



Comitta's Corner

State Representative Carolyn Comitta

Dear Neighbors,

I have been working hard all year and wanted to share some of the highlights of 2017 in the 156th Legislative District with you. As your state representative, I am here to serve you. Please feel free to share your ideas, your questions and concerns any time. My office can assist you with any state-related issue, such as PennDOT driver and vehicle issues, birth and death certificates, SEPTA senior passes, LIHEAP and Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications, to name a few! You can reach me by any of the contact methods listed in this newsletter.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. I wish you a happy and healthy holiday season, and I look forward to seeing you in 2018!

Warm Regards,



2017 State Budget

After a four-month stalemate, the General Assembly and governor were able to wrap up the final pieces to the 2017-18 state budget in October. Completing it took time, but the state was able to budget the revenue necessary to fund schools, human services and other valuable programs that benefit families in Pennsylvania.

Positive aspects of the completed budget include a \$150 million increase in education funding, an additional allocation of \$10 million toward battling the opioid crisis and \$1.2 million for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans and other veterans' mental health services.



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Pension Reform Bill Passes

This spring, I joined my colleagues in passing the first meaningful pension reform bill in years. This bipartisan effort represents a positive step toward addressing Pennsylvania's pension issues while supporting our schools and saving taxpayers money.

Act 5 of 2017 is expected to save the state \$1.4 billion over 30 years. It does so by increasing employee contributions for new hires of the State Employees' Retirement System and Public School Employees' Retirement System while reducing benefits, beginning in 2019. Current employees can opt in as well. It does not affect current employees who choose not to opt in or retirees already receiving benefits. The plan offers future public employees a choice among three retirement-savings options – two hybrid defined-benefit/defined-contribution plans and a defined-contribution retirement plan.

I've spent my entire career working on initiatives that have brought diverse stakeholders together to affect change that improves people's lives, and this is a great example of collaboration. Act 5 helps move us toward a healthier fiscal future.

Current Legislation

I have been actively at work with several of my colleagues to address the lack of oversight and regulation of pipelines in our state. Over the summer, I announced my work on legislation to give our state agencies what they need to provide the highest level of public health and safety. I introduced House Bill 1700, which would create the Pipeline Safety and Communications Board, comprised of representatives of state agencies whose work is relevant to pipelines and public safety. Packaged with H.B. 1700 is a second bill that would amend the PUC Confidential Security Information Disclosure Protection Act in order to permit agencies to communicate certain sensitive information with one another in the interest of public safety. The disclosure act was passed after 9/11 to protect information from getting into the wrong hands; however, it overreaches and restricts sharing of certain information between agencies, an unfortunate, unintended consequence.

Keep an eye on my website www.pahouse.com/Comitta and my Facebook page www.facebook.com/RepComitta for up-to-the-moment information and updates on all legislation I am sponsoring.



Gun Violence Prevention

Sadly, gun violence has become a growing public health crisis in Pennsylvania and throughout the country. Each year, more than 33,000 people lose their lives to gun violence in America, another 80,000 are wounded. In addition to the widely reported mass shootings in Newtown, Orlando and Las Vegas, gun violence has become a far too common occurrence, with daily shootings barely making headlines.

While there is no single solution to the terrible problem of gun violence, there are measures that we can take to save lives. The PA SAFE Caucus, of which I am a member, supports several pieces of commonsense legislation that would make Pennsylvania safer.

H.B. 1400 would close a dangerous loophole in our current law. The bipartisan bill would require universal background checks for all firearm purchases in Pennsylvania, as well as allow for an extended 72-hour background check to be used for multiple purchases at gun shows. Requiring universal background checks is common sense and is supported by 90 percent of Americans and 84 percent of gun owners. Background checks for all gun sales and transfers will save lives.

H.B. 832 would require gun owners whose firearm is lost or stolen to report the incident to law enforcement within 72 hours. This measure would deter gun trafficking and discourage straw purchasing, while protecting lawful gun owners who responsibly report the loss. The PA SAFE Caucus also supports firearm restraining-order legislation to enable medical professionals and family members to petition a court for a temporary firearm restraining order against a person proven to be a danger to themselves or those around them.

Facing the Opioid Crisis

In August, I had the opportunity to participate in a roundtable discussion in Kennett Square with Attorney General Josh Shapiro, local lawmakers and law enforcement officials on the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 50, opioid abuse.

At this meeting I stated the importance of collaboration to address this complicated and tragic epidemic. I support efforts such as the drug takeback programs that many of our local police departments hold to collect unused and unwanted medication, more public education on the risks associated with opioids, and improving access to treatment for those in need.

Additionally, I am a co-sponsor of the following legislation aimed at addressing the opioid epidemic:

House Bills 597 & 598 would amend the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act to provide additional tools in our ongoing fight against opioid prescription drug misuse and abuse.

H.B. 597 would prohibit prescribing extended-release long-acting opioid analgesics in a non-abuse-deterrent

form for outpatient use, unless an opioid analgesic in an abuse-deterrent form or another drug or substance is not available as a substitute for treatment.

H.B. 598 would require practitioners to check the ABC-MAP system (prescription monitoring system) before prescribing, administering or dispensing an extended-release, long-acting opioid analgesic in a non-abuse-deterrent form to determine if any unusual prescribing pattern exists for the patient and note the reasons for the prescription in the patient's medical records.

