

# Chelsa Wagner

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

22ND LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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SUMMER 2011

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smartphone's QR reader  
to learn more about my  
work in Harrisburg on  
your behalf.



Dear Friends,

I am pleased to be able to highlight in the following pages efforts to strengthen and improve our communities which I have been involved with over the past half year, and throughout my tenure as your representative. Whether working in Harrisburg or right here in our neighborhoods, my foremost goal has been to strengthen our families and communities.

However, the most difficult work toward this goal is done by community members themselves. Whether coming together to save our neighborhood library branches, undertaking innovative projects to add energy and vitality to our communities, or simply strongly advocating to me and other officials, there is no question that the strength of our neighborhoods is our people.

I regret that the recently passed state budget, which I opposed, is likely to make matters more difficult for many of my constituents. This budget makes deep cuts to education, resulting in layoffs, program cuts and potential property tax increases in local districts. Some of the most concerning immediate effects have been cuts to early childhood education programs, which have shown proven results in preparing students for future success and reducing future costs, providing a great return on investment for taxpayers.

Additional areas experiencing large reductions include higher education, raising tuition rates for our young people and harming some of our region's largest employers; human services programs, shifting costs to local taxpayers or cutting programs on which more of our neighbors are depending as the recession lingers; and important economic development and community revitalization programs that have made real differences in our neighborhoods. All this is despite state tax collections more than \$700 million above projections that could have been used to avert some of these harmful cuts.

Despite our challenges, I am pleased at the many signs of progress in our communities. I have also led the way forward on important legislation in Harrisburg, passing a proposal to reform governance of the Port Authority through the full House of Representatives.

It is my commitment to continue to work to advance our common priorities and to ensure that government is working for our families and communities. I thank all of you who have been partners in this effort through your own hard work and dedication, and look forward to continuing to work on behalf of and beside you in the future.

Kindest regards,

*Chelsa Wagner*

Chelsa Wagner  
Representative, 22<sup>nd</sup> District



## District redrawing process beginning

Every 10 years, the state's legislative districts must be redrawn to reflect population changes documented in the most recent U.S. Census. Population loss in the area is expected to result in Allegheny County having at least one fewer representative beginning next year.

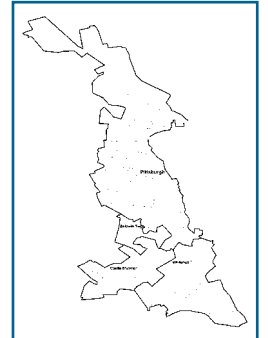
The 22nd Legislative District served by Rep. Wagner has 4,639 fewer residents than in 2000, according to preliminary census data. Most districts in Allegheny County lost population, especially those serving the City of Pittsburgh. A few suburban districts in the county gained population.

"It has been my pleasure to represent a markedly diverse district stretching from the North Side of the City of Pittsburgh, through the city's western and southern neighborhoods, and into the South Hills suburbs," Wagner said. "I am especially proud of increasing cooperation between many of the communities in my district and helping them work together toward improvements for our residents. I believe we have made great strides that must continue.

"For this reason, I am strongly advocating that my district remain intact to the greatest extent possible after redistricting, and am urging my constituents to use their voices in the line-drawing process," she added.

The new district lines are drawn by a commission consisting of the leaders of the four state legislative caucuses, along with a chairman agreed by the four caucus leaders or appointed by the state Supreme Court if they cannot agree. The public plays an important role as well through submitting comments and participating in public hearings. Please keep an eye on Rep. Wagner's e-newsletters for more information on these opportunities. If you are not already on her e-mail list, visit [www.pahouse.com/Wagner](http://www.pahouse.com/Wagner) to sign up.

"This is an important process that will help to determine what takes place in our communities for the next 10 years. I hope my constituents will become engaged in helping to shape the new legislative map," Rep. Wagner said.



Rep. Wagner receives recognition from Paula Maynes, chairwoman of the Construction Legislative Council, for her work promoting improvements to our regional infrastructure.

# Support neighborhood businesses

Rep. Wagner has worked since taking office to support local businesses in her legislative district, including initiating and funding a partnership and staff for community groups in Beechview and Brookline. The newest initiative of this partnership is the 3/50 Project.

