

State Representative | 35th Legislative District

# AUSTIN DAVIS



Summer  
2020

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## Dear Neighbor,

I am excited to provide you with a copy of my Summer 2020 newsletter and an overview of all the work I have accomplished at the state Capitol and throughout the Mon Valley so far this year.

2020 has been a difficult year for many of us. We have endured many hardships as a community and nation as we combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a crisis that many of us thought we would never experience in our lifetime. We have all, in one way or another, been personally affected by the ongoing pandemic; however, we have yet to let it break who we are as a community and commonwealth.

I want to sincerely thank our hardworking essential workers: our nurses, doctors, medical staff, grocery employees and food service workers. Without their unwavering commitment, the last few months would have been much more difficult. As a community, we owe them a debt of gratitude that can never be fully repaid.

Throughout this difficult time, our community has really come together to support one another and look out for one another. We have shown the

rest of the state who we are as a community and that we are all in this together.

Despite the challenges we have faced this year, we still have been able to accomplish great things for our neighbors and our commonwealth. In this newsletter, you will find updated information on the COVID-19 pandemic, key legislation that passed the House of Representatives, and my continued push to represent your best interests at the state Capitol.

Although my district offices are currently closed to visitors, rest assured that my staff is still working on your behalf. My highly trained staff is ready and willing to assist you with any state-related issues. Feel free to reach out to us at either 412-664-0035 or 412-476-3046 for assistance. In addition, feel free to reach out to me via email at [RepADavis@pahouse.net](mailto:RepADavis@pahouse.net) or follow me on Facebook at [Facebook.com/RepAustinDavis](https://www.facebook.com/RepAustinDavis) and Twitter [@RepAustinDavis](https://twitter.com/RepAustinDavis) for updates on my work in the state Capitol and the Mon Valley.

Yours in Service!



*Inside:* Legislative Update • Info on COVID-19  
Rent/Mortgage Assistance • Police Reform  
Right-to-Repair • and much more!

# Bills introduced at the Capitol

In addition to the work I've done at the state Capitol to ensure residents were getting the support they needed during the statewide shutdown, I've also been busy putting together legislation that best represents our interests here in the Mon Valley.

Below you will find a few of the bills I have introduced this year:

**H.B. 2326:** House Bill 2326 would give consumers the right to repair common items, such as a cellphone or dishwasher, without going through the manufacturer. Many times, manufacturers withhold information or crucial instructions on how a consumer can repair an appliance, simply so that the consumer must go through the company to receive the proper repairs. This bill would give the power back to the consumer and keep money in your pocket at the same time.

COVID-19 has shown us that our medical care facilities need all the help and resources at their disposal, especially when it involves ventilators. Right now, and throughout the duration of the pandemic, hospitals have struggled to keep up with personal protective equipment and properly functioning ventilators. These machines are crucial to a patient's fight to survive the coronavirus, but hospitals are unable to make needed repairs to ventilators because the manufacturers are unwilling to release this information.

My bill would play a direct part in reversing this obstacle and would ensure Pennsylvanians infected with COVID-19 have the tools they need to recover and return home to their families.

**H.B. 2570:** This legislation would create the Emergency Rental Assistance Grant Program for those who are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and are struggling to cover housing expenses. The program, to be administered by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, would utilize funds made available to the commonwealth from the Coronavirus

Relief Fund portion of the federal CARES Act.

I was successful in getting this legislation included in the General Appropriations bill, which created the CARES Assistance for Renters and Homeowners program that is currently aiding thousands of Pennsylvanians.

See more information on the rent/mortgage assistance program on page 4 of my newsletter.

**H.B. 2620:** It's no secret that many hardworking families struggle to pay their bills and other basic household costs. Water and sewer – essential utilities – are no exception. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that now, more than ever, our communities are strongest when neighbors lend a helping hand to their fellow neighbors.

For this reason, I've introduced this bill that would create the Pennsylvania Water Hardship Fund. Through this program, customers would be able to donate a minimum of \$1 to a fund that would go directly to fellow customers with delinquent water bills who need support.

These funds would be collected and administered by the water service and sewer companies with additional support from the Public Utility Commission.

Programs like these are critical to ensure that struggling families can maintain access to clean water. By providing the opportunity for neighbors to support their fellow neighbors, we are doing just that.

**H.B. 2411, H.B. 2694:** COVID-19 has already claimed the lives of too many Pennsylvanians and, unfortunately is expected to claim more. In response to this ongoing crisis, healthcare workers have stepped up and answered the call.

These medical professionals and other essential employees are putting their health and their lives on the line day in and day out to save the lives of our loved ones.



Just as our healthcare workers have stepped up to take care of us in this time of need, we need to step up and do everything we can to take care of them. For this reason, I have introduced two pieces of legislation that would do the following:

- Establish needed supports and protections for frontline healthcare workers, many of whom are working long hours under extreme stress and personal hardship; and
- Create a childcare grant program for frontline healthcare workers to ensure they can afford high-quality child care as they work to save lives.

