

News From State Representative

CHRISTINA SAPPEY

158th Legislative District | Chester County | Summer 2024



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
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DEAR NEIGHBOR,

While every season in the 158th is beautiful, Summer is particularly so, and full of options for enjoying our many preserved spaces. The look on my pup Embree's face here is a lovely reminder to embrace our sense of curiosity and wonder when outdoors. People of all ages can pause and appreciate the sound of birdsong, a breeze or a gurgling stream. Likewise, there's always more to learn about the ecosystems inhabiting our natural surroundings. In my work in the House, I have the opportunity to support funding of open space, trail, and stream restoration projects in our district. I believe the return on investment is huge for all of us. So, in this issue, you will find a list of trails, parks and preserves in the 158th to enjoy this summer. You may even bump into Embree and me!

Have a safe and wonder-full summer.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christina Sappey".

MORE SENIORS ELIGIBLE FOR PROPERTY TAX/RENT REBATE PROGRAM

You may be eligible for the expanded Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program which helps thousands of senior citizens across the commonwealth. Even if you did not qualify in previous years for this program, you may meet the requirements now. The expanded program raises income eligibility to \$45,000 for homeowners and renters.

Rebate amounts, which have also increased, range from \$380 to \$1000 depending on income level. The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program accommodates cost of living increases in future years to keep pace with inflation so that seniors retain eligibility with modest raises in Social Security benefits. This income eligibility adjustment will be implemented without the need for future legislative action.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program benefits individuals 65 and older, widowed individuals 50 and older, and people with disabilities 18 and older. Online applications can be found on the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue website, or you can obtain a paper copy from my office. Application deadline for the 2023 tax year is Dec. 31, 2024.

INNOVATION PROGRAM KEEPS AGRICULTURE MOVING FORWARD

Agriculture is a top industry in PA, contributing \$81.5 billion to the state's economy. To keep our farms and farmers a leading economic driver, the governor has proposed the creation of an Agriculture Innovation Fund as an important component of the 2024-2025 state budget. The fund would invest \$10.3 million in grant programs to support farmers, agribusinesses, and agriculture-supporting businesses in making advancements through improved technology. Modernizing equipment, improving food production, reducing energy consumption and encouraging regenerative farming are some of the ways in which farmers can use grant funding to adopt new practices to improve their business. In addition, farmers would have an opportunity to have a positive role in addressing climate challenges, which includes protecting land and water resources. Grants for the Innovation Fund would be administered by the Department of Agriculture and the State Conservation Commission and would include three categories: planning grants, on-farm projects and plans that have a regional impact.

I look forward to supporting the Agriculture Innovation Fund during budget season. The opportunity to propel agriculture forward through technological advancements is one we need to embrace now, and I believe will incentivize the next generation of farmers.



Grants Awarded in the 158th

ENVIRONMENTAL GRANTS
\$3.8 MILLION



INFRASTRUCTURE
GRANTS
\$6 MILLION

OTHER DISTRICT GRANTS
\$505,000

I am pleased to share that during this term, the 158th legislative district has received \$10.3 million in grant funding to finance numerous projects within our communities. These grants represent taxpayer dollars returning to the 158th to fund important projects such as stormwater management, road construction, wastewater handling and water treatment facilities, riparian buffers, and trail improvements.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Local Government Code Update Bill Becomes Law

Legislation that I co-sponsored with Rep. Bob Freeman, HB 1234, was signed into law by Governor Shapiro in April. The new law, Act 3, amends the Third-Class City Code to include appointments or a partnership, limited partnership, association, or professional corporation to serve as the city administrator/manager, in addition to an individual. In city government, cities with a population less than 250,000 are considered third class.

Act 3 modernizes Third-Class City Code and brings consistency with other municipal classifications. Additionally, the new law provides greater autonomy for third-class cities to receive management services.

HB 1512: Ensuring Telemedicine Coverage for Pennsylvanians

Pennsylvania is one of only a few states in the nation that does not require health insurers to cover telemedicine services. My legislation, HB 1512, was overwhelmingly passed by the House with a 197-3 vote to rectify this. HB 1512 will require insurers to cover costs for telemedicine visits with a healthcare provider when medically necessary and appropriate and could be a lifeline for many Pennsylvanians.

Telemedicine is a tool that can help expand access to health and mental health services for individuals who may otherwise go untreated because of travel challenges, a lack of nearby services, or appointment availability. It is especially vital for rural residents, members of the disability community, and those seeking mental health services.

