



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Joseph F. Brennan

133rd LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Brennan to introduce bill to aid disabled veterans

I recently announced plans to introduce legislation that would classify disabled veterans as minorities for the sole purpose of granting them the same status and benefits as racial and gender minorities to secure state contracts.

The United States military defends us by combating actual and perceived threats. Our brave soldiers are returning from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan – many disabled – having protected us from the reality of terrorism. I believe this legislation will show appreciation to the courageous men and woman who risked their lives so that we can continue to live under the freedoms allowed by the United States Constitution.

This bill would grant disabled veterans the benefits awarded to members of the Bureau of Women and Minority Business Opportunities when bidding for state contracts. Additionally, it allows for another minority status outside racial and gender disadvantaged groups.



In December, Rep. Brennan hosted a ceremony to unveil the Fred B. Rooney Highway, a portion of Route 378 from Route 22 to the Hill to Hill Bridge, renamed to honor former Congressman Rooney, also pictured.

Brennan reintroduced bill to expand PACE/PACENET eligibility

Last year, I reintroduced legislation that would increase eligibility for the PACE and PACENET prescription assistance programs for seniors.

With the poor state of our current national economy and the continued rising costs of prescription drugs, I believe we owe it to our senior citizens to make certain that prescription assistance is available to all those in need.

Under current law, senior citizens and others applying for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program can exclude

half of their Social Security or federal railroad retirement Tier 1 benefits from their income calculation. However, seniors applying for prescription assistance under PACE or PACENET must count all of their income. Both programs are funded by the state lottery.

My bill would allow seniors applying for PACE and PACENET to exclude a portion of their Social Security or federal railroad retirement income, just as with the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

In addition, the bill would allow federal retirees who are ineligible to receive Social Security benefits to exclude half of their federal retirement benefits when applying for PACE and PACENET, beginning with the 2009 income year. Legislation already has been introduced in the House to allow this same exclusion for federal retirees applying for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program if they are ineligible for Social Security benefits.

The bill awaits a vote before the full House.

The end of electric rate caps

As I'm sure you are aware, rate caps came off PPL's electric generating rates on Jan. 1. This section explains why the caps came off and what you can do.

A law passed in 1996, years before I took office, deregulated the supply of electricity in Pennsylvania with the goal of creating competition and

driving down prices. The deregulation law capped rates at 1996 levels for a number of years while utilities recovered their infrastructure costs incurred before the transition. Those rate caps are now expiring.

I do not believe rate caps should expire at this time, and have supported

legislation to extend them.

The good news is that the deregulation law allows consumers to choose which company generates the electricity they use and competition has worked in other parts of the state to lower utility bills below what they were when rate caps were in place.

Shopping for electricity: Use caution

Many current PPL customers are being contacted by electricity companies offering to supply their electricity. If you decide you want to switch your energy supplier, make sure you sign up with a licensed provider. For the most up-to-date information on licensed suppliers and their prices, check the Office of Consumer Advocate Web site at www.oca.state.pa.us or call toll free 1-800-684-6560. Detailed shopping guides also are available through the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission at www.puc.state.pa.us or PPL Electric Utilities at www.pplelectric.com.

What to do if you decide to switch suppliers:

- Contact the supplier you've chosen, and tell them you'd like to switch. They'll send you a new contract.
- Ask the supplier what other steps you need to take to make the switch.
- Once you select a new supplier, that supplier will contact your current supplier to start the enrollment process. You may receive a notice from the current supplier confirming your change.

What happens if I switch suppliers?

If you choose an alternative supplier, you will continue to receive your monthly electric bill from PPL, which will contain all charges. While a new company will be generating the electricity you use, PPL will continue to serve as the company that distributes the electricity to your home, maintains power lines, provides customer service and responds to emergencies.

By shopping for the best price on electricity generation, you are contributing to the generation of competition in the marketplace.

New energy rebate program coming soon

The state soon will start a rebate program to help residents replace older, inefficient appliances with new, nonelectric ENERGY STAR® qualified and ultra-efficient appliances.

Residents can "reserve" rebates when the program begins in April. The program ends when funds are depleted.

Eligible products include:

- Gas storage water heaters
 - Gas tankless water heaters
 - Oil furnaces
 - Gas furnaces
 - Oil boilers
 - Gas boilers
- * Please recycle old appliances.

Information about the state rebate program will be available at www.dep.state.pa.us.

Reputable home improvement contractors now registered online

Reputable contractors in Lehigh and Northampton counties now have another way to make sure their good names aren't ruined by fly-by-night operators who scam homeowners out of their money.

The Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act requires ALL contractors to register with the state attorney general. The registration information also is available to homeowners online by visiting www.attorneygeneral.gov and clicking on the "consumers" tab, and via a toll-free number, 1-888-520-6680.

For more help, visit the Residential Consumer's Electric Shopping Guide on my legislative Web site, www.pahouse.com/Brennan.

Save the date: Senior Fair - April 30

Please join me from 9 a.m. to noon on Friday, April 30 at my annual senior fair. This free event will feature more than 40 vendors, as well as health screenings and representatives from state and local health agencies. Stop in for complimentary refreshments and door prizes.



The event again will be held at the East Side Youth Center, 1140 E. Clair St., Allentown. For more information, please contact one of my offices at 610-882-1510 (Bethlehem) or 610-266-1470 (Catasauqua).

