

State Representative Dan Miller

Newsletter



SUMMER/FALL 2017

Serving the 42nd District

Mt. Lebanon, Dormont, Castle Shannon, and Baldwin Township with parts of Scott Township and Brookline



Discussing civics with Scouts in the district office.

INSIDE:

- Opioid Crisis
- Committee Updates
- Redistricting
- Disability & Mental Health Summit

Committee Assignments:

Judiciary • Education, Co-Chair, Subcommittee on Special Education
Children & Youth • Human Services • Labor & Industry

Caucus Memberships:

Autism & Intellectual Disabilities, Co-Chair
Early Childhood Education • Firefighters & EMS • Government Reform
HOPE (Heroin, Opioid Prevention, and Education) • LGBT Equality • Steel

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Opioid Crisis

There is no doubt that our community has not been immune to the opioid epidemic. One of my top priorities as your state representative has been trying to address this crisis and helping those with addiction get access to treatment, keeping their families together, and getting work. Over the past year, I have attended several hearings on these topics and have hosted events here in our district to bring information and to hear what is or isn't working right here at home. As a member of the House Human Services Committee, I also have the opportunity to more directly push and support legislation in this arena. Here is an update on some of the bills that I have co-sponsored that are making progress this year.

The first bill of note is H.B. 119, which passed the House and which seeks to establish a process for certifying "sober houses." Properly operated sober houses can be extremely helpful in stabilizing and advancing recovery, but some are little more than warehouses for people in need, with little connection to therapeutic supports. This legislation would establish a formal certification process for all drug and alcohol sober houses that receive taxpayer dollars. This certification would also be required for any referral to a sober house made by a health care provider.

Additionally, H.B. 118 passed the House and sits in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. This bill attempts to address the current shortage of beds for those seeking inpatient treatment. Too many people are going home empty-handed rather than receiving the support they need. This bill would encourage existing health care facilities to convert unoccupied beds to provide medically supervised detoxification and to create a staging area for people who are in need of developing a high-quality treatment program. Its intent is to increase the availability of emergency drug and alcohol detoxification in our community hospitals.

Another bill that was approved by the Human Services Committee is H.B. 122. This bill would establish the Pennsylvania Project Lazarus Commission, which would work to develop a best-practice model for a comprehensive,



community-based effort to consolidate overdose prevention efforts. Additionally, this commission would identify factors to help counties establish or build existing comprehensive community-based programs to prevent prescription medication and opioid poisonings, provide responsible pain management, and promote substance abuse treatment and support services. North Carolina has taken a similar approach and has seen great success in reducing fatal overdoses in the community and my hope is that we can accomplish something similar in Pennsylvania.

And, of course, as I write this we are in the midst of our budget debate. Governor Wolf has proposed the largest consolidation of state services in years – a plan that would merge the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (among others) into the Department of Human Services. I believe there is a lot to champion in the thought behind this merger; specifically, that breaking down service silos would make access easier and streamline the bureaucracy. I have been advocating the importance of this work, and I have been very pleased with the response from the administration reconfirming that, regardless of the structure, addiction issues will not be downgraded.

As I've said in the past, we have a long way to go in our fight against addiction and stigma. While none of these bills is perfect, I believe they are positive steps in the right direction, and I will continue to push for bipartisan solutions to a problem that has no demographic boundaries. I hope we will have further action on these efforts soon.



Committee Updates

There are 24 different House committees, each having both Democratic and Republican members. Every Representative is given several committees to participate in. Here are some of the issues my committees have been working on this session:

Human Services Committee

Requiring Prescribers to Check the Prescription Drug Monitoring Database:

People with an addiction to opiates or other pills sometimes go doctor- or pharmacy-hopping in order to secure a stream of prescription drugs. In order to curb that practice and hopefully lead more people to rehab, I have co-sponsored H.B. 396, which would require doctors to check the drug monitoring database with every prescription. This bill was approved by the committee and awaits action in the House.



Right to Try Legislation: No doubt the Food and Drug Administration plays a very important role in keeping us safe, but at times its process can limit options for people diagnosed with a terminal illness. I have co-sponsored H.B. 45, which would allow eligible patients who have a terminal illness to use investigational drugs, biological products, and devices that have not yet been approved by the FDA. This bill passed the House and awaits Senate action.

Judiciary Committee

Animal Abuse Statute Overhaul:

I was proud to support H.B. 1238, which was a long-overdue rewrite of our animal cruelty code. I was surprised that this effort did not meet with unanimous approval but regardless, it passed the House and at this writing is in the Senate.



Officer Down Advisory Act: When one of our law enforcement officers is down in the line of duty, it means things are critical for them and often for the public. That's why I co-sponsored the PA Officer Down Advisory system that would work similar to an Amber Alert and notify the public that an officer in their area has been seriously injured or killed. The House passed the bill and it is in the Senate.