**The 3/50 Project encourages residents to think locally when making purchasing decisions. The concept is easy:**

- 3** What three independently owned businesses would you miss if they disappeared? Stop in. Say hello. Pick up something at the business. Your purchases are what keep those businesses around.
- 50** If half the employed population spent \$50 a month in locally owned independent businesses, it would generate more than \$42.6 billion in revenues nationally. Now, imagine if three-fourths of the population did that!
- 68** For every \$100 spent in locally owned businesses, \$68 returns to the community through taxes, payroll and other expenditures. If you spend that in a national chain, only \$43 stays here. Spend it online and nothing comes home.
- 1** The number of people it takes to start the trend. You. Or a bunch of you.

This project is a nationally respected program and is supporting local business districts all over the country. Let's see if the South Pittsburgh communities are up to the challenge to find ways to spend \$50 a month in either Brookline or Beechview – or both.

Visit local merchants to learn more about raffle items associated with the project.

It's easier than you think! After all, stronger business districts often have a more positive impact on property values and growth for the neighborhood.

This initiative is supported by the following organizations: Beechview Merchants Association, Brookline Area Concerned Citizens, Brookline Chamber of Commerce, Community Leaders United for Beechview and South Pittsburgh Development Corporation.

## Project bringing coffee and community to three neighborhoods

An easily overlooked but often distinguishing feature of a vibrant community is a gathering place. Over the past year, Cannon Coffee on Brookline Boulevard has emerged as such a destination for Brookline community members, offering not only a "cuppa joe" and a bite to eat, but live music and a community gathering space.

Now, Cannon co-owner Nathan Mallory, in partnership with Renew Pittsburgh, is seeking to replicate this neighborhood-centric business model by bringing non-profit coffeehouses to Beechview and Sheraden.

Brew on Broadway in Beechview is scheduled to be open at press time. Meanwhile, a vacant house on Adon Street in Sheraden is being revitalized by Renew Pittsburgh for future use as another location.

Profits from the shops will be funneled into community projects and overseen by a board of local residents.

"With public dollars for community development increasingly scarce, it is heartening to see local residents stepping up and making a real difference in their communities," Wagner said. "This is exactly the type of project that can add life to our neighborhood business districts and jumpstart other development. My sincere thanks goes out to Project Coffeehouse, Renew Pittsburgh, and all the community members who will be involved in this effort."



Rep. Wagner helped celebrate the grand opening of Brew on Broadway in Beechview on Aug. 11. Left to right: Adam Costa of Crested Duck Charcuterie, Phyllis DiDiano of Community Leaders United for Beechview, Brew board member Dino De Ciantis, Rep. Wagner, Kevin Acklin of Renew Pittsburgh, and coffee shop manager Nathan Mallory.

## Efforts toward sustainable library system continue

Progress continues to be made toward a financially stable Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh that will continue to fulfill its important role in area neighborhoods.

Earlier this year, library supporters along with Rep. Wagner and other officials finally secured cancellation of planned branch closures. This was partly due to Rep. Wagner's successful efforts to secure dedicated funding for the library through the local share of table games proceeds from the Rivers Casino. This funding is contingent upon the library maintaining its neighborhood branches, and has led the library to plan major improvements to a number of locations, including some of those previously slated for closure. These include Beechview, Mt. Washington, Sheraden and West End, which are now scheduled to undergo renovations focused on handicapped accessibility. This is a huge victory that would not have been possible without the successful efforts of Rep. Wagner and many community members to save these branches.

A plan devised by the Library's Sustainable Funding Task Force, on which Rep. Wagner serves, would raise approximately \$3.25 million annually for the library. This November, city voters will be asked to approve a 0.25 percent property tax increase in order to provide these funds. This increase would cost \$25 per year for a city taxpayer whose home is assessed at \$100,000.

"There is no question that a world class library system is one of the amenities that makes Pittsburgh one of America's most livable cities," Wagner said. "The successful efforts to maintain neighborhood branches has only magnified the importance of our libraries to community members of all ages and the welfare of our neighborhoods."



During the fight to save Carnegie Library branches from closure, Rep. Wagner led library board members and elected officials on a tour of affected branches to meet staff and patrons. Now, with the closures cancelled, major improvements are planned to branches including Mt. Washington, pictured here.

