



State Representative

Frank Burns

72nd Legislative District

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Fall 2011 Newsletter

Burns votes 'yes' on welfare reform

Bill ensures illegal immigrants cannot receive welfare; requires random drug testing of recipients

In July, Rep. Burns voted for legislation to reform Pennsylvania's welfare system.

The new law requires the Department of Public Welfare to check the Social Security number of an applicant for public assistance against 19 different electronic databases to determine whether the applicant is eligible to receive welfare benefits.

The law authorizes DPW to implement necessary changes to assistance programs to improve efficiency and prevent misuse. It is designed to eliminate duplication of services and deter public assistance fraud to maximize the funding available.

The law also allows DPW to implement a drug testing program for welfare recipients who have convictions for drug-related felonies. It mandates that welfare recipients with drug-related felony convictions be tested for drug use when they first apply for benefits.

Additionally, 25 percent of all recipients with drug-related felony convictions will be randomly tested for drug use every six months and public assistance will be denied to applicants and/or recipients who refuse to be tested.

Recipients who fail the drug test for the first time will be provided with drug addiction treatment services; failing the drug test a second time will result in public assistance being suspended for 12 months. If a recipient fails the drug test a third time, public assistance is permanently suspended and they become ineligible for any future benefits.

Burns votes for new 'Castle Doctrine' law

In April, Rep. Burns voted for legislation reinforcing a person's right to defend himself or herself against an intruder.

The law, known as the Castle Doctrine, permits law-abiding citizens to use force, including deadly force, against an attacker in their homes and any places outside of their homes, businesses, automobiles or state parks where they have a legal right to be. The law also protects individuals from civil lawsuits by the attacker or the attacker's family when force is used.

The law does not apply if the person entering a home is:

- Another resident of the home;
- A law enforcement officer;
- A parent, grandparent or other guardian removing a child from the home or vehicle.

In addition, the law does not apply if a person is using their home or vehicle to further criminal activity. The law also offers specific protection against civil liability for the lawful use of force in self-defense.



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Burns sponsors Caylee's Law in Pa.

Rep. Burns is urging support of measures to strengthen penalties in Pennsylvania associated with the death or disappearance of a child.

Currently in Pennsylvania, it is a first-degree misdemeanor for a parent to conceal the death of a child in the event of a still birth. An initial review shows there do not seem to be any state laws regulating the timely reporting of a child's death or disappearance.

Prompted by the public outrage over the Casey Anthony verdict in July, Rep. Burns is supporting legislation to be known as "Caylee's Law" to ensure that parents or guardians notify law enforcement in a timely manner when a child goes missing or dies.

The legislation, H.B. 1799, would do the following:

- increase the penalty for "*concealing the death of a child*" from a first-degree misdemeanor to a third-degree felony (punishable by a maximum penalty of seven years in prison and up to \$15,000 fine).
- establish a first-degree misdemeanor offense of "*failure to report death of child*" (punishable by a maximum penalty of five years in prison and up to \$10,000 fine). This offense also would require the parents, legal guardian, or anyone else supervising the welfare of a child to report the death of the child to law enforcement within 12 hours after discovery.
- establish the first-degree misdemeanor offense of "*failure to report missing child*" (punishable by a maximum of five years in prison and up to \$10,000 fine). It also would require the parent or guardian to report a missing child to law enforcement within 48 hours.

Burns issues warning about Property Tax/Rent Rebate solicitation

Rep. Burns is advising senior citizens to discard a solicitation offering to complete the application for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for a \$39 fee.

The solicitation involves a letter asking residents to fill out an enclosed Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program application and return it with a \$39 fee to a Harrisburg address.

The state does not charge a fee to enroll in the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program, so this communication is not from a state agency. Burns' offices can assist those who need help applying for a property tax or rent rebate for free.

Burns said people with questions can call his offices at 814-536-8400 in Johnstown, 814-467-9583 in Windber or 814-472-8021 in Ebensburg.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program provides state rebates on property taxes or rent paid in 2010 to eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, and half of Social Security, Supplemental Security or federal Railroad Retirement Tier I income is excluded.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650, but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975. The deadline to apply is Dec. 31.

Burns presents certificates to 'There Ought to be a Law' contest winners

On May 17, Rep. Burns presented certificates to the winners of his "There Ought to be a Law" contest at three local schools.

For the contest, Burns challenged local students to suggest a law that they think is needed.

First-place winner Bobby Antesberger, a sixth-grader, won for his proposed legislation to require the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to charge a fee for junior fishing licenses, following a Junior Fisherman Training Course that would include teaching the proper use of fishing equipment, studying various species of fish and discussing the important responsibilities of fishermen, such as keeping the environment clean and water safety.



Lexi Lohr, a ninth-grader, came in second place for her proposed legislation to require recipients of welfare to only be able to receive benefits for one year, stating that the original intent of the system was to assist Americans to become financially stable and to enable states and the country to reduce its debt.



Brandon Wehner, a seventh-grader, received third place for his proposed legislation to require a tax on automobile inspections to fund major city renovations for public services.

Out and about around the district ...



Rep. Burns helps Cambria Elementary students plant trees in celebration of Arbor Day.

Rep. Burns presents Band-Aids to Jaden Isenberg, a first-grade student at Cambria Elementary School. Jaden helped launch a letter-writing campaign to collect Band-Aids for the "Band-Aids for Brent" campaign, which provides colorful Band-Aids to hospitalized children.



Rep. Burns joins children at a Fishing Derby held at the Golden Rod Sportsmen's Club on July 23.



In August, Rep. Burns gave a tour of the Capitol to residents of Davidsville. Pictured from left are Taya Kimmel, Leivi Burns, Carlie Dillon, Rep. Burns, Katie College and Josie Blank.



Rep. Burns presents a citation to Windber High School student Brea Neri. Neri is the recipient of the 2011-12 Pennsylvania House of Representatives Scholarship. Pictured from left are Windber High School Principal Ralph DeMarco, parents Dan and Anne Neri, Brea Neri and Rep. Burns.



Rep. Burns meets with Cambria Elementary students about a state program called Science: It's Elementary! The program, which was eliminated in Gov. Tom Corbett's state budget, helped schools upgrade science equipment and better prepare students for careers in science. Rep. Burns met with the students and submitted letters they wrote to the governor.

Rep. Burns donates afghan blankets to residents of the Hollidaysburg Veterans Hospital.



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INSIDE:

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My office can help you with:

- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver's license applications.
- Information on financial assistance for higher education.
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds.
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications.
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation.
- Birth and death certificates.
- Problems with the Department of Public Welfare (food stamps, medical and income assistance).
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems.
- Requests for literature – bills, regulations, statutes.
- Pennsylvania maps and 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.
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications.
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions.
- PACE prescription-drug cards for senior citizens.
- The Children's Health Insurance Program, adultBasic and other state-sponsored insurance.
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups.
- Information about federal, state and local government agencies.