

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ARVIND VENKAT, MD

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Summer 2024

Dear Neighbor,

With fall approaching, I wanted to update you on the progress we have made in the State House this summer and how I'm working for you in Harrisburg – and right here at home – to improve life in our district.

In the pages to follow, you'll find news about my bills to protect patients and promote quality health care, details about the new state budget, updates on the latest funding I've helped bring back to the district, and news about state-related programs and resources.

When it comes to state services, please remember that there are many ways my talented staff can assist you, from helping you file for a property tax or rent rebate or obtain a handicap placard to locating important documents like birth certificates. Please stop by my district office to see how we can help or contact us by phone or email.

Finally, I want to let you know that I am grateful for your continued trust and support. It is an honor and a joy to represent the communities of our district and all the wonderful people who call it home.

Arvind Venkat

Rep. Arvind Venkat, MD
30th Legislative District



Visit www.pahouse.com/venkat/EmailSignup or scan the QR code below to subscribe to my weekly e-newsletter to receive updates on my work as state representative and learn more about what is happening in our community.



A Budget to Move Us Forward

I was thrilled to cast a “yes” vote for the 2024-25 state budget because I believe the new spending plan has the right priorities.

The budget invests \$1.3 billion statewide in our

K-12 public schools, while here at home, it delivers an additional \$2 million to our school districts.

The new plan also invests sensibly to bolster resources for police, fire, and EMS workers, and it will help ensure hospitals are able to stay open and that no Pennsylvanian goes bankrupt from receiving health care.

The budget addresses the needs of small businesses and working families by allowing businesses to deduct net operating losses and contribute to the child care expenses so many working parents face.

At the same time, the budget invests in programs that will create new jobs, strengthen workforce development, encourage industry innovation, and expand ‘shovel-ready’ sites to attract new businesses.

To be sure, no budget is ever perfect, and it takes bipartisan compromise to get any plan across the finish line. But the budget we passed prioritizes the needs of families, students, and small businesses, and it invests in ways to improve life in our community and strengthen our economy – all without adding any new taxes and, in fact, cuts taxes. I believe that’s a strong plan for the future.



As a physician-legislator, one of my main priorities is ensuring that our state laws protect patients, promote access to affordable health care, and help our medical professionals do their work as effectively and efficiently as possible. Over the past year, I have worked for passage of medical debt relief for Pennsylvanians, and I will continue those efforts in the months ahead.

In the following pages, you'll find updates about other legislation I have introduced.

My Bill to End an Unfair Reimbursement Practice Becomes Law

No one should have to pay a fee just to be reimbursed for their services, but this has been the reality for many health care providers, who have been forced to accept insurer reimbursement payments through electronic credit cards that often carry high transaction fees. This unfair practice – which has prevented many practitioners from being fully compensated – has also penalized patients when those costs have resulted in rate increases.

To address the problem, I introduced legislation that would require insurers to offer health care providers a variety of different reimbursement options and eliminate electronic credit card payments as the sole method of reimbursement.

In July, the governor signed my bill into law. Now, under Act 58 of 2024, health care professionals can choose the payment option best suited to their needs, and electronic credit card reimbursements with mandatory fees will be permitted only if the in-network health care provider agrees to that arrangement.

Combating a Killer Epidemic

More than a million Americans have died of drug overdoses in the past 25 years. As an emergency physician, I have witnessed some of those devastating incidents firsthand, but my experience pales compared to that of families who have lost a loved one to an overdose.

Earlier this year, I introduced legislation that would require the state Department of Health, in collaboration with the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, to develop a poster explaining the signs of an opioid-related overdose, what to do in the event of an overdose, where to find an opioid antagonist such as naloxone, and where to find additional resources and information. The poster – similar to one developed by the state of Florida – would be displayed in public places and made available online to download for private use.

House Bill 1783 was later amended and enhanced so that it would also create a treatment and recovery grant program to help people with substance use disorder, their families and treatment providers.

I'm encouraged that the House passed the bill by a large, bipartisan majority. It now awaits consideration in the state Senate, where I'll be urging my colleagues to act on it quickly. Until the numbers associated with this devastating epidemic start moving in the right direction, we can't afford to wait.