## Neighborhood Development Update

- The long-awaited IGA grocery store is scheduled to open in Beechview in September. Rep. Wagner worked to promote alternative shopping options for Beechview residents during the time the store was closed, and gained assurances from the new owner that former employees and other neighborhood residents would be given priority for jobs.
- The final community meetings were held in April for a study of designating the area along the 'T' line in Beechview and surrounding South Hills Junction as a Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID). A final presentation is expected this fall. Rep. Wagner initiated and provided funding for this effort. Designation as a TRID would provide tax incentives for redevelopment in the study area for 20 years.
- Manchester is home to a new museum. Bicycle Heaven at 1800 Preble Ave. displays thousands of custom and vintage bikes, and also offers repairs and rentals. It is easily accessible from the North Shore bike trail.
- Planning for the reconstruction of Brookline Boulevard continues to progress. As of June, both site investigation and preliminary design were completed. Final design continues, with bids anticipated to be opened next spring and construction to begin during 2013.



### What's wrong with this picture?

Since taking office in 2007, Rep. Wagner has been urging the mayor to take action to rehabilitate the Beechview Senior Center or find a suitable new location. With more than \$1 million in state funding secured for a new center, there is no excuse for the city's continued inaction. Above, Rep. Wagner and center patrons observe a leaking ceiling in the center's dining area. You can help by calling Mayor Ravenstahl at (412) 255-2626 and requesting that the city implement this important project. The most difficult part of any project — finding the money — is done.



As a member of the Board of Directors of the Dick's Sporting Goods Pittsburgh Marathon, Rep. Wagner helped to bring the marathon back three years ago, and this year worked to bring the course to the West End neighborhood, which hosted a community festival for the race on May 15. Rep. Wagner participates along with state Rep. Dan Deasy and City Councilwoman Theresa Kail-Smith.

## Senior housing projects move forward

Rep. Wagner has been pleased to support two exciting senior housing developments in her legislative district.

On July 13, a grand opening and house warming event was held at the new South Hills Retirement Residence in Mt. Washington. The beautifully renovated South Hills High School now holds 106 one- and two-bedroom apartments for seniors older than 62. Rep. Wagner worked to secure tax credits through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency in order to make this project possible.

The building includes both market-rate and affordable units. Amenities include keyless entry, an on-duty site manager, a shuttle for transportation, emergency pull cords in every apartment, and full handicap accessibility. The building's "green" features, which include generating much of its own electricity, also save residents money on utility bills.

In Brookline, reconstruction of the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh's Mazza Pavilion property is nearly complete. Rep. Wagner strongly advocated for the reopening of this facility, and has worked to keep senior constituents updated on the status of the project. Construction is scheduled to wrap up by the end of September, and residents should be able to move in by the end of the year. The building will hold 33 units once completed, and previous residents will have priority placement when the application process begins.

"It is wonderful to see these buildings renewed and coming back to life," Wagner said. "It is extremely important to provide safe and convenient housing options for our seniors, and these two projects are also important neighborhood revitalization efforts."

## Wagner welcomes women legislators to Pittsburgh

Rep. Wagner hosted the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Eastern Regional Conference for the Women in Government Foundation, Aug. 25-27 in Pittsburgh. The conference took place at the Omni William Penn Hotel downtown.

The Women in Government (WIG) Foundation is a national, non-profit organization of women state legislators that provides leadership opportunity, networking, expert forums, and educational resources to address and resolve complex public policy issues.

Rep. Wagner is currently the state coordinator for the WIG program in Pennsylvania. Her work in the areas of education, health care, economic

recovery and transportation has established her as a strong mentor and a prominent spokesperson on the policy issues impacting the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.

“Women are in a severe minority in most legislatures, and Pennsylvania ranks near the bottom of all the states. For instance, I am currently the only woman out of 23 members serving Allegheny County in the state House,” Wagner said. “By being strong advocates and building our knowledge and leadership skills, women legislators can claim important roles in policymaking and open doors for other women in the future, which will mean better governance for all of us.”



Rep. Wagner speaks with Mary Brooks Beatty, past president of WIG, at last year's convention. Rep. Wagner served as host legislator for this year's convention in Pittsburgh, which included an address by Franco Harris.

## Save \$ with electric choice

On Jan. 1, 2011, rate caps expired for all Pennsylvania electric utility customers.

While this has resulted in rate increases, customers do not have to pay the prices charged by their current supplier. Customers have the ability to choose between their current electric distribution company (EDC) and competitive supply prices for the generation portion of the bill. A different electricity generation supplier (EGS) may be able to offer a better price for the generation. Customers will be able to compare the EDC price to a competitive supplier price to find the best option.

