



# State Representative Brendan F. Boyle

170th Legislative District

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## Boyle's effort to expand survivor benefits becomes law

I am pleased to report that my colleagues in the House and Senate passed, and the governor has signed, legislation that increases survivor benefits in Pennsylvania for the families of police and emergency services personnel who die in the line of duty.

Before this new law, the families of police officers, firefighters and emergency personnel killed in the line of duty were entitled to survivor benefits that amount to just a portion of their full salary. This sub-par level of benefits often left these families struggling to make ends meet while also trying to deal with the loss of their loved one.

Under the legislation (H.B. 1938) I proposed in July, the surviving spouse of a paid police officer, firefighter, ambulance service or rescue squad member who dies in the line of duty will receive a monthly benefit. The benefit will be equal to the first responder's monthly salary at the time of death, and will increase annually based on the Consumer Price Index. If there is no surviving spouse, the benefits would go to any surviving children.

Simply put, this change should allow families of fallen first responders to maintain the same standard of living and quality of life they experienced before their loved one died in the line of duty.

I originally introduced my legislation in July, which was approved by the House Finance Committee and awaited a vote by the full House. In early October, we in the House passed the Senate version of my bill (S.B. 369), which the governor then signed into law.



Rep. Boyle (far left) watches Gov. Rendell sign into law a survivor's benefits expansion Boyle proposed in the state House.

By enacting this law, we're trying to make sure the families of fallen officers and emergency personnel know that Pennsylvania is grateful for their loved one's sacrifice and that we honor their family's loss. By making sure survivor benefits are adequate, we can at least make sure families can survive financially while dealing with their incredible loss.

## Protecting pensions

In September, my House colleagues and I successfully fought against proposed changes to the pensions of city workers, police officers, and firefighters.

House Bill 1828 was originally designed by the House only to firm up Philadelphia's underfunded pension system and stave off the city's financial collapse. However, the state Senate later made serious changes to the bill that would have created new rules for 3,100 municipal pension systems across Pennsylvania. These changes would have been very damaging to the pensions of our city workers.

My colleagues and I were seriously concerned by the new version, as were our city's police and firefighters, the attorney general and municipal officials. When the bill returned to the House, we successfully stripped the legislation of the unwelcome language, and the governor signed it into law.

The new law provides critical pension relief to thousands of municipalities across Pennsylvania, including here in our community, by allowing them to recover from the losses that occurred when the financial markets collapsed.



Rep. Boyle speaks at the state Capitol during an event recognizing Workers Memorial Day.

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## Boyle, House remove taxes on arts, cultural events, volunteer firefighters from budget agreement

While trying to find new revenue sources to fill the gap during the late stages of the budget agreement, there were some tax proposals that raised a great deal of opposition – both in the House and in the public at-large.

One major point of contention that I helped fight off was a tax on small games of chance, which many local volunteer fire companies, nonprofits, and veterans' organizations rely on for raising funds. There was also a well-publicized tax proposed on tickets to arts and cultural events, including museums and performing arts venues. Taxes on volunteers and the arts are not the best way to raise revenue for the state budget. These were ill-conceived measures that I spoke out against on the House floor. They would have put the interests of our communities and environment behind the interests of well-funded groups with well-connected lobbyists.

My colleagues and I joined together and fought these tax proposals, successfully eliminating them from the final state budget plan. We also restored \$11 million in funding for the arts, which the Senate wanted to cut. No matter how late the budget was, the delay never warranted making bad policy choices in the name of expediency.

## New budget increases state education funding during economic downturn

Even though many tough choices needed to be made during the budget process, I felt that one area where we could not compromise was education.

My House colleagues and I felt it was important to continue our progress toward Pennsylvania's commitment to the school funding formula enacted by the General Assembly last year, and renew our commitment to programs proven to boost student achievement. During budget negotiations, I opposed drastic state funding cuts to early education and other programs that Senate Republicans were proposing. These cuts would have shortchanged our children and compromised our ability to prepare them for the workforce needs of tomorrow.

Thankfully, the budget includes a \$300 million increase in the state's funding for basic education, which will help prevent property tax increases. Funding for Pre-K Counts and Accountability Block Grants will allow the continuation of these early-education programs proven to help kids learn. Pre-K Counts brings quality half-day and full-day pre-kindergarten to disadvantaged children across Pennsylvania. House Democrats held the line to protect this important program by funding it at \$86.4 million.

Accountability Block Grants fund vital programs in school districts, such as full-day kindergarten and class size reduction. House Democrats worked to fund this program at \$5.4 million more than the proposal Senate Republicans put forth.

## College credit legislation enacted as part of budget

I'm happy to report that the state budget includes a new measure that doubles the number of credit hours community college students can transfer to state-owned universities.

The Pennsylvania Statewide Credit Transfer System has been saving community college students from paying additional tuition costs for credits that would not have previously transferred to our state universities. This new law that doubles from 30 to 60 the number of transferable credits from a community college to a state university will help students maximize their credits and open the door of higher education to many struggling families, especially during these tough economic times.

For more information about the credit transfer system, residents can visit the PA TRAC Web site at [www.patrac.org](http://www.patrac.org). The site allows students to easily find which credit hours can transfer to another college.



*Rep. Boyle (at right) talks with a participant during his 2009 senior fair at the CORA Services Building in Philadelphia. Many residents visited the fair to obtain free help and information from organizations that offer services to Pennsylvania's seniors and their families.*

## Unemployment benefits extended for thousands of Pennsylvania workers

In August, the legislature passed a law I supported (Act 30 of 2009) that extends unemployment benefits to out-of-work Pennsylvanians for an additional seven weeks.