Cutting the Red Tape for Physician Assistants

Physician assistants (PAs) can be a crucial part of patient care, but a restrictive state licensing law is creating administrative hurdles that reduces their availability to patients.

Currently, PAs licensed by one of the state medical boards may work only for primary supervising physicians also licensed by that same medical board, whether the State Board of Medicine or the State Board of Osteopathic Medicine. It's an unnecessary rule that adds red tape for PAs and limits their availability to patients.

To address the problem and provide physician assistants the flexibility they need to serve more patients, I introduced H.B. 2294 and H.B. 2295, which would allow a PA to work with either type of doctor, regardless of the licensing board.

The legislation was approved by the House Professional Licensing Committee and is being considered by the full House.

Ensuring Seniors in Need Have Access to Long-Term Care

Medicaid plays an essential role for many older adults who need to transition to skilled nursing care. Yet many nursing homes choose to accept only private-paying patients because there is no guarantee that a patient's pending Medical Assistance (MA) will be approved. Fortunately, there are mission-driven long-term care facilities that work to accept all patients in need.

These facilities provide services immediately, even before a patient's MA application has been approved. When approval comes, the provider is paid retroactively, but if MA eligibility is denied, the care facility has little recourse to cover the cost of the patient's care.

Unfortunately, there are frequent reports of delays in applications being approved. In some cases, processing can take more than a year, leading to hundreds of thousands of dollars in uncompensated care that providers must cover during the delay – or absorb altogether if the application is ultimately denied. Facilities simply can't afford to remain in limbo and face the prospect of losing massive expenditures because of delays in eligibility determinations.

To address the problem, I introduced H.B. 2320, which would set firm deadlines for determining Medical Assistance eligibility, allow long-term care facilities to receive interim payment while eligibility is being determined, and require return of payments when eligibility is not met. We need to ensure that these long-term care facilities remain financially viable so they can continue caring for the seniors who rely on them. The bill is currently in the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee, and I will be urging my colleagues there to advance it to the full House for consideration.



Addressing the Food Allergy Epidemic

Millions of Americans suffer from food allergies, resulting in thousands of visits to hospital emergency departments by adults and children. Tragically, some of these individuals die from unintentional food allergen exposures.

Working with affected families in our community along with stakeholders in state government, the restaurant industry, and bipartisan colleagues, I introduced H.B. 1869 that would require notification both to restaurant and food service workers and patrons of the potential for food allergy exposures and explicit request for customers to notify their servers about their food allergies. This bill passed with wide bipartisan support through the state House and now awaits consideration in the state Senate. I will work with bipartisan colleagues to move this legislation forward to help protect the many affected by this food allergy epidemic in our state.

Bringing Your Tax Dollars Home

A key part of my job as your representative is bringing your tax dollars back to the district, where they can support programs and resources to benefit our communities. I'm proud to announce that since the start of the year, I have helped secure **over \$3.3 million** to support programs and projects here at home.

Since my last newsletter to you in April, I have worked to secure:

- **More than \$728,000** for our local schools to support student-based mental health and behavioral health programs, physical security enhancements, and school personnel needs.
- **\$350,000** for Emsworth Volunteer Fire Company's equipment needs.
- **\$270,000** to allow the Ohio Township Volunteer Fire Company to purchase a new water tanker truck.
- **Over \$248,000** for modernization of traffic signal equipment at the intersection of Mount Nebo Road and Arndt Road.
- **\$220,000** for Highland Volunteer Fire Department in McCandless to update communications equipment.

I'm looking forward to bringing even more of your tax dollars home in the months ahead!



My Bill to Protect Consumers From Paying Higher Fees for Paper Statements

Recently, financial institutions have been charging more for paper statements that you might receive for your bank account or other bill. This is simply unfair as some people do not have internet access, are used to receiving paper statements, are afraid of missing statements, or do not speak English primarily and need the paper statement to carefully review their finances. I have introduced H.B. 2292 to ensure that financial institutions cannot charge a fee for receiving a paper statement. The bill currently is in the House Consumer Protection, Technology, and Utilities Committee.



