



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

THOMAS
CALTAGIRONE

127TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



LEGISLATIVE REPORT

FALL 2011

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Dear Constituent,

Inside this newsletter, you will find updates on privatizing the state's liquor stores, natural gas drilling, legislation I am working on in Harrisburg, and funding for local projects and revitalization efforts.

Please remember my constituent service office is always available to serve you and contains a variety of informational booklets, brochures and other publications on state programs and services.

My constituent service office is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and is located at 645 Penn St., 5th Floor in Reading, 610-376-1529.

You can also email me through the "Contact Me" page on my website, www.pahouse.com/Caltagirone. And follow me on Facebook at www.facebook.com/RepCaltagirone and Twitter, @RepCaltagirone!

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Caltagirone

State Rep. Tom Caltagirone
House Judiciary Committee Chairman
127th Legislative District

Tell me what you think about privatizing state liquor stores!

The legislature has reconvened for fall session, and I expect that we will soon vote on legislation to eliminate the state liquor store system.

The proposal, House Bill 11, would close 609 state liquor stores, and eliminate 5,000 full- and part-time family-sustaining jobs.

Many people – myself included – believe that this proposal would also cost Pennsylvania millions in tax dollars, while compromising public safety.

In addition, it would not combine beer and wine and spirit sales into one location, as most people would prefer for better convenience, and with one of the highest proposed gallonage taxes in the nation, may not offer more competitive pricing than the current system.

I recently posted a survey on my website about this issue and many of you already have responded.

There's still time to tell me your opinion. Should the privatizing of liquor stores be a priority at this time? How would privatization affect wine and liquor prices? If the stores are privatized, should current state workers be protected?

You can take the survey on my website, or send me an email at RepCaltagirone@pahouse.net. I'd like to consider your thoughts, and the thoughts of your friends and neighbors, as I work to address this issue at the state level.

ProtectPA – an update on natural gas drilling legislation

Did you know that Pennsylvania is the only major natural gas producing state that does not impose a natural gas extraction tax on drillers? We also lack the strong safeguards needed to make sure our water isn't being contaminated and our roads aren't being ravaged by drilling activities.

I am co-sponsoring legislation that would enact a fair tax on natural gas extracted in Pennsylvania and protect Pennsylvania's water and other

precious natural resources, while allowing natural gas drilling to flourish.

ProtectPA (H.B. 1800) would ensure the responsible growth of the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry through reasonable community protections, public safety requirements and environmental safeguards, as well as a responsible extraction tax.

I especially fail to see why big oil and rich natural gas companies should get a FREE pass on taxes while you,

the taxpayer, must pick up the tab for damage caused by their drilling to our roadways and natural resources.

The legislature will no doubt consider more proposals related to natural gas drilling in the fall session, and I will keep you updated as more action arises.

In the meantime, feel free to send me an email at RepCaltagirone@pahouse.net to tell me how you feel about this issue.

Were you recently affected by long power outages?

I plan to introduce legislation that would require utility companies to financially compensate customers who are adversely affected by unreasonably long power outages and interruptions.

Many people save money by purchasing food in bulk, and especially in these financial times, losing food in lengthy power outages can be devastating to those living on limited and fixed incomes. We saw no better example of that when our region was pummeled by Hurricane Irene and

Tropical Storm Lee and many residents lost power for days.

While there is nothing we can do to prevent weather disasters, I have learned that electric companies have slashed funding for their repair and maintenance departments, while lavishing generous raises and compensation packages on their top executives. Because repair departments are underfunded, power outages last far longer than necessary.

My legislation would require electric companies found to have cut funding for their repair departments to compensate their customers for unreasonably long power outages.

Many of my colleagues in the House, particularly with constituents most affected by the recent tropical storms, have said they support this legislation. We believe public utilities exist to serve the PUBLIC first, not their CEOs and management.

