



# Chelsa Wagner

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

22ND LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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SPRING 2011

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## Dear Friends:

It is my pleasure to once again have the opportunity to provide you with an update on my activities on your behalf over the past half-year.

Strengthening our community libraries remains one of my priorities, and funding I secured has already begun flowing to libraries in both the city and county. I also continue to advocate for long-term, dedicated funding for public transit, along with reform of the Port Authority's governance to ensure tax dollars are spent wisely and efficiently.

I am gratified to have been entrusted with another term as your representative in last November's election, and will continue to strive to always act in the best interests of those I represent. Since my first campaign in 2006, I have advocated for a smaller, less costly legislature, greater efficiency and transparency in state government, and an end to the pay-to-play culture of Harrisburg.

I continue to fight to see the reforms that Pennsylvanians have been demanding finally being put in place, and I will gladly work with members of either party to accomplish this. I was pleased that the first bills to be considered in the new legislative session were reform measures with broad bipartisan support, and I will fight to continue on the path toward a more responsible and responsive state government.

For my own part, I have introduced a "Pay-to-Play Prevention Act" that would end Pennsylvania's infamous status as having one of the weakest campaign finance laws in the nation. Allowing unlimited amounts of money to flow into campaigns with insufficient transparency has led to a failure to address the needs of average Pennsylvanians and, in the worst cases, outright corruption. My legislation would help put an end to this stain on our politics.

Along with providing a new perspective on the need for reform, our new state leadership should shift the geographic focus of our state government. Our new House majority and minority leaders, our new Democratic Appropriations and Caucus chairmen, and of course our new governor are all from Allegheny County. To make sure our region can compete for limited state and federal resources, all of us – Democratic and Republican, city and suburb – must work together toward a successful future.

As always, it is my pleasure to serve you and I encourage you to contact one of my offices with any matter of concern.

Kindest regards,

Chelsa Wagner  
Representative, 22nd District

## 2010 Property Tax/Rent Rebate available

Many Pennsylvania homeowners and renters meeting certain income and eligibility requirements can once again benefit from Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program and claim a cash rebate on property taxes or rent paid during 2010. Applications are available from Rep. Wagner's constituent service offices at 900 Brookline Blvd. and in the Caste Village Shoppes.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 and older; widows and widowers 50 and older; and permanently disabled individuals 18 and older. The income limit is \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters (excluding half of Social Security income), and the maximum rebate for both homeowners and renters is \$650.

**The deadline to apply for a rebate on property taxes or rent paid in 2010 is June 30, 2011.** Rep. Wagner's office staff is always available to assist constituents with completing and submitting the application. Documentation of all income received in 2010 must be included with your application. Homeowners also must submit copies of their property tax payment receipts for 2010, and renters must complete the rent certificate included with the application.

Rep. Wagner has introduced legislation to ensure that all Pennsylvanians receiving a rebate benefit fully. Currently, landlords are permitted to claim up to 100 percent of a tenant's rebate if this is part of the lease agreement. Unfortunately, many landlords include and enforce this provision without the full understanding of the tenant or their family. The lease agreement provided to personal care homes by the state Department of Public Welfare actually includes boilerplate language claiming the rebate for landlords.

House Bill 415 would prohibit the landlord from claiming any portion of a tenant's rebate to ensure that this program fulfills its purpose of benefitting vulnerable Pennsylvanians living on fixed incomes.

"As we work to plug a record state budget deficit, we must be mindful that our citizens face their own challenges – the elderly and disabled who depend on this rebate foremost among them," Wagner said. "We must make sure this money reaches those for whom it is intended."



## Wagner works to secure libraries' future

A year that had been filled with uncertainty for supporters of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh branches and those who rely upon them ended on a positive note, with the library's board voting on Dec. 13 to officially cancel plans to close neighborhood branches.

Rep. Wagner led other elected officials and community leaders in working to find solutions to this threat to their neighborhoods, but gave special credit to community members who voiced support for their local branches.

"This outcome would absolutely not have been possible without the hundreds of everyday library patrons and community members who made calls, wrote letters, attended rallies and meetings, and supported their neighborhood libraries when they needed it most," Wagner said. "I want to offer my personal thanks to all of those who advocated on behalf of maintaining these important resources for our communities."

When the library board voted in October 2009 to close four neighborhood branches, Rep. Wagner immediately condemned the proposed closings and was pleased to assist neighborhood groups in organizing a strong and vocal opposition to them. She also immediately advocated for smaller-than-expected cuts to libraries in an extremely difficult state budget year, which could have all but closed the operating deficit that Carnegie claimed was the reason for its decision. The Carnegie's determination to persist with its plan led Rep. Wagner to call for the library to open its books to elected officials and the public, and to organize a tour for library board members of the affected branches to showcase the real people and communities the closings would harm.