This legislation was supported by over 100 healthcare and insurance stakeholder groups, including the Hospital and Health system Association of PA (HAP). HB 1512 is currently in the PA Senate Banking and Insurance Committee awaiting consideration.

Water Rights for Consumers

In recent years, many water and wastewater customers have been unexpectedly hit with exorbitant price hikes when their municipalities sold those systems to public utilities. This is a troubling statewide trend that has prompted me, along with several colleagues, to introduce a package of bills that would amend Act 12 and protect consumers from surprise rate increases when their municipal water or wastewater systems are sold to a public utility.

Act 12 was created in 2016 to incentivize public utilities to purchase struggling water or wastewater systems from municipalities that could not afford the needed repairs and improvements to ensure water safety. Unfortunately, in many cases, healthy water or wastewater systems are being sold instead. This is because Act 12 was structured to allow for the over-valuation of the water or wastewater systems and does not give the Public Utility Commission (PUC) sufficient time to review these transactions. The result provides the municipalities with an influx of cash, but residents find themselves on the receiving end of higher bills because the purchasers, the public utilities, have raised rates to recoup their costs. Additionally, the deals are frequently pushed through without giving customers a chance to voice their concerns and without notice that their rates are about to rise.

These rate hikes are unacceptable. Residents should not be blindsided by water bills that are doubled or even tripled overnight with no discernible improvements made to the service. The bills I have introduced with my colleagues would provide transparency and accountability in the sale of municipal water and sewer systems, and they include:

- **House Bill 1862-** Places stringent notification requirements on both sellers and buyers of a water system to ratepayers from the initial inception of a sale.
- **House Bill 1863-** Provides the PUC with ample time to review all sales of water systems to assure healthy systems are not being sold.
- **House Bill 1864-** Eases the immediate financial burden on ratepayers by spreading out any possible future rate increases over three rate cycles, or six years.
- **House Bill 1865-** Puts a cap on an acquisition amount, discouraging the purchase of healthy systems.

Most recently these bills passed through the House Consumer Protection, Technology, and Utilities Committee and are awaiting a vote on the House floor.

While it is clear that the current iteration of Act 12 is not working for many Pennsylvanians, I believe that an amended Act 12 should be available as a tool for financially distressed municipalities that are unable to maintain healthy water and wastewater systems, many of which are located in poor, rural areas.



Community Solar Legislation

Community Solar legislation was recently approved by the House with bipartisan support. The House has discussed community solar legislation for many years without advancing because the proposals lacked flexibility for ratepayers. HB 1842 is different because it allows customers to decide whether or not they want to participate in the program. I voted for HB 1842, however, I believe the bill should be amended in the Senate to address some concerns from the agricultural community.

Community Solar projects are subscriber-based and allow participants to jointly finance a solar project at another location to get the benefits of rooftop solar energy. The electricity that is generated from the remote location is sent to the utility grid. Subscribers pay for a share of the electricity generated from the solar project and then receive a portion of the dollar value from the project as a credit. Consumers who cannot install their own individual solar units on their homes are able to benefit from the electricity generated by the community-sponsored energy venture.

Helping Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange Access Benefits

As a member of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I believe we have a duty to treat our veterans, who have sacrificed for our freedom, with respect and dignity. That is why I co-sponsored HR 335, which calls for the creation of the Pennsylvania Task Force on Agent Orange. This resolution was unanimously passed by the House and will help PA veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange obtain benefits that are available to them through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

From 1962 until 1971, the United States military used a blend of herbicides known as Agent Orange to remove foliage that provided cover to enemies during the Vietnam War. The herbicide was banned when evidence of the harmful and sometimes deadly results of exposure began to emerge.

Those who were exposed to Agent Orange are at risk of developing cancers, neurological and psychological conditions, and other long-term effects to the skin and heart. Exposure can also cause reproductive health problems and birth defects in the children of veterans, including spina bifida, hip dysplasia, and congenital heart disease.

The VA offers several benefits to veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. However, the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs estimates that there are a number of veterans in Pennsylvania who qualify but are not yet receiving VA benefits. The new task force will study and form recommendations on how best to communicate with veterans affected by Agent Orange to connect them with the benefits for which they are eligible and the treatment options available to them.

Gone Fishing!

