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State Representative • 179th Legislative District
Tony Payton, Jr.

Spring Report 2011



Graffiti is ugly and can be found just about everywhere: abandoned businesses and homes, bridge overpasses, school property, and community gathering spots.

It is vandalism, it is against the law, and it impedes our efforts to clean up our city and increase safety.

I am supporting legislation to better deal with graffiti offenses and deter offenders from vandalizing property in the future by giving adult and juvenile courts more effective and appropriate resources to punish offenders.

The legislation would allow courts to require both juvenile and adult graffiti offenders to complete a period of supervised community service, including the repair or restoration of any damaged property. If any damaged property is not repaired or restored by the offender, the offender would be required to pay restitution in an amount that would ensure the property was repaired or restored.

An offender could also be ordered to pay a fine in an amount the court believes necessary to prevent the offender from defacing property in the future.

I have worked with many community members to make Frankford, Hunting Park, Olney, Feltonville, and Oxford Circle a more beautiful and safe place to live. This legislation would complement our efforts and more effectively deal with problematic vandals who deface local property.

Payton continuing to 'REACH' for affordable college education

Is your child nearing high school graduation and touring college campuses? Higher education is an investment that requires some financial planning and thought, especially in tough budget years like this one. You may have read about Gov. Corbett's proposed budget cuts for state-related universities this year, and are worried about how that will affect you or your child's tuition costs.

I am deeply concerned about the rising costs and expenses associated with college education. I want to make higher education more accessible and affordable for Pennsylvania students because I believe no gifted student should be turned away from college because of cost. I also believe it is in the best interest of our state to help students become successful and contributive tax-paying citizens of this Commonwealth.

I have reintroduced my legislation to create the Reliable Educational Assistance for College Hopefuls, also known as REACH. The proposal would create an innovative program to provide financial support to every exceptional high school student living in Pennsylvania.

The REACH Scholarship would provide a full scholarship, covering tuition and fees, to all high school students, regardless of economic background, gender, race and/or religious affiliation. Every public, private and parochial school student who meets the academic base criteria would be eligible for the REACH Scholarship to be used at one of the Commonwealth's institutions of higher learning.

Fighting back on education cuts

While my REACH proposal has received bipartisan support, we are facing unprecedented attacks on higher education: Gov. Corbett has proposed cutting state funding for higher education by 50 percent (see page 2).

I remain committed to making college affordable, and in light of tough economic times, have taken a different approach to see that my REACH proposal is enacted.

I am working with my colleagues to also introduce a package of smaller bills that would award a REACH scholarship based on a college major. The program benefits and guidelines would be the same as the omnibus REACH bill, but focus on specific student needs in the hopes that some of the proposals could be approved individually.

Bills have been introduced or are being prepared now to grant the REACH Scholarship for:

- Community College attendees (H.B. 890)
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) majors (H.B. 891)
- Education Majors (to be introduced)
- Business Majors (to be introduced)
- Arts and Culture Majors (to be introduced)



Because each smaller REACH bill would only cost \$25 million to fund, I am optimistic we can implement some of the scholarships to help make college more affordable, and ultimately increase our tax base in Pennsylvania with college professionals working in growing careers.

Consolidating 911 centers could save millions in tax dollars

I have introduced legislation (H.B. 1020) to consolidate the state's emergency 911 call centers and make available millions in tax dollars for more effective state programs.

The 911 centers are funded through the Emergency Services Fund, which includes fees collected from every wireless service customer, funds appropriated by the General Assembly and funds from private or public sources. Pennsylvania collects more fees for this service than any other state in the nation.

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency reports that if the 911 centers were consolidated, they could save taxpayers as much as \$100 million annually and eliminate massive inefficiencies identified within Pennsylvania's 69 call centers.

For example, while the Philadelphia County call center handles almost 8,000 calls a day, at a cost of \$12 per call, other counties average only 5 calls a day at a cost of nearly \$200 per call. The highest cost per call is currently in Sullivan County, at \$326.

Clearly, allowing each county to have its own 911 call center and paid staff, regardless of demand, is wasteful and expensive.

My bill would have PEMA study how to effectively reduce the size of our emergency call center footprint without diminishing public safety. Doing so would secure adequate funding for an improved 911 system, while providing revenue for other programs that will help grow our tax base.

It is my hope that funding that is freed up from the savings of a statewide consolidation could be used to pay for programs that expand the tax base, such as my REACH scholarship legislation, or other programs that attract and retain STEM-related industries (science, technology, engineering and mathematics education) and employment opportunities.