As 2009 drew to a close, she worked with city officials to see funding allocated to the Carnegie over two years to keep the branches operating and was able to ensure that the city's 1 percent share of table games proceeds would be dedicated to the library provided all branches remained open.

While 2010 was less action-packed in public, much work went on behind the scenes to ensure the recent positive result. Rep. Wagner has served for the past year on the library's Sustainable Funding Task Force, always promoting transparency and community involvement in library decision-making and insisting that it continue to serve all city residents. The first payment to the library from table gaming proceeds was released in October, with payments quarterly thereafter. And while the mayor has refused thus far to meet his obligation to provide the second year of council-approved funding to the Carnegie, Rep. Wagner insisted privately and publicly that this commitment be met.

While all of the challenges to ensuring a robust library system well into the future have not yet been met, Rep. Wagner is hopeful that 2011 will see everyone working to strengthen and improve this vital community asset rather than simply struggling to maintain it.

"There is no doubt that access to our community libraries is essential to so many of our residents and to the success of our neighborhoods," Wagner said. "While the branches appear safe for now, I am committed to working to see that this situation does not occur again."

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## PAT needs reform along with funding

The Port Authority bus service reductions planned for March are causing headaches for commuters and others who rely on public transit, with several bus routes in Rep. Wagner's legislative district and dozens more around the county being affected.

"I realize how vital transit is to many of my constituents and the difficulties that these cuts will cause, but economic and political circumstances do not favor an immediate solution," Wagner said. "I also have sought to leverage transit as a resource for community development in the neighborhoods I represent, and it is clear that the cuts are a setback to these efforts."

**Special programs are available for senior citizens, disabled individuals, and those receiving Medical Assistance who find themselves in need of transportation due to the cuts. Please contact Rep. Wagner's constituent service office at (412) 343-2094 for more information about these programs.**

There are many questions as to why the PAT board chose to reduce service when \$45 million in emergency funding for the authority was approved last December. While PAT could have chosen to maintain current service until July using these funds, the authority claims that a devastating 50 percent cut would then have been necessary unless a funding solution were to be approved at the state level before this time. The 15

percent cut in March should allow this level of service to be maintained until July 2012, according to PAT.

While opinions differ on which choice is preferable, conditions in Harrisburg do not appear to be ripe for a legislative solution in the near future.

"I and many other legislators are fully aware of the value of public transit to our constituents and communities and advocate full funding, but we have received no indication from our new governor or legislative leadership that this is a priority for them," Wagner said.

Despite the challenges, Rep. Wagner remains committed to continuing to advocate for a funding solution as soon as possible and to seeing transit service restored and expanded.

She also is reintroducing legislation that would provide PAT board appointments to the governor, legislative leaders, and the City of Pittsburgh. Currently, all board appointments are made by the county executive. The lack of a diversity of viewpoints on the board has been cited as a deficiency within PAT by multiple independent analyses, and this proposal is essential to addressing this problem.

"PAT must reform its governance to restore the confidence of county residents and state officials," Wagner said.

## TRID planning continues

With fuel costs rising, many Americans are seeking easier public transit access to jobs and shopping, and development dollars are increasingly dedicated to areas with strong public transit resources. In South Pittsburgh, the “T” light rail line is a prime opportunity to capitalize on these trends.

Rep. Wagner initiated and provided funding for a study of designating Broadway Avenue in Beechview and the South Hills Junction transit station as a Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID). The study kicked off with public meetings in October and input from residents was collected at two locations through February, when the findings were presented to the community. Designation as a TRID would provide tax incentives for redevelopment in the study area for 20 years.

The process will continue with specific proposals from the consulting team on leveraging our resources and addressing the challenges we face in revitalizing our neighborhoods. As always, community input and involvement will be critical to this process. Rep. Wagner’s office will continue to keep community members updated on coming events and new developments. Interested residents also can visit [www.tinyurl.com/smartrid](http://www.tinyurl.com/smartrid) for more information.

“The ‘T’ is a unique resource for our South Hills communities and this study will give us a roadmap for using it to our advantage,” Wagner said. “I am pleased that my office was able to provide the vision and resources to begin this process, and I hope the entire community will join us in working toward a positive result.”



**Rep. Wagner speaks to Beechview residents at an October community meeting kicking off the TRID study of the light rail corridor along Broadway Ave. and at South Hills Junction.**



## Beechview grocery opening approaches

The new IGA grocery store on Broadway Avenue in Beechview is expected to open in April, just in time for Easter shopping. This is a welcome addition to efforts to revitalize the Beechview business district.

Rep. Wagner received a commitment from the new operator to re-hire former Foodland employees and give other community members priority for jobs at a new store. Additionally, she has requested that community input be solicited on desired items and services to be offered.