Did you know that prior to the kick-off of fishing season, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission stocks approximately 3.2 million adult trout in 697 streams and 129 lakes across the state for public fishing? Anglers from throughout the area assist Commission staff with stocking each year in our streams, an activity I love lending a hand to also! Funding for this program is provided entirely by state fishing license fees. You can purchase your fishing license online at HuntFish.PA.gov, the online portal of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's website, or through a local issuing agent.



GET OUTSIDE THIS SUMMER! WALKING TRAILS AND PRESERVES IN THE 158TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Summer is the perfect time to get outside and discover the natural landscapes of Chester County. The 158th offers an abundance of opportunities to explore the outdoors. While this list is not exhaustive, it provides a glimpse into the diverse array of walking trails, preserves, and parks in our district. How many will you check off this summer?

Anson B. Nixon Park (Kennett Square Borough): In the heart of Kennett Square Borough, you can find 106 acres of land with walking trails and ponds, picnic areas, a dog park, and the home of many community events. Other trails through the Kennett area can be found through the Kennett Trails Alliance. To learn more, visit their website at (kennectivity.com).

Avondale Preserve (Avondale Borough): A preserve with walking trails through woodlands and along a stream, offering a peaceful escape within the borough.

Brandywine Meadows Trail (West Bradford Township): With both paved and unpaved hiking and biking trails across 48 acres of land, this trail provides lovely views of the Brandywine Creek.

Bucktoe Creek Preserve (Kennett Township): A nature preserve managed by the Kennett Land Trust, featuring walking trails through woodlands, meadows, and along Bucktoe Creek.

Cheslen Preserve (Newlin Township): Spanning 1,282 acres, Cheslen Preserves features marked hiking trails, flower-filled meadows, stream valleys, and wetlands.

Harmony Hill Nature Area (East Fallowfield Township): A natural area with walking trails along the Brandywine Creek, perfect for quiet walks and birdwatching.

Marlborough Valley Preserve (East Marlborough Township and West Marlborough Township): Managed by the Brandywine Conservancy, this preserve offers walking trails through woodlands, meadows, and along the Brandywine Creek.

White Clay Creek Preserve (New Garden Township): A vast preserve that straddles the Pennsylvania-Delaware border that connects with White Clay Creek State Park. It features extensive hiking trails, diverse habitats, and scenic views.

Pocopson Park (Pocopson Township): With serene natural surroundings including wooded trails, picnic areas, playgrounds, and sports fields, this park offers a retreat for outdoor enthusiasts of all ages.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT – TOUGHKENAMON

Toughkenamon's name traces back to an early 18th-century surveyor's map that labeled the valley between two ridges as "Doch ran Amon." Drawing from 19th century descriptions, Dolchranamon is believed to stem from the Lenape term "firebrand." Firebrands were sticks with one end on fire according to the Lenape Talking Dictionary. The term Dolchranamon was given to the area based on Native American legends, recounting the use of firebrands to repel an invading tribe.

Credit for the town's modern name is owed to Isaac Slack, who is known as the father of Toughkenamon. Slack was responsible for building factories and homes in the town and went on to convince the railroad industry to make Toughkenamon a stop on the line. The town was officially named in 1868 when the post office opened at the railway station. Toughkenamon's early days were defined by its role as a bustling railroad hub, serving both the Philadelphia and Baltimore lines. Its five buildings included the Warner Paxson's store and the "Hammer and Trowel" tavern. Since then, Toughkenamon has undergone remarkable growth, evolving from its modest beginnings into the community that it is today. If you find yourself traveling through Toughkenamon, please be sure to pause and reflect upon its journey from inception to the present day.

Special thanks to the New Garden Historical Commission who provided this important history.



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*Versión en español de este
boletín disponible aquí.*

lpo.tb.0624

YOU'RE INVITED!

I hear from constituents regularly about our roads, and I share your concern. That's why I'm having a Transportation Town Hall with special guest, Mike Carroll, Secretary of the PA Transportation Department. I hope you'll join us for an informative discussion and Q&A.

Remember you can report potholes and road issues by calling 1-800-FIX-ROAD.

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★ STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★



Transportation Town Hall



With PA Transportation Secretary Mike Carroll

Wednesday, June 12 | 7:00 PM

Bradford Heights Elementary School
1330 Romig Road, Downingtown, PA 19335

RSVP REQUIRED

Please call **484-200-8264** or email
RepSappey@pahouse.net to register