LIHEAP deadline extended, cash grants increased

Pennsylvania's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, better known as LIHEAP, has increased its cash grant amounts by \$100 and extended the program through April 2 because the state has efficiently managed the program.

Under the changes, LIHEAP's closing date has been extended from March 15 to April 2. The Department of Public Welfare, which administers the program, expects this change will allow an additional 80,000 households to receive help paying their heating bills this winter.

DPW also expects cash grants to average \$326. Additional information pertaining to income eligibility guidelines, as well as LIHEAP applications, may be obtained by contacting your county assistance office or visiting www.compass.state.pa.us. You may also call the governor's "Stay Warm PA" toll-free hotline at 1-866-550-4355 or visit my Web site at www.pahouse.com/Brennan.

You also may call your local county assistance office for details: Lehigh County Assistance Office, 610-821-6509; Northampton County Assistance Office, 610-250-1785.

Brennan introduces consumer protection bill to regulate rent-to-own centers

Since the rent-to-own industry began in the 1960s, its sales tactics and interest rates have come under scrutiny at both the state and local level. Many centers charge interest rates that average 100 percent, and they often fail to disclose those rates.

I recently introduced a bill, H.B. 2247, that would toughen rental disclosure guidelines to benefit consumers.

Under the legislation, rent-to-own centers would be mandated to:

- Reveal all fees in the original rental/purchase agreement;
- Provide statements outlining a consumer's right to terminate an agreement without charging additional fees

- not previously outlined in the original rental contract as long as the property is returned in good condition;
- Provide account statements to a customer upon request without an extra charge; and
- Follow the interest rate cap in Pennsylvania law that prohibits charging more than 25 percent interest.

Centers that knowingly fail to disclose all fees or follow state law could face a class C misdemeanor and be fined up to \$1,000.

My legislation would help protect consumers who utilize rent-to-own centers from unknowingly entering into contracts which they cannot meet.

Brennan supports ban on texting, cell phone use while driving

The state House recently passed a measure that would ban text-messaging and the use of hand-held cell phones while driving in Pennsylvania.

House Bill 2070 would make it a primary offense for drivers to use hand-held mobile phones, smart phones, personal digital assistants or portable computers while their vehicle is in motion. The use of hands-free devices still would be permissible.

Making a hand-held mobile phone call or texting while driving would be punishable by a \$50 fine. That fine would be doubled to \$100 if the offense was committed in a school zone, active construction zone, highway safety corridor or emergency response area. It would not be illegal to call 9-1-1 and for emergency responders performing official duties.

Studies from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Virginia Tech, Carnegie Mellon and the University of Utah all have shown that drivers who talk on their cell phones are three to four times more likely to be involved in a crash. According to Pennsylvania Department of Transportation statistics, since 2003, there have been only 397 accidents in Pennsylvania where hands-free phones were a contributing factor, while 6,877 accidents listed hand-held phones as a contributing factor.

The National Safety Council, a research and advocacy group, estimates that 200,000 crashes of all types on U.S. roads are caused by drivers who are texting.

The bill awaits action by the state Senate.



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Here to serve you!

Please feel free to stop by any of my offices, or give my staff a call if they can help you with any government-related question or problem you may have. Please also feel free to stop by to visit or pick up valuable information.

7 W. Fourth St.
Bethlehem, PA 18015
(610) 882-1510

8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m., Monday through Friday

123 Bridge St.
Catasauqua, PA 18032
(610) 266-1470

8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday

WWW.PAHOUSE.COM/BRENNAN

IMPORTANT Local Agency Numbers:

Lehigh County District Attorney	(610) 782-3100
Northampton County District Attorney	(610) 559-3020
Crime Victims Council of Lehigh Valley	(610) 437-6610
Turning Point of Lehigh Valley, Inc. 24-Hour Helpline	(610) 437-3369
24-Hour Helpline	1-877-438-4957
Do Not Call Hotline	1-888-777-3406
PACE/PACENET	1-800-225-PACE (7223)
AARP – Employment Center	(610) 865-3002
Social Security Administration	
Allentown.....	(610) 433-3237
Bethlehem.....	(610) 691-2451
CACLV – Community Action Committee Lehigh Valley	(610) 691-5620
Career Link	(610) 437-5627
Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Lehigh Valley	(610) 821-4011
Victim/Witness Assistance Program	
Lehigh County.....	(610) 782-3890
Northampton County.....	(610) 559-3711
MADD – Mothers Against Drunk Driving	(610) 814-6233
LIHEAP	
Lehigh County.....	(610) 821-6509
Northampton County.....	(610) 250-1785
PA Department of Revenue – Bethlehem office	(610) 861-2000
Internal Revenue Service – Bethlehem Office.....	(610) 865-8208
U.S. Representative Charles Dent	(610) 861-9734
PA Attorney General’s Office – Allentown office	(610) 821-6690
Lehigh County Government Center.....	(610) 782-3000
Northampton County Government Center.....	(610) 559-3000
Lehigh County Housing Authority	(610) 433-2312
Northampton County Housing Authority	(610) 759-8488
Second Harvest Food Bank.....	(610) 434-0875
Valley Wide Help	
Allentown.....	(610) 435-7111
Bethlehem.....	(610) 691-8711