H.B. 1871 would amend the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act, further providing for drug overdose response immunity. That means the immunity would apply to both the person calling for help and to the overdose victim — but only when the person calling for help has committed a criminal offense. After all, someone who simply finds an overdose victim has no reason to fear arrest and needs no further encouragement to seek help.

House Bill 722: Ending Gerrymandering in PA

According to a recent study by the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), Pennsylvania ranks third worst in the nation for the fairness of its electoral boundaries. When politicians manipulate district lines to benefit themselves and their parties, the public always loses.

That's why I support efforts to end gerrymandering and am a co-sponsor of H.B. 722, which would amend the Pennsylvania Constitution by establishing an Independent Redistricting Commission to provide a nonpartisan process for redistricting in the Commonwealth for state Senate, state House and Congressional districts.

If this legislation is enacted, the Independent Redistricting Commission tasked to draw boundary

lines would not be beholden to incumbent politicians or political parties. This proposal also would ensure that state legislative and congressional districts are drawn in a fair and impartial manner. H.B. 722 was developed in conjunction with Fair Districts PA, a bipartisan, statewide coalition that includes the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, Common Cause Pennsylvania, the Committee of Seventy, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches and more than 20 other organizations.



2017 PennDOT Projects Update

I hear frequently from many of you regarding our roadways, and I'm pleased to share that much progress was made to improve safety and mobility in Chester County this year. See below for a list of projects in our area.

Route 926 Bridge Replacement –

PennDOT opened the new Route 926 bridge over the Brandywine Creek in Birmingham and Pocopson townships on Aug. 25. The bridge opened ahead of its scheduled Sept. 1 opening date. The new bridge replaces the former structurally deficient span, which was closed for construction on Feb. 13, 2017. Under the \$8.6 million project, PennDOT replaced the 79-year-old bridge with a new three-span structure built at a higher elevation; rebuilt and raised 1,700 feet of the roadway approaches to make them less prone to flooding; replaced the nearby culvert over Radley Run with an 84-foot twin arch concrete culvert; and realigned 800 feet of Creek Road at its northern intersection with Route 926.



Paving – PennDOT resurfaced 60 miles of state highway in Chester County in 2017. Across PennDOT's five-county District 6 region, more than 290 miles of state highway were resurfaced, 50 more than anticipated, and 39 bridges in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties were repaired or replaced.

Roads Resurfaced in the 156th District in 2017:

- U.S. 202 between Dilworthtown Road and U.S. 202/322 ramps in Westtown, West Goshen, Thornbury and Birmingham townships
- West Miner Street between Brandywine Street and South High Street in West Chester Borough
- Route 926 between Cheyney Road and Route 3 in Willistown, Westtown and Thornbury townships
- Marshall Street/Goshen Road/Phoenixville Pike between North High Street and Saunders Lane in West Chester Borough and West Goshen Township
- Route 926 between U.S. 202 and Cheyney Road in Westtown and Thornbury townships
- Birmingham Road between Old Wilmington Pike and Lenape Road in Birmingham and East Bradford townships
- High Street between U.S. 202 and Route 52 in West Chester Borough and West Goshen Township
- Westtown Thornton Road between the Delaware County line and Route 926 in Thornbury Township
- Fernhill Road between Phoenixville Pike and Paoli Pike in West Goshen Township

For more information on projects occurring or being bid this year, those made possible by or accelerated by the state transportation funding plan (Act 89), or those on the department's Four and Twelve Year Plans, visit www.projects.penndot.gov.

Motorists can check conditions on more than 40,000 roadway miles, including color-coded winter conditions on 2,900 miles, by visiting www.511PA.com. 511PA, which is free and available 24 hours a day, provides traffic delay warnings, weather forecasts, traffic speed information, and access to more than 850 traffic cameras.



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Outstanding Schools in the 156th

Over the course of the year I have visited most of the wonderful elementary, middle and high schools in the district. I have toured buildings, met administration, students and staff, and learned about the many programs and initiatives in place to help our students succeed at every level. I feel very proud to have such exceptional schools in my district, and I am grateful to all of the dedicated administration, faculty, staff, families and students who make such achievements possible. I was particularly proud of the three National Blue Ribbon Schools I visited. Congratulations to Saints Simon & Jude School, St. Maximilian Kolbe School, and West Chester East High School on earning this prestigious honor!



St. Maximilian Kolbe School – Pictured with Principal Monica Malseed.

Senior Expo 2017 a Success!

Thank you to all of our vendors and seniors for participating in our 2017 Senior Expo on Oct. 21! I was honored to help make community programs for seniors easy and accessible at this fun, free event at West Chester East High School.



A big thanks also to our wonderful performers from Rustin High School, the Henderson High School Jazz Combo, and Fred Astaire Dance Studio West Chester.



If you need help connecting with senior service providers or help with state-related programs, please don't hesitate to contact my office at (610) 696-4990.



Saints Simon & Jude School – Pictured with Principal Sister Regina Elinich and students Luke Gueriera and Molly McFillin.

West Chester East High School – Pictured with East Principal Kevin Fagan, Assistant Principal Maureen Wallace and students Kaley and Jack.