My bill to keep courts open now law

Gov. Tom Corbett signed my bill into law to keep Pennsylvania courts open and serving the public.

This measure completes changes to the district and municipal courts' civil jurisdictional limits, so that cases that have been making their way into the Courts of Common Pleas because of inflation are redirected back to where they were traditionally heard – before magisterial district judges.

I also worked with Senate leaders to extend the November expiration of a revenue stream used to help fund the court system. We all understood that an extension was necessary to keep courts open for business to enforce our laws.

I appreciate all the bipartisan effort in the House and Senate that went into passing this important piece of legislation and thank the governor for his support. This bill is a positive change that helps our court system remain as efficient and effective as possible.



Gov. Corbett signs Rep. Caltagirone's legislation into law at a Harrisburg reception. Also pictured is the Honorable Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Thomas G. Saylor.

Reducing the size of the legislature

I support legislation (H.B. 153) that would cut the House of Representatives by 50 members because I believe it would increase accountability and efficiency within state government. The legislative process is routinely hampered by our own size and too many conflicting interests.

I have championed reducing the size of the legislature for the past decade, and previously introduced legislation to divide Pennsylvania into 26 Senate districts and 103 House districts, essentially cutting the legislature in half.

There is no better time to streamline government and reduce costs in the General Assembly – the 2011-12 state budget included many painful cuts to state programs and now state government should look to cut itself.

The public has made it clear that it wants the legislature to show leadership in reducing costs and share in the pain of the state's fiscal crisis. Having fewer representatives could save Pennsylvania taxpayers millions of dollars.

You can read more about the bill on my website, www.pahouse.com/Caltagirone.



Bath salts, synthetic marijuana now banned in Pa.



Rep. Caltagirone at the Harrisburg bill signing of S.B. 1006, which bans synthetically produced designer drugs in Pennsylvania.

I am very pleased to report the governor has signed legislation into law to ban synthetically produced “designer” drugs in Pennsylvania. Bath salts, synthetic marijuana and other synthetic drugs are designed to mimic the effects of mainstream illegal narcotics and are extremely dangerous, especially for teenagers, but they were legal to buy and sell in Pennsylvania. As the House Judiciary Committee Democratic chairman, I worked with my committee to guide this and related legislation through the legislative process to update Pennsylvania law to include these latest forms of narcotics. I’d also like to thank Berks County District Attorney John T. Adams for his leadership and efforts in making this change.

It’s imperative that we rein in their use before it gets too out of control. Banning bath salts, synthetic marijuana and other synthetic drugs eliminates any confusion or misconception that because it’s legal, it’s OK to use.

Getting truant teens off the streets and back in school

Truant students can be a nuisance to the community and to school officials, but they also need special attention to keep from falling in with the wrong crowd and habits.

I have introduced a two-bill proposal to more effectively handle truant students in Pennsylvania and encourage them to complete their education. Berks County Magisterial District Judge Wally Scott approached me with the idea, and I am grateful for his support.

My first bill would remove a \$300 fine assessed for truant offenders older than 13. Young offenders who cannot pay the fine are placed in a youth detention center or jail, and while this may seem like tough love, it really does more harm than good.

Children who skip school are already at-risk and need positive guidance. Placing them in detention centers and jail usually leads to them learning criminal tendencies from other offenders and does nothing to encourage the student to change or improve him or herself.

My companion legislation would instead suspend the driver’s license of any student who has failed to respond to a citation or summons on a truancy charge.

A driver’s license is one of the most important privileges to teenagers. The threat of suspending it may give them the incentive to be responsible for their actions. It certainly is more



effective than handing a student a bill for a fine they have no way of paying and then throwing them in a detention center – unless our goal is filling youth detention facilities.

My bill also would provide incentive for students to graduate – if a student graduates during the suspension period, obtains a GED or reaches 21, the driver’s license would be restored.

Local projects receive state funding for crime prevention, business development efforts!

