



YOUR REPORT

from State Representative

ROBERT FREEMAN

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Bill would Help Communities with High Percentage of Tax-exempt Properties

State Rep. Robert Freeman has reintroduced legislation (H.B. 2271) that would provide funding to municipalities with high levels of tax-exempt property, such as colleges and universities, nonprofit medical facilities, government offices or state forests and game lands.

“Municipalities with a significant amount of tax-exempt property, including several in the Lehigh Valley, have difficulty providing the essential services expected from local government because of the effect tax-exempt properties have on the real estate tax base of the community,” Freeman said. “By providing annual funding to these municipalities, we can enable them to fix and maintain infrastructure and to provide the essential services that ensure the health and safety of their citizens.”

The bill would establish the Tax Exempt Property Municipal Assistance Fund to help municipalities with 15 percent or more of tax-exempt property within their borders. It would be funded by the state’s current 18 percent tax on wine and liquor, known as the Johnstown Flood Tax. The tax generated approximately \$270 million in the 2009-10 fiscal year.

“The tax did its job a long time ago, rebuilding Johnstown after it was devastated by a flood in the 1930s,” Freeman

said. “It’s time to target that money for municipalities that are falling further into financial distress as a result of having significant amounts of tax-exempt properties within their boundaries. This legislation can help hundreds of communities across our commonwealth.”

Those communities should not have to bear the loss of tax revenue because they contain regional institutions that are tax exempt. In the Lehigh Valley, the legislation would aid Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton, Fountain Hill and a number of other communities.

Freeman added that many communities that are under the Act 47 Financially Distressed Municipalities program have a high percentage of tax-exempt property and could regain stability with this funding.

The legislation would require that each county annually provide the state with information regarding the assessed value of tax-exempt properties. The funding formula would be based on the assessed value of those properties as if they were taxable. No single municipality would receive more than 10 percent of the total revenue in the fund, and property owned by the municipality itself would not be eligible.

Property Tax Circuit Breaker Proposed by Freeman

Homeowners would be protected from property tax overload under legislation (H.B. 2577) introduced by state Rep. Robert Freeman.

“My proposal would amend our state Constitution to allow for property tax circuit breakers to be used in Pennsylvania. A property tax circuit breaker is quite simple: it would protect taxpayers from a property tax overload just like an electric circuit breaker. Specifically, it would allow local taxing authorities to exempt a taxpayer from paying the portion of their property tax that exceeds a certain set percentage of their household income,” Freeman said.

“This proposal will offer Pennsylvania homeowners needed property tax relief and build fairness into the property tax system by ensuring that property taxes never exceed a set percentage of household income,” he said.

In Pennsylvania, a proposed constitutional amendment must pass the General Assembly in two consecutive legislative sessions before being

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Freeman Bill would Promote Redevelopment of Abandoned Factory Buildings

State Rep. Bob Freeman has reintroduced legislation (H.B. 2269) that would establish tax incentives to promote redevelopment and reuse of vacant factory or mill buildings in municipalities in Pennsylvania.

“Adaptive reuse or using a building for a purpose other than which it was originally intended, is a way to reuse buildings that have stood in our communities for decades. Repurposing an old factory or mill for retail, office or arts space, or transforming them into dwellings, encourages economic development and improves the quality of life of a community,” Freeman said.

“Some of these buildings have withstood the test of time for more than 100 years. They might be vacant, but they are solidly constructed and still standing. My bill would provide an incentive to breathe new life into these buildings – many of which are part of a community’s heritage and identity.”

Freeman’s bill would establish three types of tax incentive programs:

- A 25 percent tax credit for the rehabilitation and reconstruction costs incurred by the owner.
- A business tax credit equal to the salaries and wages paid to full-time employees, up to a maximum of \$5,000 per employee.
- An interest income tax credit of 10 percent on the interest from loans for the expenditures within the building. The limit would be up to \$10,000 per taxable year. The loan holder also would be eligible for a 100 percent tax credit, up to \$20,000 per taxable year, on interest from loans for substantial rehabilitation.

Freeman said adaptive reuse isn’t a new concept and pointed to the number of old industrial buildings around the Lehigh Valley that have been repurposed. The Silk Mill at North 13th Street in Easton is one such example of adaptive reuse of an old factory complex.

Rep. Freeman’s office can help you with:

- PennDOT issues – vehicle registrations, handicap placards and driver’s license applications
- Obtaining and completing state forms
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers’ compensation concerns
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Requests for literature – legislation, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- The status of the renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications by the Department of State
- Unclaimed Property/Treasurer’s Office claims
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications, problems or questions
- PACE/PACENET prescription-drug applications for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints
- Liquor Control Board concerns or questions
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups



Diane Lamas, Rep. Freeman’s District Office Manager and Legislative Assistant for almost 19 years, retired at the beginning of June. Diane did an outstanding job and was always willing to go to great lengths to assist constituents with their requests and concerns. She will be missed but we wish her well and all the best in retirement.

Property Tax Circuit Breaker Proposed

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placed on the ballot to be considered by the state’s voters. If the Pennsylvania electorate approves the proposal, Freeman said enabling legislation would need to be passed by the General Assembly and signed by the governor to set the specific percentage of household income that would trigger the circuit breaker on property taxes.

House Bill 2577 is awaiting referral to a House committee.

Important 2018 General Election Deadlines

October 9 – Last day to register to vote

October 30 (by 5 p.m.) – Last day to apply for an absentee ballot

November 2 (by 5 p.m.) – Last day for county election offices to receive absentee ballots

November 6 – Election Day

You may vote by absentee ballot if you are unable to make it to the polls because of illness, disability or if you will be out of your municipality on Election Day.

