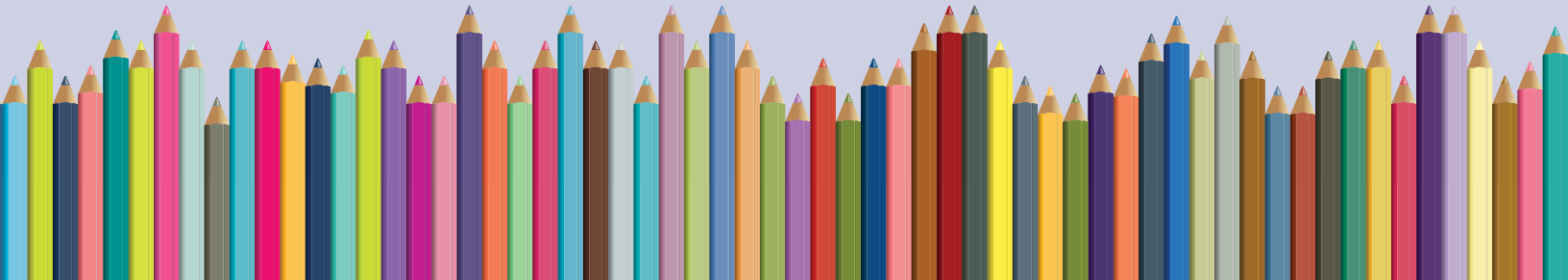
Beyond the difficulty of generating the required revenue, the other major issue that has always faced any proposal to eliminate school property taxes is determining how the funds should be distributed. This problem has ultimately doomed every attempt at school property tax elimination in the past; that's why I believe now is the time to offer my proposal.

In 2015, the Basic Education Funding Commission released a new formula for distributing state funding for basic education to Pennsylvania's 500 school districts. The new formula accounts for student-based factors, including student count, poverty, English language learners and charter school enrollment; and school district-based factors, including sparsity-size, median household income and local effort capacity.

I believe the new funding formula enables us to move away from the days of waste and ever-bloating school costs due to our over-reliance on the "hold-harmless" funding system. Simply saying that no school can receive less funding than they received in a prior year, regardless of any factors that would suggest otherwise, is the reason the funding target for property tax elimination was always a moving and ever-growing amount.

Now, with the new funding formula, we can determine what it takes to adequately educate a student, including numerous factors for their various needs, and provide that amount for the number of students in each district regardless of funding in any given prior year. My plan would also allow school boards to enact a local PIT if their community wishes to supplement their district with additional funds.

There is no doubt this is a significant proposal that would bring major changes to the way we generate revenue and pay for our system of public education. But for too long, we have allowed seniors to lose their homes, while hardworking parents struggle to pay mortgages bloated with the weight of property tax payments. I have met with the governor's administration and legislative leaders to gain support for my proposal. As we look to solve this exceptionally difficult budget stalemate, I believe my proposal could bring us toward a resolution by eliminating school property taxes and forever changing the way we fund our schools.



# Bills aim to find employment for disenfranchised citizens

As your state representative, I am always working to increase employment among my constituents and all disenfranchised citizens across Pennsylvania. I recently introduced a bill, H.B. 1696, aimed at increasing employment opportunities for veterans and other individuals with barriers to employment.

Called the Work Opportunity Tax Deduction, my legislation would incentivize employers that hire from disenfranchised groups and foster economic growth in the commonwealth, by offering them a tax deduction based on a percentage of the wages paid to their qualified employees.

Modeled after the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit, my bill targets disenfranchised groups, including veterans, TANF recipients, SNAP recipients, those who have undergone rehabilitative assistance, those convicted of a felony and recipients of SSI.

In addition to increasing individual employment, I am also working to increase business opportunities for minority/women/disadvantaged-owned businesses. I introduced legislation, H.B. 85, which is designed to improve the participation of minorities, women and the disadvantaged in state contracts and purchasing. Small businesses need our support to help them survive and eventually thrive in the marketplace. My bill would level the playing field for small businesses to compete with larger businesses for state contracts.



## Update on Wilkinsburg student transition

As many of you are aware, my local colleagues and I pushed to secure a several-million-dollar state commitment to make sure resources are available to assist our students in their transitioning from Wilkinsburg to Westinghouse. However, the challenge for an improved academic environment doesn't end with the allocation of the \$3 million in additional state funds.

The local leadership of parents, students and the school boards were invaluable in ensuring the money was a part of this year's budget so we can prepare and make ready all those necessary academic investments. We still need to ensure that these resources are distributed in an equitable manner to guarantee an excellent education for all these students, those coming from Wilkinsburg, and those already attending Westinghouse.

I support making sure we have adequate resources for our schools, but I also want to make sure we know where and how those resources are being utilized to improve our learning environments and impacting academic outcomes for our students.

I can assure the people of the 19th Legislative District that I have always endeavored to, and will continue to maintain a priority towards, improving the quality of education for our children. I will continue to work on an overarching plan to address accountability in education. This includes student initiatives, teacher initiatives, school and community support, as well as educational plans.