**H.B. 2691:** In the wake of the deaths of Antwon Rose and George Floyd, it has become abundantly clear that we, as a commonwealth, must do more to rebuild the trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. We can no longer ignore the calls for more oversight and transparency in policing.

My legislation aims to rebuild that trust by creating a County Independent Citizens Law Enforcement Review Board in second- through eighth-class counties. Composed of at least nine members who reflect the geographic and cultural diversity of the county, this board would be authorized to investigate selected local police misconduct complaints and establish mediation programs or conduct public hearings, subpoena witnesses, and more.

Citizen participation in the policymaking process produces numerous benefits and increases trust between the community and its leaders.

# Around the District



*On Memorial Day, I joined McKeesport City officials to honor those Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.*



*At the beginning of March, I was able to tour Steel Center for Career & Technical Education. It was exciting to see so many young people from the Mon Valley taking advantage of career and tech education opportunities.*



*It was a pleasure to join Governor Tom Wolf, the Pennsylvania State Police, and my colleagues as the governor signed two bipartisan police reform bills to create a statewide database for police officer infractions and increase training among law enforcement.*



*It was a privilege to join Rep. Harry Readshaw on the House floor to honor and remember former Munhall Mayor Ray Bodnar. Mayor Bodnar was an honorable man who served our community for more than four decades as an elected official. The House of Representatives stood for a moment of silence to honor his memory.*



*I joined Steel Valley students and community members to march for equity in our education system. As a product of the McKeesport public school system, I know firsthand the importance of a quality education. Every child deserves equal access to a quality education regardless of his or her Zip code.*



*During these unprecedented times, I joined community leaders in Duquesne and Clairton to distribute food to families.*



*Pure Penn is expanding its medical marijuana facility in McKeesport, and I was able to get an up-close look at its expansion project. Since the legalization of medical marijuana in Pennsylvania, this industry continues to thrive, and Pure Penn is expanding its footprint right here in the Mon Valley.*



*While in Harrisburg, I joined my colleagues in the Legislative Black Caucus to take control of the Speaker's rostrum in an effort to get important police reform legislation on the House calendar in the wake of the George Floyd killing.*



*I recently moved offices in Munhall. My new Munhall office is located at 3905 Main St.*

## Working to ensure rental/mortgage assistance is available to those who need it

In May, I began a push to advocate for residents struggling to make ends meet during the COVID-19 pandemic by introducing legislation geared toward providing rental assistance to those in need. In late May, portions of my legislation were rolled into a budget-related bill.

I was grateful to see portions of my legislation included in this bill because it is legislation that largely benefits residents who have been financially impacted by COVID-19.

My role in getting this included in the budget package would not have been possible if it were not for my appointment to the powerful House Appropriations Committee. I am hopeful that this program will help to alleviate financial stress for many families throughout the commonwealth, and I look forward to continuing to work together in a bipartisan fashion with my colleagues to help improve the lives of Pennsylvanians during these times of crisis.

Specifically, this legislation was wrapped into H.B. 2510

– now Act 24 of 2020 – under the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. A minimum of \$150 million is dedicated to rental assistance and \$25 million to mortgage assistance through the COVID Relief Rent and Mortgage Assistance Grant Program. Homeowners or renters may be eligible for assistance if they became unemployed after March 1, 2020, or their annual household income was reduced by 30% or more.

Grants for rental assistance cover 100% of an individual's monthly rent, not to exceed \$750 per month, for a maximum of six months. Grants for mortgage assistance cover up to 100% of an individual's monthly mortgage, not to exceed \$1,000 per month, for a maximum of six months. All payments would be made no later than Nov. 30, 2020. In addition, all payments would be directly disbursed to landlords or mortgagees.

The deadline to apply for this program is Sept. 30, 2020.

# Fighting to protect consumers from rate increases during pandemic

I recently wrote a letter to the Public Utility Commission expressing my concerns about the recent rate increase proposed by Pennsylvania American Water.

My letter called on the commission to hold public hearings and conduct an investigation into the necessity of the requested rate increase.

COVID-19 has left millions of Pennsylvanians without jobs, and the economic effects this virus has had and will continue to have on families across the commonwealth is overwhelming. To make matters worse, experts predict that the economic losses incurred by families in my district and across the commonwealth will last well into 2021.

Mon Valley families shouldn't have to fear the loss of services for their most basic needs due to an inability to pay.

The utility company, Pennsylvania American Water, began the process of examining needed investments to continue to ensure safe and reliable water and wastewater services before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, I find it troubling the company would continue its push for a significant increase during an ongoing public health crisis.