“The arrival of IGA offers the opportunity to finalize development plans for the entire business district,” Wagner said. “However, the Urban Redevelopment Authority must fulfill past promises to aggressively market the other properties it owns in the business district. The community also must be invited to participate fully in these efforts, as this has been the downfall of past plans that have not come to fruition.”

## McNeilly grocery now open

Rep. Wagner has advocated since taking office for a new grocery store at the corner of McNeilly Road and Sussex Ave. on the Brookline/Baldwin Township border. In November, these South Hills communities welcomed Aldi, which opened a brand new facility on the site. This should be a convenient grocery option for many neighborhoods in the area.

## Transformed South Hills HS open

Rep. Wagner recently toured the new South Hills Retirement Residence in Mt. Washington, which opened last November. The beautifully renovated former South Hills High School now holds 106 one- and two-bedroom apartments for seniors over 62 years of age. The building is LEED-certified, which means it meets high energy efficiency standards and can save residents money on their utility bills.

“As an advocate for this project since taking office, I worked successfully with

the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency to provide tax credits to help finance the project,” Wagner said. “I am excited that renovations are complete and that this formerly vacant building is now full of life and a prime example of sustainable design.”

Amenities include keyless entry, an on-duty site manager, a shuttle for transportation, emergency pull cords in every apartment, and full handicapped accessibility. There still are a few apartments available

for rent, but vacancies are filling up quickly. Individuals who would like a rental application for the South Hills Retirement Residence should call the site manager at (412) 481-8100.

Rep. Wagner continues to advocate for productive reuse of other vacant structures, including the former Prospect School on Mt. Washington. Developers are currently exploring redevelopment of this site, and more information should be available soon.

## West End Bridge improvements proposed

Rep. Wagner is working closely with Riverlife, a public-private partnership dedicated to the redevelopment of Pittsburgh's riverfronts, on advancing projects of interest to neighborhoods in her legislative district.

One of Riverlife's most exciting planned projects is a pedestrian walkway along the existing West End Bridge connecting the North Side and the West End.

In 2006, with the support of the Alcoa Foundation, Riverlife held a design competition for a pedestrian bridge to be incorporated into the bridge's grand structure. The competition received international accolades and submissions from top design teams around the world.

The extraordinary winning solution, from California-based firm Endres Ware, links the north and south banks of the Ohio River with a combined pedestrian-bicycle bridge that runs as a gently sloping curve along the east side of the existing bridge, with three connections at the shoreline at either end of the span.

Rep. Wagner also has initiated discussions with Riverlife, CSX Transportation and city officials on nurturing commercial and recreational development between West Carson Street and the Ohio River and providing increased access from the West End communities to the river.

"Pittsburghers once grew up learning not to go near the rivers, but today they are one of our best resources for economic development and recreation," Wagner said. "I am happy to be working along with Riverlife to increase these opportunities."



***An artist's rendering of the proposed pedestrian walkway along the West End Bridge. Photo courtesy of Riverlife.***

## Grant supports Columbus Square project

Rep. Wagner was pleased to sponsor a grant from the House Democratic Caucus to support Manchester Citizens Corporation's (MCC) Columbus Square project. This project will transform a vacant industrial brownfield into a new community of 31 single family residences. Each residence will have a private yard and two-car garage.

According to the MCC, the homes will feature the architectural characteristics of the historic surrounding neighborhood. There will be cost-saving energy components and floor-plans to accommodate individual owner needs. The location also offers an easy commute to all North Side and Downtown destinations.

"With development dollars limited, this is a prime example of the need to invest in areas where our established urban communities will benefit as well," Wagner said. "Community members have worked to preserve Manchester's history, make the neighborhood safer, and attract new homeowners. This development represents a vindication of these efforts over many years, and a source of momentum for the future."



## Brookline senior high rise moving forward

The reconstruction of the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh's Mazza Pavilion senior high rise along Brookline Boulevard is steadily progressing. After being stripped down to the bare frame, the building is starting to be put back together with a new roof, windows and exterior walls. The interior will receive new electrical wiring and HVAC systems as construction moves forward. Construction is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2011, and residents may be able to move in by the end of the year.

The building will house 30 units once completed, and previous residents will have priority placement when the application process begins. For further information on Mazza Pavilion, please call the Housing Authority at (412) 456-5030. At press time, no application for residency or official waiting list was available. To be notified when more information becomes available, please contact Rep. Wagner's office at (412) 343-2094 and ask to be put on the Mazza Pavilion information list.

Visit Rep. Wagner's website at [www.pahouse.com/Wagner](http://www.pahouse.com/Wagner) to sign up for regular e-mail alerts.