## Bill would expand Occupational Limited Licenses

I am working on an expansion of eligibility for the Occupational Limited Licenses (OLL). My legislation would bring license suspensions for driving under the influence of controlled substances in line with driving under the influence of alcohol. I believe this oversight has created undue hardship for those who want to maintain employment, while still serving their punishment. Regardless of one's transgressions, the responsibility and routine of employment helps both the individual and the economy.

Currently, drivers without any prior offenses who are convicted of DUI of alcohol can apply for an OLL after 60 days of serving their suspension. Yet, at the same time, drivers without any prior offenses who are convicted of driving under the influence of controlled substances must serve out their entire suspension for that portion of a compounded suspension before applying for an OLL.

An OLL allows drivers with suspended licenses to drive for a limited set of purposes under significant restrictions. Offenders may drive to their occupation, work, trade, medical treatment, or study, which helps them continue working, studying, etc. while they serve their sentences, allowing them to make positive life choices in an effort to avoid recidivism. Without this legislation, offenders risk loss of income – impairing their ability to make restitution and continue supporting themselves, being forced to discontinue their education, or having to forego medical services.



*In September, I joined community leaders to highlight the “Little Free Libraries” initiative of the Pittsburgh Brashear High School’s construction shop class during a discussion and tour at the school. To encourage reading and literacy, Brashear students, working with parent organizer Debra Smallwood, designed and built bird house-sized book cases where books are shared, read, borrowed and replaced by members of the community. I posed with Brashear High School student Lester Tillet, who designed the library box in my office.*



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INSIDE:

■ Golden Luncheon for  
seniors coming in April

lpo.kl.0216

Health and Wellness Weekend coming in September

You are invited to my **4th Annual Health and Wellness Weekend** on **Friday, Sept. 9 through Sunday, Sept. 11**. Come out and join us for a fun, informative and empowering weekend of events that will provide exposure to new concepts and resources that promote a healthier, sustainable lifestyle.

The three-day event includes an Opening Night Reception, the 5K UPHill Walk/Run and my 13th Annual Community Appreciation Day at Kennard Field, which features free food, children’s activities, dancing, an employment resource center, live local entertainment, free prize giveaways and much more.

There will also be a Health Expo offering health screenings, vendors, cooking demonstrations, children’s obstacle course, equipment and class orientations, a live DJ, a mural painting for families and kids, and free giveaways.

This fun-filled weekend contains something for everyone, and we plan to make it even bigger and better this year. I look forward to seeing old friends and meeting new constituents at this year’s events.

For more information about Health and Wellness Weekend, sign up to receive my emails at my website at [www.pahouse.com/Wheatley](http://www.pahouse.com/Wheatley) or follow me on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/RepWheatley](http://www.facebook.com/RepWheatley) or on Twitter at [www.Twitter.com/RepWheatley](http://www.Twitter.com/RepWheatley).



Constituents dance and celebrate during Rep. Wheatley’s Community Appreciation Day.



Exciting projects throughout the 19th District

Great things are happening in Hazelwood as residents play a major role in the neighborhood’s revitalization efforts. In fact, two local start-up businesses are flourishing right along Second Avenue. Dylamato’s Market recently settled into its new home at 5414 Second Ave., offering a wide range of products including local meats, fresh pastries, dinners to go, and fresh fruits and vegetables. This past summer, along with other local entrepreneurs now housed in Dylamato’s Market, local resident Diane Shenk created the Summer Marketplace, a program joining locally owned micro-businesses to provide residents access to fresh, healthy foods like produce. As you know, I have worked for several years to help bring fresh, healthy food to underserved city neighborhoods. Now that Dylamato’s has settled in its new home, I am delighted that the Summer Marketplace will be part of the community for many years.

Hazelwood resident Elaine Price’s business, Floriated Interpretation, located at 4737 Second Ave., is becoming a major asset to the neighborhood. Her business includes a garden center and horticulture services, such as interior landscaping for offices and apartments.

In the southern Hill Top communities, there is a lot of excitement around the McKinley Park redevelopment, which has spawned involvement from residents and leaders across generations.

Youth from the Hill Top communities have been doing much of the work to maintain and improve the infrastructure of the park, while Beltzhoover native Jamil Bey has been working with community stakeholders, architects, and designers on the park’s master plan. The final design recommendations will be unveiled March 12 at the St. Paul AME church in Knoxville. A Student Conservation Association crew comprised of youth from Beltzhoover, Knoxville, and Mt. Oliver will begin work in the park on Feb. 25. You can join residents for a tour of the projects in the park on March 12 at 11 a.m. Lunch will be provided to those who RSVP at [info@pgh.works](mailto:info@pgh.works).

I feel strongly that residents are the first stakeholders of any community development and I am eager to support resident-driven initiatives throughout the 19th District. I congratulate and commend our partners in the region who are building relationships and opportunities in our communities. I will continue to highlight the impact residents are making in our neighborhoods. Please contact my office via phone or email to share other great stories.