Education Committee

Secondary Special Education

Transition: H.B. 1305, which I co-wrote, looks to ensure that those who provide secondary transition guidance for students with special education



needs receive training and education in those specific and critically important issues. The bill passed the House and is in the Senate Education Committee.

Graduation Requirements for Career and Technical Education (CTE) Students:

I believe that quality CTE is more important now than ever, but the state also needs to provide flexibility in how some of the more diverse programming measures competency. H.B. 202 mirrors other recent legislation that would allow for alternatives to graduation requirements and rejects a one-size-fits-all mentality. I supported this bill through the House, and it is now in the Senate.

Children & Youth Committee

Adoption Package: As a strong supporter of adoption and of making it an easier, more attractive option, I was very glad to support this package, which included two of my bills, H.B. 62 and H.B. 63, which passed the House and await action in the Senate.

Postpartum Depression: Early Intervention Services for Infants and their Mothers: H.B. 200 would amend Pennsylvania's Early Intervention system to include support for mothers who suffer from postpartum depression. The goal is to provide help to new families and to de-stigmatize postpartum depression. This bill was approved in committee and now awaits consideration by the full House.

Labor & Industry Committee

Unemployment Compensation

Funding: Due to the failure of the Senate majority to support a bipartisan Unemployment Compensation bill last session, hundreds of employees were laid off and three state centers closed.

While problems existed, this move led to countless delays suffered by many people who were seeking access to benefits they earned. Thankfully, a temporary fix was signed by the Governor in April, but a long-term solution is needed. I thank Auditor General Eugene DePasquale for his work on this issue.



Seasonal Unemployment Compensation Eligibility: A loophole in PA's unemployment system has historically discriminated against seasonal workers who are very busy during certain months and out of work in others. Accordingly, I was very pleased to support H.B. 319 and thankful that it became law.

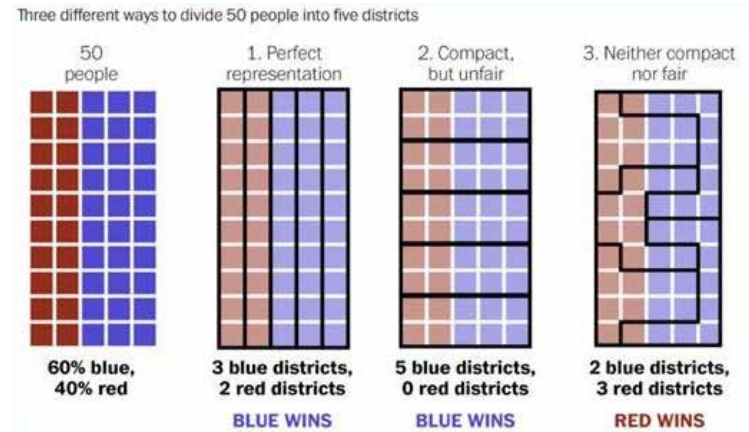
Redistricting

The process of gerrymandering continues to be an issue that I am frequently contacted about. Many people believe that the method of redrawing districts after each Census has been abused, often saying that politicians are now choosing their constituents rather than the other way around. As a member of the bipartisan Government Reform Caucus, I have always supported bills that would seek to remedy this and I continue to push for their advancement.

Here is how the process currently works for drawing state House and Senate districts:

- Our state Constitution requires that our district maps are drawn by the Legislative Reapportionment Commission. This commission is made up of the majority and minority party leaders of the House and Senate, plus the chairman, who is chosen by the other four members. It is rare that all four chambers agree on a chairman, so that decision is then sent to the state Supreme Court, which then appoints the chair. The commission puts together a preliminary plan, and anyone who disagrees with it can file exceptions.
- Once those exceptions have been addressed (or not) by the commission, the final plan is released, and it is then reviewed by the Supreme Court to determine its constitutionality. Any contradictions in law are sent back to the commission to fix until the completed plan passes Supreme Court muster. The redrawing of federal districts proceed more akin to typical legislation, meaning that plan must, at the end, be signed by the Governor.

I believe we can do better. Working off some of the progress made in other states, I think that we should create an independent redistricting commission along the lines of the one described in H.B. 722, for example, that would stop the practice of having legislators at the table during redistricting. There are a couple of different variations on this idea, so I hope that the majority in Harrisburg would allow this issue to have a hearing and then a vote as soon as possible.



4th Annual Disability & Mental Health Summit

Our 4th annual Disability and Mental Health Summit was in March and thanks to our friends at Beth El Congregation, Saints Simon and Jude, and many others, we offered more programming than ever before! This year set a new attendance record, and we had specialized programming over three days. Our resource fairs brought in over 140 unique organizations that concentrate in disability or mental health issues. We take a lot of pride in offering the greatest collection of such resources in western PA!