State loan for GoggleWorks Shops expansion

The Greater Berks Development Fund has been awarded an additional \$1 million state loan to complete the GoggleWorks Shops in Reading. I worked with my late friend Sen. Michael O’Pake for years to secure state funding for this project, so I am very pleased to see it so close to completion.

The GoggleWorks Shops will ultimately be a 22,039 square foot space for casual dining and retail use, and it already houses a local TV station and Italian restaurant. The project is intended to complement the GoggleWorks Center of the Arts, which attracts over 125,000 visitors annually. In addition to the GoggleWorks Shops, a neighboring apartment complex is under construction and a 14-screen IMAX movie theatre is operating.

The GoggleWorks Shops are an exciting addition to the city and will strengthen redevelopment efforts in downtown Reading. Not only will the project create jobs for our region – both during and after construction – but it will attract new people to see what downtown Reading has to offer. As more projects like these are completed, I have no doubt it will encourage more redevelopment within the commercial district.

\$1.1 million in crime services grants awarded in Berks County

Earlier this year, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, of which I am a board member, approved nearly \$1.1 million in grants to help sexually abused children, domestic abuse victims and DUI victims right here in Berks County.

Three of the grants were awarded under the federal Victims of Crime Act grant program, which is financed by fines and penalties paid by convicted federal offenders, not from tax dollars, to provide financial support to victim assistance programs in Pennsylvania and other states.

- The Opportunity House was awarded \$76,233 for the Children’s Alliance Center of Berks County. The center provides comprehensive services to child victims of sexual abuse younger than 18 in Berks County.
- Berks County Women in Crisis received \$871,709 for its safe house and domestic and sexual violence services. The organization provides domestic and sexual violence crisis and follow-up direct services, including a 24/7 hotline, rapid-response, and safe-haven shelter, plus counseling, support groups, legal assistance and advocacy, information and referrals and supportive services.
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving – Berks County received \$71,882 to provide services for victims of driving under

the influence cases. The group provides counseling, a 24/7 help hotline, criminal justice support including court accompaniment, and more.

Additionally, a fourth grant was awarded to the Western Berks Regional Police Department under the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program. The \$39,718 grant will be used to pay staff salaries.

Reading receives \$150,000 state grant for recycling efforts

Reading has been awarded a \$149,951 grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The grant is part of the Recycling Performance Grant Program, which provides incentives to help Pennsylvania’s communities increase the amount of materials recovered through recycling and promote economic growth in the Commonwealth through job creation and market expansion.

Recycling programs are critical to protecting our environment and every can, bottle and cardboard box adds up. Reading’s recycling program has been very successful, and I’m happy the state has recognized the community’s efforts to conserve and reuse. These funds will only improve our recycling program.

Three grants for youth programs in Berks County

I am pleased to announce the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, of which I am a board member, has approved \$376,000 in grants for youth crime and substance abuse prevention programs in Berks County.

These grants will be used to work with at-risk youth and their families to help them avoid alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse, as well as a life of crime. Anything we can do to work with these kids to get them on the right path is a good investment in their future and in the overall betterment of the community.

- Berks County has been selected as the demonstration site of the Georgetown University Juvenile Justice System Improvement Project, which is aimed at creating more effective juvenile justice programs.
- The Council on Chemical Abuse in Berks County was awarded \$89,981 to expand its Life Skills Training Program within the Reading School District.
- The Berks County Counseling Center was awarded \$111,225 to expand its Strengthening Families Program over a two-year period to families with children between the ages of 10 and 14.

You can read more about these projects on my website, www.pahouse.com/Caltagirone.

Frequently Asked Questions

The doors at my Reading constituent service office are always open for constituent questions and concerns. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions and concerns we hear:

I didn't receive my vehicle registration or camera card from PennDOT. What should I do?

Please call my office and we can check on that for you, along with any other PennDOT issues or questions you may have.

I need help with filling out my Property Tax/Rent Rebate application form.