### THE AMOUNT YOU MIGHT SAVE DEPENDS ON ISSUES SUCH AS:

- How much you pay now for electric generation supply;
- How much electricity you use;
- How market prices change in the future;
- What products and service are included in the EGS price such as renewable energy produces or other demand side and conservation services; and
- The price offered by the suppliers serving your area.

In some areas, an EGS's rate is as much as 10 percent cheaper than the default service price offered by the utility.

**Consumers can visit [www.papowerswitch.com](http://www.papowerswitch.com) to learn more about electric choice and to shop for a supplier.**

Remember, regardless of who generates your electricity, you will still continue to call your EDC for emergency services and questions regarding your residential service, including outages. The quality, reliability, and maintenance of your electric service should not change as it is still monitored by the Public Utility Commission. However, if you have a question about your generation charges you should first call your EGS.

For further information, contact the Public Utility Commission at 1-800-692-7380.

## Wagner opposes strip club proposals

On July 21, Rep. Wagner testified before the City of Pittsburgh Zoning Board of Adjustment along with many community members to oppose the proposed reopening of the Butta Bing strip club on Saw Mill Run Boulevard in Overbrook.

Not only does Rep. Wagner agree with concerns about potential negative effects on the community, but she spoke specifically to the club owner's record of causing serious harm to other city neighborhoods.

Daniel Smithbower pleaded guilty in 2009 to mortgage fraud in connection with the illegal activities of Bernardo

Katz, which devastated the Beechview business district. Extensive research by Rep. Wagner's office helped lead to the indictments of Smithbower and Katz, who is now a fugitive in Brazil.

“To allow an individual who has shown such disregard not only for our neighborhoods but for the law to reopen a business of this type would be ill-advised and almost certainly harmful to our residents,” Wagner said.

Smithbower was taken into custody by sheriff's deputies immediately after the hearing for ignoring summons related to the condition of the club, which was damaged in a fire in 2005.

At press time, the board had made no decision on Smithbower's application to reopen the club.

Rep. Wagner has also publicly opposed an effort to open a strip club along West Carson Street in the West End portion of her district.

“The safety and welfare of our neighborhoods is my top concern,” Wagner said. “As a public official, I feel it is my responsibility to speak out on these matters, and the city authorities should act in the best interest of these communities.”

## Legislative Update

- Rep. Wagner's proposal to reform governance of the Port Authority of Allegheny County passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority in June. Contained in **House Bill 1304**, her proposal would expand the PAT board to 11 members, with five members appointed by state leaders. Currently, all nine board members are appointed by the county executive.

"The faith of state officials and transit riders alike in the PAT board has been badly shaken," Wagner said. "We need to ensure that the tough questions are always asked when public money and the welfare of our residents is at stake. My proposal would also position our local representatives to better advocate for a long-term funding solution for PAT."
- Rep. Wagner introduced **House Bill 1779**, legislation designed to curb the "Pay-to-Play" culture in state government and end Pennsylvania's status as one of only five states that places no limits on contributions to political campaigns.

"It is clear that big business has bought access to policymakers that average Pennsylvanians don't get," Wagner said. "A great number of reforms that are critical to Pennsylvania families will simply remain out of reach as long as big money donors can dictate to elected officials."
- Legislation to ensure that handicapped parking spaces are available to those who truly need them has been reintroduced by Rep. Wagner. **House Bill 1755** would require handicapped parking placards to be reauthorized every five years to confirm that they are still needed, and would increase fines for fraudulent use of a placard or illegally occupying a handicapped space.
- State constables would have access to critical information needed to fulfill their duties under a proposal by Rep. Wagner. **House Bill 1756** would permit district judges to provide constables with information from the state's judicial database when they are asked to serve warrants. Currently, constables are sometimes provided with outdated addresses and little or no identifying information on those to be served, which places the safety of these public servants and communities at risk.
- **House Bill 1377** would provide additional financial assistance to students who successfully complete 60 credits of community college and seek to move on to a four-year institution. This legislation was suggested to Rep. Wagner by Bryan Ceberio, a Community College of Allegheny County student from Brookline.
- Rep. Wagner will soon reintroduce her **Return to Service Act**. With municipal budgets stretched thin, this legislation would assist communities by allowing retired police officers to perform part-time duties without jeopardizing their pension benefits. Such duties could include traffic control, community relations and administrative tasks, allowing current officers more time to devote to crime prevention in communities.