In addition to our local partners, we continue to grow our partnerships with nonprofits such as the PEAL Center, 21 and Able, the Pittsburgh Youth Leadership Taskforce, and the Allegheny Family Network in order to bring in experts from all over Pennsylvania. One of the highlights at this year's Summit was the expansion of our youth program. There, we

bring in almost 100 transition-aged students from around the area to participate in a special program designed for their future. We talk about the importance of self-advocacy and transition planning, and then conclude with a very special component that brings legislators from across the state to meet with the students in small groups to discuss their hopes and concerns about their future. This event then leads into our bipartisan, bicameral Legislative Panel, where elected leaders discuss related policy concerns with experts in the field.

Of course, too many families with a loved one with a disability or a mental health issue are hanging on by a thin thread. That is why I take such pride in bringing this event to our district. We are already working on next year's program, and I will continue to fight for these issues in Harrisburg!

In Our Community



Baldwin Township

I thoroughly enjoyed participating in Baldwin-Whitehall's senior exit interviews, which I think is a great program designed to help our students make informed decisions about their futures. Additionally, I always appreciate their commitment to the Special Olympics. I also appreciate my close working relationship with County Councilman Palmiere, who is always advocating for his constituents!

Brookline

St. Mark's was kind enough to again let us host a community event, this time talking about the importance of quality Pre-K with our Early Learning 101 forum. I also always love attending the great community events such as Breeze Fest and Taste of Brookline. In addition, I was honored to partner with my House colleagues and District Judge Jim Motznik to sponsor the portrait of former Judge Charlie McLaughlin, who had a long-standing, positive role in our community.



Castle Shannon

It's always great to participate in Castle Shannon's Community Day and Memorial Day celebrations, and to continue with our annual shredding event that we sponsor with Castle Shannon Revitalization Corp. and the police department. We also hosted our Suburban Poverty event in the library, and visited Keystone Oaks to talk public safety and STEAM education.

Dormont

We are always thankful to the Dormont Library for being such a great community partner, this year hosting our Community Development Discussion and our Violence Against Women Roundtable. Also, we're always glad to be involved with the planning discussions for Dormont's continued resurgence. I also enjoyed celebrating the library's 80th birthday, participating in events at the Hollywood Theater, and sponsoring the Dormont Dash.



Mt. Lebanon

Mt. Lebanon is the home of many of our community events, and this year we were glad to partner with many of our religious institutions, community organizations, and our local government for the Unity Rally, which brought hundreds of people together against bigotry and hatred. We also helped to secure some infrastructure grants, continued our town hall roll out, and presented our annual senior fair.

Scott Township

Scott and our friends at Beth El and Saints Simon and Jude continue to be strong supporters of our annual Disability Summit. I also appreciate working on projects involving sewers and traffic signals with Commissioner Bruckner, and supporting its CPR training initiative for residents.



Contacting Rep. Miller

Hearing from you and working to address your state-related issues is an essential part of my job. Thanks for the honor to serve you, and I hope you will make a habit of reaching out! With the recent rise in local activism, I thought it might be helpful to describe our contact system.

Contacting for assistance:

This is where you, your family, your business, etc., need some type of direct help from my office regarding a state-related matter. You can email, call, or stop in, but it's best not to wait if you have a time-sensitive issue!

Contacting about legislation:

Some people just want to let me know their thoughts on a bill or on one of my votes, and that's OK. Others have a general inquiry about a specific piece of legislation or vote and would like to talk to my staff or to me directly about it. It helps us if you let us know how we can best respond to you. And no matter what, don't forget that we can always set up a phone conference to discuss an issue with you – or you can just stop in! Email, call, stop in, or write an actual letter – my office logs it all so that I stay on top of your concerns or thoughts.



Some constituent services we provide:

... I need help with unemployment benefits

If you are having difficulty getting answers from an Unemployment Compensation Service Center, our office can help you get in touch with them – without having to spend a long time on hold!

... I want to ride the bus for free / senior transit pass

Are you over 65? You can ride any Port Authority bus or T for free! Our office is authorized by Allegheny County to register persons 65 or older for the free Port Authority transit card. Stop in with a photo ID and fill out a quick form!

... I need help with my Property Tax/Rent Rebate form

Our office is happy to help you complete and file these forms. Call for a free appointment.

... I am having issues with Medicaid/CHIP health benefits

Whether an initial application, renewal or coverage issue, our office can help clarify and submit documentation needed for those programs.



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Upcoming Events



September 28th • 9 am – noon

Salvation Army Pittsburgh Temple
1060 McNeilly Road, Pittsburgh 15226



October 23rd • All Day

Contact Mt. Lebanon Recreation Center
for more info and to sign up at 412-561-4363