This helps more than 6,000 people in Philadelphia and Montgomery County who have exhausted their unemployment benefits. The law temporarily changes the mechanism Pennsylvania uses to trigger extended unemployment benefits, allowing the state to draw on \$145 million in federal stimulus money to offer seven weeks of additional emergency unemployment benefits. This is in addition to other federal extensions already approved or pending approval by Congress.

The state's toll-free number, where you can file a claim or have your unemployment compensation questions answered, is 1-888-313-7284.

## Home heating assistance available

If you have trouble paying your winter heating bills, the Pennsylvania Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) can help.

LIHEAP provides cash grants to help low-income families heat their homes, as well as crisis grants for heating emergencies. The program began taking applications for cash grants on Nov. 2; crisis grant applications will be taken starting Jan. 4. A family of four with an annual income of up to \$33,075 can qualify for assistance.

You can obtain an application by calling the Philadelphia County Assistance Office. The number is 215-560-1583. Applications are also available through local utility companies, community service agencies and on the state Department of Public Welfare's Web site: <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/servicesprograms/liheap/>. As always, please contact my office with questions about this, or any state-related issue. LIHEAP runs through March 15.

## Deadline for Property Tax/Rent Rebate extended to Dec. 31

Pennsylvania has extended the deadline for senior citizens and other eligible residents to apply for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program until Dec. 31.

Under the program, senior citizens and other eligible homeowners and renters can apply for a rebate of up to \$650 on their 2008 property taxes or rent. The program is open to senior citizens 65 or older, widows or widowers 50 or older, and residents 18 or older with a permanent disability. The income limit for homeowners is \$35,000; the income limit for renters is \$15,000. Residents only have to include half of their Social Security or federal railroad retirement Tier I benefits when calculating income.

Information and applications are available by contacting my office, visiting [www.PaPropertyTaxRelief.com](http://www.PaPropertyTaxRelief.com), or calling toll free 1-888-222-9190.

## New Post-9/11 GI Bill now available to veterans

The new Post-9/11 GI Bill provides comprehensive in-state education benefits to eligible veterans and service members who served at least 90 days after Sept. 11, 2001.

Benefits include in-state, undergraduate tuition and fees at public institutions, plus a housing allowance and a stipend for books and supplies. The level of benefits range from 40 percent to 100 percent, depending upon the length of service after Sept. 11, 2001.

For example, to receive 100 percent of the benefit, a veteran must have served a total of 36 months of active duty service, or have been discharged for a service-related disability after at least 30 days of continuous service. For more information on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, a detailed breakdown of the benefits, and to apply, visit [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov) or contact my office for assistance.



*Rep. Boyle addresses the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police survivors' luncheon, where he was honored to served as the keynote speaker.*



State Representative  
**Brendan F.  
Boyle**

## Constituent Service Offices

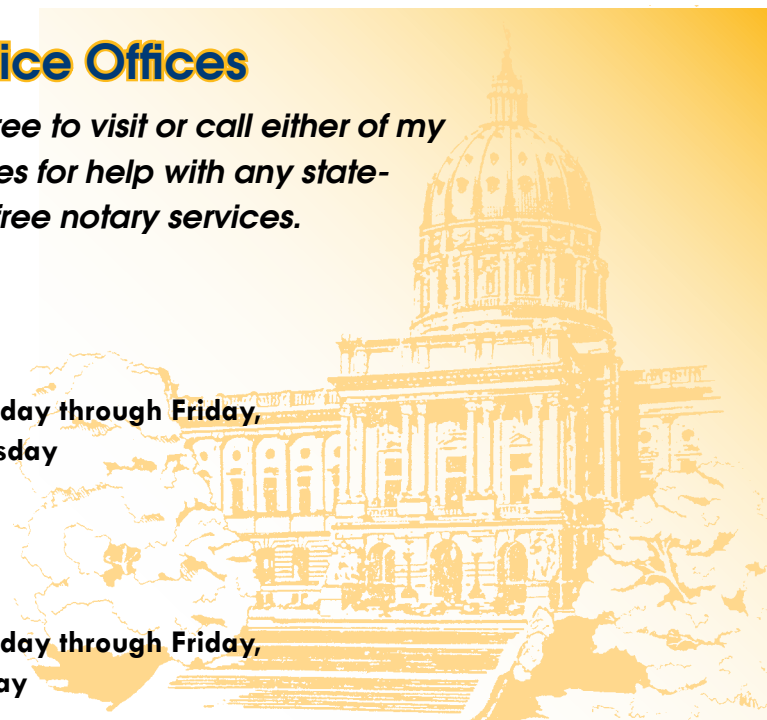
*As always, please feel free to visit or call either of my constituent service offices for help with any state-related issue as well as free notary services.*

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open until 8 p.m. on Thursday



## Protect your home against rising energy costs

As many of you know, rate caps on electricity will be expiring next year, and as such, we should all expect to see our PECO bills increase. While the exact rate of increase is not yet known, there are simple steps we can all take to lower electricity bills by reducing our usage.

### WINTERIZE YOUR HOME:

Make sure you have weather stripping on doors and windows, and if you have a drafty window, try installing a heavy curtain to help insulate the room.

Wrap your hot water heater in an insulated blanket.

Set your thermostat between 66 degrees and 68 degrees in the winter.

### CONSERVE ENERGY:

Turn off and unplug appliances that are not in use.

Make sure to unplug cell-phone and other chargers when not charging the device.

Turn off lights in areas of the home you are not using.

In this economy, no one wants to hear about increases in prices. But if you take action to reduce the amount of energy you use, you can keep utility bills under control. For more tips on how to save on your energy bills this winter, visit [www.turnsealsave.org](http://www.turnsealsave.org).