Staff in my office can help you obtain and complete your Property Tax/Rent Rebate application. Call or stop by.

I can't get in touch with the Unemployment Compensation Service Center.

Call my office and we can put in a legislative request for someone from that office to call you back. We can also help with other Unemployment Compensation issues.

I just found out I have unclaimed property listed with the Pennsylvania Treasurer's Office.

You can call the state Treasurer's Office of Unclaimed Property Bureau toll-free at 1-800-222-2046 and they will send you a claim form, or you can visit its website at www.patreasury.org. If you need assistance or would like us to send in your claim form for you, please feel free to stop by or call my office.

I get telemarketing calls that I do not want. What can I do about it?

You can have your name added to the Pennsylvania Do Not Call Registry by calling 1-888-777-3406. Or you can visit www.nocallsplease.com and click on the free enrollment form option.

Where can I get an application for a disability parking placard?

I have disability parking placard applications available at my office. Once completed, we can send in the application for you.

How do I apply for a birth certificate?

You can apply online at the Pennsylvania Department of Health website at www.portal.health.state.pa.us. Click on the link for birth and death certificates on the left side. Or you can visit my office and we can send in the request for you.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program DEADLINE TO APPLY EXTENDED!

ATTENTION SENIORS: The deadline to apply for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended to Dec. 31.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program provides qualifying senior citizens and other Pennsylvania residents with rebates of as much as \$650 based on property taxes or rent paid the previous year. More than 603,000 Pennsylvania homeowners and renters received rebates last year based on the property taxes or rent they paid in 2009.

It is open to Pennsylvania residents 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and people 18 or older who have a permanent disability. The income limit to qualify is \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters; only half of Social Security and federal Tier 1 Railroad Retirement benefits need to be counted as income when applying.

Qualifying seniors and other residents must apply for a 2010 property tax or rent rebate by Dec. 31. Residents who received a rebate last year already should have received a rebate form in the mail.

Applications for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program are available in my constituent service office – please stop by if you'd like assistance filling out the forms.

Sign up for email updates!

Please visit my website, www.pahouse.com/Caltagirone to sign up for e-alerts on important information, including legislation being considered in Harrisburg and local community events.

LIHEAP opens Nov. 1; state mailing applications early

Fall is here, and with that comes the cold weather. The state has begun mailing out applications for Pennsylvania's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to those who received LIHEAP assistance last year.

If you receive an application in the mail in the next few weeks, please consider applying now. Because of funding cuts, less money is expected to be available for the program, so I urge you to apply. Only those receiving an application may apply early; however, everyone will be able to apply when LIHEAP officially opens Nov. 1.

LIHEAP helps limited-income families pay their heating bills through home energy assistance grants and crisis grants. Cash grants are awarded based on household income, family size, type of heating fuel and region. A family of four with an annual income of up to \$33,525 can qualify for assistance.

Crisis grants will be available Jan. 3, but the program will accept crisis applications early. Crisis grants are provided in the event of a heating emergency, including broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced, lack of fuel, termination of utility service or danger of being without fuel or of having utility service terminated. In most counties, assistance with home heating crisis situations is available 24 hours a day.

For more information on LIHEAP, call my office at (610) 376-1529.

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THOMAS CALTAGIRONE

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Inside this issue:

- Legislative Update
- State funding for local projects
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate, LIHEAP and More!

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Attention flood victims!

Were you one of the thousands of Pennsylvanian residents whose home or business was damaged in the recent storms and flooding?

The federal government has added Berks County to the list of counties that may apply for assistance from damages incurred during Tropical Storm Lee.

This assistance applies to homeowners and renters, as well as businesses, and is funded largely by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

To register for assistance, call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). Applicants who have a speech disability or hearing loss and use TTY should call 1-800-462-7585. Operators assist callers seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Register online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov and follow the screen prompts. More information is also available on the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency website, www.pema.state.pa.us.