Moreover, in 2018, the PUC unanimously approved a settlement that allowed Pennsylvania American Water to raise water and wastewater rates. The primary factor for the increase was to allow for \$1.26 billion in investments to replace and upgrade aging infrastructure, leading me to question the latest request.

I fully understand the need to update aging infrastructure so that we can ensure residents have safe water and wastewater. However, I'm still confused as to why an additional increase is needed at this time, especially during a pandemic.

We've seen lots of good come out of humanity during this health crisis, but we're also seeing questionable moves that seem more influenced by profits than the health and safety of state residents

I will continue to provide updates on this matter as we move forward.

# Historic law enforcement reform bills pass the General Assembly, become law

George Floyd's death shed light on the need to take a hard look at law enforcement procedures and how matters involving police are handled as well as the need to establish a specific set of checks and balances to hold those policing our streets accountable.

While I have said time and time again that our fight has just begun, we recently made a historic first step in reforming policing in Pennsylvania.

I'm happy to inform you that Gov. Tom Wolf signed H.B.s 1910 and 1841 into law, mandating mental health and background checks for law enforcement and creating a statewide database for police misconduct.

In late June, both bills passed the House and Senate unanimously, and ultimately were signed by the governor July 14.

It was an honor to stand side by side with my colleagues and fight for these long-needed reforms. It is my hope that this small step brings us closer to rebuilding the trust between the police and the community.

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## Working with Allegheny Health Network, and others to bring COVID-19 testing to the Mon Valley

In May, I worked with Allegheny Health Network, the Allegheny County Health Department, and members of the Pittsburgh Black Elected Officials Coalition to bring mobile COVID-19 testing clinics and testing sites to underserved Mon Valley areas. Ensuring that everyone is able to get tested for COVID-19 is absolutely essential. Over the past few months, it has become evident that this virus has greatly impacted vulnerable populations across the commonwealth. Now, more than ever, is the time to act and ensure our most vulnerable populations have equal access to testing.

Allegheny Health Network mobile testing sites have been located periodically at the City Hall Building in Clairton and at Duquesne Elementary School in Duquesne. These mobile test sites will continue to be set up at these locations and will be announced by Allegheny Health Network. Updates can be found on their website at <https://www.ahn.org/coronavirus/faqs/testing>.

Additionally, with the help of my colleagues and the Allegheny County Health Department we were able to get COVID-19 testing at federally qualified community health centers. One of the clinics offering this testing is the McKeesport Family Health Center at 627 Lysle Blvd., McKeesport, PA 15132. Patients do not need a doctor's referral for this testing but should reach out to the facility before arriving to ensure availability.

I am proud to have been able to increase testing in these areas and will continue to work to bring more resources to the Mon Valley during these unprecedented times.



State Representative

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## Fast facts on COVID-19

As of this writing, Pennsylvania has more than 102,000 COVID-19 cases. There are more than 7,000 deaths in Pennsylvania attributed to COVID-19.

Pennsylvanians did their part during the spring and early summer to combat the pandemic, notably by abiding by the governor's stay-at-home order, wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and utilizing hygienic practices to minimize the spread.

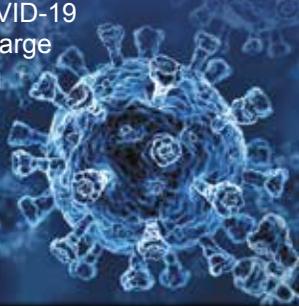
However, we have seen a large increase in cases since the state officially reopened, especially in Allegheny County.

This virus, unfortunately, is not going away unless we continue to do some things that may seem inconvenient now but could be lifesaving.

An important aspect of combatting coronavirus is wearing a mask, which is now required in all businesses and whenever leaving home. Consistent mask-wearing is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Additional ways to slow the spread of COVID-19 are practicing social distancing, avoiding large gatherings, staying home from work when you feel ill, and washing your hands.

These sound small but the effect of practicing these initiatives can help us get back to our everyday lives. It is my hope that you and your family remain safe and healthy through this difficult time.



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## Ways my office can assist YOU!

- COVID-19-related resources, information
- Process applications for birth and death certificates
- Provide you with Pennsylvania state tax forms
- Print out federal tax forms whenever possible
- Provide you with and help you fill out Property Tax/ Rent Rebate forms
- Notarize any state form for free
- Help you find and claim unclaimed money in your name through the Pennsylvania Treasurer's Office
- Notarize and process applications for disability parking plates and placards
- Field questions or handle problems concerning PennDOT, including complaints about road conditions
- Explain the Real ID application process
- Assist you with unemployment compensation questions or problems
- Field questions or complaints about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Provide you with recognition from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding local accomplishments and family milestones
- Provide you with state forms or brochures
- Send state forms for you to their appropriate departments in Harrisburg to expedite their processing
- Schedule tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Answer questions about proposed legislation