My Bill to Protect Consumers from Last-Minute Travel Site Rate Hikes

This year, I introduced legislation to protect travel consumers from last-minute rate hikes that pop up on travel websites just as consumers are preparing to make their payment.

Specifically, H.B. 2321 would prohibit these travel services from changing prices for at least 30 minutes from the time a consumer first visits the website. If a price change must be instituted, the travel service would be required to inform customers five minutes before the 30-minute window expires. The bill is currently in the House Consumer Protection, Technology, and Utilities Committee.



In the Community and in Harrisburg



As a member of the Manufacturing Caucus, I toured Butler Technologies, a local leader in several innovative areas of manufacturing. I'm committed to supporting PA firms that make our state more self-sufficient, strengthen the economy, and provide good-paying jobs for residents.



This spring, the Pennsylvania College of Emergency Physicians presented me with the 2024 Legislator of the Year award. As an emergency physician-legislator, I am proud to receive this recognition for my work to make health care more affordable and accessible for all Pennsylvanians.



I had the pleasure in Harrisburg of hosting two fellow physicians from Allegheny Health Network. They are working on and advocating for addiction treatment and addressing social determinants of health. I'm proud to support their work on behalf of all Pennsylvanians.

Freshmen at Hampton High School presented projects for sustainable development goals, and I was truly impressed by their innovative ideas on how to improve our community.



I was deeply honored to take part in the 78th annual Avonworth Community Memorial Day service in Ben Avon. Thank you to all the active service members, veterans, Gold and Blue Star families, and community members who came out to commemorate those who gave "the last full measure of devotion" to our nation.



It's always a pleasure to host state champion sports teams at the Capitol, like North Allegheny's girls swimming and diving team. Congratulations to these young women and their coaches, parents, and staff for the team's amazing accomplishment.



Speaker Joanna McClinton and I spoke with two North Allegheny High School students who are part of the GirlGov program. These two young women are part of an initiative to fuel a passion for public service and prepare future generations of leaders.

Rep. Jessica Benham, Rep. Emily Kinhead, and I showed our support for LGBTQ+ neighbors at the Pittsburgh Pride Parade.



Supporting the creative talents of students helps fuel their desire to pursue an enriching career. I was glad to meet with Avonworth High School students during their annual art show.

I checked in with Franklin Park police officers during the Festival at the Park and learned how my team and the community at large can continue to support them.



I was honored to stand with the American Cancer Society on their Day of Action to advocate for my legislation that would create the Pennsylvania Medical Debt Relief Program. No one with cancer – or any other disease – should ever have to delay treatment because of medical debt.



During National Nurses Appreciation Week, I met with nurses at the Verland Foundation in Ohio Township to thank them for all their hard work. I'm so grateful for the many highly skilled health care providers in our community. Whether they're advocating on behalf of patients in Harrisburg or caring for them here at home, their dedication shines through.



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30TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



lpo.ks.0824

UPCOMING EVENTS

FREE SHRED EVENT

HOSTED BY **REP. VENKAT**

SAT., SEPTEMBER 21ST 10 AM - 11:30 AM

AVONWORTH HIGH SCHOOL
 304 JOSEPHS LANE, PITTSBURGH, PA 15237

OR UNTIL THE TRUCK IS FULL

My office's next shredding event is Saturday, September 21 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., or until the truck is full, at Avonworth High School (304 Josephs Ln. in Ohio Township).

Each household may bring a maximum of two boxes of paper only. Information will also be available to keep you and family safe from identity theft.

Diwali
 CELEBRATION
 HINDU FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10TH
 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

BAIERL FAMILY YMCA
 2565 NICHOLSON RD., SEWICKLEY, PA 15143

Dry food items will be collected for North Hills Community Outreach.

Join us at the Baierl Family YMCA (2565 Nicholson Rd. in Franklin Park) on Sunday, November 10 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. to celebrate Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights. Light snacks will be served, and dry food items will be collected for North Hills Community Outreach food bank.

Please visit www.pahouse.com/venkat/RSVP?id=1638 to RSVP. You can also call my district office at (412) 348-8028 or email RepVenkat@pahouse.net to learn more.