Voter registration forms and applications for absentee ballots are available at Rep. Bob Freeman’s Easton office.



Personal Notes...

Redistricting Reform and the Politics of Harrisburg

Dear Friends,

Last year, legislation to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to reform the way that Congressional and state House and state Senate districts are drawn was introduced. Both House Bill 722, introduced by Rep. Steve Samuelson, and Senate Bill 22, introduced by Sen. Lisa Boscola, would replace the current partisan ways in which legislative districts are drawn with a citizens commission to draw legislative lines. The aim is to end the practice of gerrymandering in Pennsylvania where legislative districts are drawn for purely partisan advantage without consideration for keeping recognizable communities of interest within the same legislative district.

The Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Commission would be made up of 11 citizens drawn from a list of those expressing an interest in serving on the commission. Four would be Democrats, four would be Republicans, and three would be either non-affiliated voters or registered with a minor party. No member of the commission could be an elected official, a candidate for public office, a staff member or officer of a political party or a lobbyist nor an immediate family member of any of those categories. The commission would not be permitted to take into consideration the address of any individual, political affiliations of registered voters, or previous election results when establishing district lines. Maps would be drawn to ensure contiguous and compact legislative districts made up of communities of interest. At least four public hearings would have to be held around the state to get public input and the final legislative maps would need the approval of seven or more commissioners to be adopted.

I was proud to co-sponsor House Bill 722. I have been a co-sponsor and consistent supporter of redistricting reform measures in every session of the legislature dating back to the early 1990s. To my mind, ending the practice of gerrymandering is one of the most fundamental things that needs to be done to change the political culture of Pennsylvania and to ensure that legislative districts reflect communities of interest and foster more competitive elections. Good government groups such as Fair Districts PA, Common Cause, and the League of Women Voters

threw their full support behind these bills, holding numerous informational meetings around the state and rallies to demonstrate broad-based public support for the proposal.

Unfortunately, efforts to move the bills ran into political road blocks. House Bill 722 was gutted in the House State Government Committee when an effort to have it discharged from committee was about to be initiated. House Bill 2402, which I also co-sponsored and reflected the original House Bill 722 language, was introduced in its place. It was sent by Speaker Turzai to the House Rules Committee and remains bottled up there. Senate Bill 22 made better progress in the Senate at first. It was reported out of the Senate State Government Committee. However, it was amended on the floor of the Senate along partisan lines with a poison pill amendment meant to punish the Pennsylvania Supreme Court judges who had ruled the Congressional districts drawn up in 2011 as a partisan gerrymander, replacing those districts with more balanced and compact districts that clearly represented communities of interest. Senate Bill 22 was voted out of the Senate but was also bottled up in the House Rules Committee by the House Republican leadership.

Because of the political maneuvering and delaying tactics employed, the deadline for getting the proposed constitutional amendment on redistricting reform approved in time to apply to the redistricting that will take place after the 2020 census has passed. There is still the possibility, however, that at least the redistricting of Congressional districts could follow the provisions of the legislation if a bill to that effect were enacted by the state legislature, since a constitutional amendment would not be necessary for Congressional districts which are established by the enactment of a bill. That will be a battle to fight in a new session of the legislature, but a battle worth waging to improve the redistricting process in Pennsylvania. You can count on me to continue to fight for redistricting reform no matter how long it takes. It is a fundamental reform that needs to take place.

Sincerely,

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Deadline extended to Dec. 31

The deadline to apply for the state Department of Revenue's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended to Dec. 31. Rebates range from \$250 to a maximum of \$650.

Eligibility requirements include: Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, or people with disabilities 18 or older; an income limit of \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, with only half of Social Security counted as income. Spouses and personal representatives of estates may also file rebate claims on behalf

of claimants who lived at least one day in 2017 and meet all other criteria.

The maximum rebate is \$650, although supplemental rebates for certain qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975.

Applications and FREE assistance are available from the Department of Revenue district offices, local Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers or at state Rep. Bob Freeman's office located at 215 Northampton St. in Easton.



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**Property
Tax/Rent
Rebate Forms
extended to
Dec. 31.**

*See inside on
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Rep. Bob Freeman makes himself available to meet with constituents from the western end of his district in Hellertown Borough Hall on the first Thursday of every month from 10:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

Hellertown Days

The following are the dates that Rep. Freeman will be in Hellertown to meet with constituents for the remainder of 2018:

October 4

November 1

December 6

Local Projects Benefit from State Funding

Numerous state grants have been secured in Rep. Freeman’s district this year. Below is a list of some of the projects that have been awarded state funding:

- \$126,173 to Hellertown Borough to install pedestrian countdown indicators on Main Street which will improve safety and mobility and reduce congestion.
- \$160,000 to Hellertown Borough for a Main Street Pedestrian Safety Initiative.
- \$67,982 to Hellertown Borough to upgrade pedestrian signals at four intersections along Main Street.
- \$60,000 to the City of Easton to install street lighting in the West Ward.

- \$60,000 to West Easton for a pole building to serve as a garage and storage facility to house vehicles, equipment and road supplies.
- \$450,000 to the City of Easton for a proposed bicycle/ pedestrian project to improve Wood Avenue.
- \$25,000 Keystone Historic Preservation Grant to the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor to create a rehabilitation plan for Easton’s 2.5 mile portion of the Lehigh Canal.
- \$200,000 in Historic Preservation Tax Credits for the rehabilitation of the Simon Silk Mill.



Fourth-graders from Wilson Borough Elementary School visited the state Capitol in May and met with Rep. Freeman in the chamber of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.