# Rep. Wagner's Legislative Update:

- Rep. Wagner once again has introduced **Port Authority Board Reform** legislation. With all members currently appointed by the county executive, the lack of diverse viewpoints on the board has been cited as a deficiency by multiple independent analyses. This bill would provide appointments to the governor, state legislative leaders, and the City of Pittsburgh.
- The **Green Work Force Training Act** was reintroduced by Rep. Wagner. This legislation would provide financial support to training programs in the growing energy efficiency and renewable energy industries, especially those focusing on the unemployed. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, a total of 106,000 Pennsylvanians currently are working for renewable energy or energy efficiency companies, and more jobs are being added daily.
- **Disabled Parking Fraud Prevention** legislation introduced by Rep. Wagner would increase penalties for fraudulent use of a parking placard and require recertification every five years to ensure that spaces are available for those who truly need them.
- Legislation creating a **Homeless Children's Education Task Force** was introduced by Rep. Wagner. Children now make up the largest proportion of the homeless population in Allegheny County at 36 percent, and many lack consistent access to schooling. This bill would require a panel led by the Secretary of Education to make suggestions to the legislature on how to address this problem.

## Beechview welcomes home ownership programs

Because of the ongoing recession, new home buyers have faced many obstacles to purchasing a home. However, the affordable, quality housing available in Beechview is attracting new residents as well as giving them access to programs to assist them with their purchase of a home.

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), a federal program administered locally by the Pittsburgh Housing Development Corporation and the Urban Redevelopment Authority, has helped renovate several homes in the neighborhood. The first two of eight homes in the program are ready to be purchased at a monthly payment of as little as \$375 per month. For more information, call (412) 255-6600.

A number of programs in the area offer free home buying classes and counseling that can be invaluable in the process of purchasing a home. Please contact Rep. Wagner's constituent service office at (412) 343-2094 if you are interested in being connected with one of these agencies.

These programs present an opportunity for homeownership for a few, and a step toward economic revitalization for the entire Beechview community.

## Pittsburgh Marathon extends to West End

As a board member of the Pittsburgh Marathon for the past three years, Rep. Wagner is thrilled with the level of interest and excitement the event has brought to the city. This year, the race course has been extended to the West End neighborhood, crossing the West End Bridge to Steuben Street, then looping onto South Main Street via Wabash Street and continuing to West Carson Street. Pittsburgh is a city of neighborhoods, and the marathon route touches on a diverse mix of distinctive communities.

**Watch for information on community events to be held along the Marathon route for this year's race on Sunday, May 15 and cheer on the local and visiting runners.**

## Rep. Wagner's local constituent service offices are here to help you!

- State and federal tax forms
- Birth certificate applications
- College and financial aid resources
- Questions about Pennsylvania Department of Welfare services (food stamps, LIHEAP, etc.)
- Housing issues
- Applying for PACE and PACENET drug coverage for seniors
- Food assistance
- Capitol tours
- Employment issues
- And any other question related to state government
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate questions
- Car registrations, PennDOT forms



**PLUS FREE NOTARY PUBLIC SERVICE**



**STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
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# COMMUNITY SHREDDING EVENT

## Let Rep. Wagner help with your spring cleaning

Please join Rep. Wagner on Saturday, April 16 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Castle Shannon Volunteer Fire Department, 3600 Library Road, for a community shredding event.

Shredding is not only environmentally friendly, but protects personal information. Constituents will have the opportunity to bring up to five (5) boxes or bags of confidential items to the truck for shredding.

### Acceptable items for shredding include:

- Bank information and cancelled checks
- Mortgage & loan information
- Letters, envelopes, ledgers
- Outdated bills
- Medical information
- Any other clean paper
- Obsolete invoices

For more information, please contact Rep. Wagner's constituent service office at (412) 343-2094.

## 2010 Senior Fair



Rep. Wagner held her 4th Annual Senior Fair in October at Resurrection Church in Brookline. Constituents had the opportunity to meet Rep. Wagner and her staff, hear from vendors and service providers, and receive free flu and pneumonia shots.

**Rep. Wagner thanks all who attended!**

## EITC benefits local students

This year, the Bridge Educational Foundation will receive a \$44,000 donation from U.S. Steel through the Commonwealth's Educational Improvement Tax Credit program (EITC). These funds will support scholarships for students attending a number of local private and parochial schools. Schools in and near Rep. Wagner's legislative district that will benefit include:

- Bishop Leonard – St. Mary of the Mount Academy, Mt. Washington
- Cardinal Wright Regional School, North Side
- Good Shepherd Christian Preschool, Whitehall
- St. Gabriel School, Whitehall

Rep. Wagner worked to avert a planned reduction in the amount provided by the EITC during last year's state budget negotiations, and has supported legislation to return funding to the level which existed before cuts two years ago.

Eligible businesses can claim a tax credit for as much as 90 percent of EITC contributions up to \$300,000. For more information, visit [www.newpa.com](http://www.newpa.com) or call 1-866-GO-NEWPA.