## Property Tax/Rent Rebate still available

The deadline to apply for a rebate on property taxes or rent paid during 2010 through Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended until Dec. 31. Applications and assistance completing them are available at Rep. Wagner's constituent service offices on Brookline Boulevard and in the Caste Village Shoppes.

Senior citizens may have received mail solicitations offering assistance with their rebate application for a fee. However, **Rep. Wagner's offices provide this service free of charge.**

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with permanent disabilities 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters (excluding half of Social Security, Supplemental Security or federal Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits).

Rep. Wagner has also introduced legislation that would prevent landlords from taking public money meant to benefit their tenants.

Currently, many personal care homes include a lease provision, often overlooked or not understood by tenants or their family members, which allows the personal care home to claim a portion of the rebate designated for a tenant, typically 50 percent or \$325. The lease agreement provided to personal care homes by the state Department of Public Welfare actually includes boilerplate language claiming the rebate for landlords.

"This practice must be ended. Seniors and disabled residents of our Commonwealth are faced with difficult economic times on a fixed income, and it is our responsibility to do all that we can to protect their economic security," Rep. Wagner said.

Rep. Wagner's bill was unanimously approved by the House Urban Affairs Committee last March but it never received a vote by the full House. She has urged legislative leaders of both parties and Gov. Corbett to ensure that this bill is passed and enacted into law in the current legislative session.

## Did You Know?

Rep. Wagner's Constituent Service Offices assisted with **2,464** constituents in the first half of this year. The services most frequently requested were assistance with PennDOT, Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications, free notary public service, and inquiries on the state budget and pending legislation.

For assistance with any matter related to state government, contact Rep. Wagner's Constituent Service Offices in Brookline at (412) 343-2094 or in the Caste Village Shoppes at (412) 881-1005.

## EITC Scholarships Awarded

Rep. Wagner joined fellow legislators and students and administrators from local schools in May at the presentation of scholarship funds through the Bridge Educational Foundation. These scholarships are made possible through Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program, which allows businesses to receive tax credits for supporting local private and parochial schools and students. Local schools benefiting include St. Mary of the Mount Academy (Mt. Washington), Cardinal Wright Regional School (North Side), Good Shepherd Christian Preschool (Whitehall) and St. Gabriel School (Whitehall). Rep. Wagner has supported legislation to expand the EITC to benefit more students.



**STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
CHELSA WAGNER**

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## Mark your calendars!

*Rep. Wagner's fall events for seniors*

### **Older & Wiser Program presented by Neighborhood Legal Services**

**Topic: Powers of Attorney and Living Wills**

**1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 6**

Whitehall Borough Building Community Room  
100 Borough Park Drive

RSVP is encouraged. Please call (412) 343-2094.

### **Rep. Wagner's 5<sup>th</sup> annual Senior Health & Wellness Fair**

**10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday, Oct. 28**

Church of the Resurrection, Father Quinn Hall  
1100 Creedmoor Ave., Brookline

*(Flu and pneumonia shots provided under Medicare.)*



**Rep. Wagner hosts ice cream socials throughout the summer months at senior community centers and residences around her legislative district to meet her senior constituents and hear their concerns.**

## Emerald View a gem in South Hills

Emerald View Park in Mt. Washington – the only City of Pittsburgh regional park south of downtown – has now expanded to 257 acres through new land acquisitions, and a planned 19-mile trail system is now half complete.

The park is a unique hub for trail enthusiasts and local residents, connecting directly to the Great Allegheny Passage, the Allegheny County Riverfront Trail System, Beechview Greenway trails, and the urban stair trails to Pittsburgh's South Side. In 2010, Emerald View Park became a Regional Asset District (RAD) park and the Allegheny Land Trust received the Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence for its conservation work on Mt. Washington.

Along with trail construction, habitat restoration and garbage cleanup have been major elements of the project.

Mt. Washington Community Development Corporation offers quarterly hikes free of charge, with the next hike scheduled for Oct. 16. For more information, please call (412) 481-3220 or visit [www.mwcdc.org](http://www.mwcdc.org).



**Rep. Wagner hikes along trails in Emerald View Park with Ilyssa Manspeizer, Director of Park Development and Conservation with Mt. Washington Community Development Corporation.**

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