We all know Pennsylvania is again facing a difficult budget year. Before we cut any essential programs in the state budget, the legislature should address any wasteful and unnecessary government spending.

My 911 consolidation proposal is a step toward that reform and more responsible government.

Corbett's budget eliminates funding for vital health programs

Gov. Corbett's budget contains more bad news for Pennsylvanians. After canceling health insurance coverage for 41,000 Pennsylvanians in the state's adultBasic program last month, he now wants to cut state funding for hospitals by \$150 million.

This means that hospitals like Aria Health, Friends and Temple also will lose out on \$183 million in federal matching funds, making it even harder for hospitals to serve the community.

Corbett's budget also eliminates funding for:

- Burn centers, critical care access, trauma centers and acute care hospitals.
- Programs that help those who are suffering from debilitating illnesses, such as cancer, diabetes, tuberculosis, lupus and Tourette's syndrome.
- State-related academic medical centers which are often the last possible option for low-income families to receive urgent health care.
- Obstetric and neonatal services, as well as newborn hearing screening.
- Health care clinics, which are often the only option for low-income people to receive affordable basic health care.
- Regional poison control centers.
- Autism services for more than 25,000 Pennsylvanians now living with autism.

These cuts will jeopardize our hospitals' ability to provide life-saving treatment for the sick, elderly and critically injured and endanger thousands of jobs in our health care facilities.



Rep. Payton joined students, parents and teachers who came to the state Capitol for the NAACP Youth March for Education in protest of Gov. Corbett's proposed budget cuts to education funding.

Gov. Corbett's attack on education will hurt Pa. families

Gov. Corbett is proposing devastating cuts for public and higher education in his 2011-12 state budget plan. He wants to reduce funding for public education in grades K-12 by **\$1 billion**.

Under that plan, Philadelphia School District funding will be cut by \$297.8 million, or 23.5 percent. The average household can expect \$500 in property tax increases and/or program cuts.

Corbett also ELIMINATED state support for grants that help pay for full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes, tutoring, pre-k learning and other programs that have been proven to help kids succeed.

College students should also be aware: Corbett's budget proposal cuts funding for Pennsylvania's public colleges and universities by 50 percent.

This drastic cut will mean dramatic tuition increases at Pennsylvania's state-system and state-related universities, completely pricing many students out of higher education or saddling them and their families with huge debts once they graduate.

These cuts would also jeopardize the economic momentum generated by our colleges and universities. They create many health-care and research jobs, educate our future workforce and pour billions into our state's economy.

You can ask Gov. Corbett and other legislative leaders to restore funding for basic and higher education by visiting www.pahouse.com and checking out the Action Center, which contains additional information on the devastating budget cuts.

Federal health care reform is working

We recently marked the one-year anniversary of the signing of the federal health-care reform law. **Millions of Pennsylvanians are already benefitting** from it, even though the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act doesn't fully go into effect until 2014:

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

- Most young adults can stay on their parents' family plan until they turn 26. It doesn't matter whether you're married, living with your parents, in school, or financially independent. More than **89,000 young people** have been able to stay on their parents' health insurance thanks to this new provision.
- Most health plans can no longer deny coverage to children younger than 19 because of pre-existing conditions.
- Medical Assistance may be an alternative while a job search is under way. Information is available through the Department of Public Welfare's toll-free number (1-800-692-7462).

FOR SENIORS

- **216,000+ seniors** have received a rebate check for their prescription drugs.
- **2.2 million seniors** now have access to free preventive health services.

FOR SMALL BUSINESS

- **160,000 small businesses** are now eligible for a tax credit to fund their employee health insurance.

PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS AND PREVENTATIVE CARE

- If you have been uninsured because of a pre-existing condition, you may be eligible to join the Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan. More than **5,000 Pennsylvanians with a pre-existing condition** who could not find health coverage now have a coverage option. (See related box below)

- If you are in a new insurance plan, insurance companies cannot charge you a deductible or copayment for recommended preventive services, like flu shots and other immunizations.
- Insurance companies are prohibited from capping the dollar amount of care you can receive in a lifetime, or dropping your coverage due to a mistake on your application when you get sick.

Other benefits include preventing your health insurance from being canceled unfairly, allowing you to select your own primary care physician, and prohibiting your health provider from requiring preauthorization for emergency services.

More information about these new provisions is available at www.HealthCare.gov. Anyone can visit HealthCare.gov today and access a personalized list of private insurance plans, public programs and community services that are available to you.

AFFORDABLE CARE IS WORKING

Unfortunately, Gov. Corbett and Republicans in the state legislature are trying to keep Pennsylvanians from these benefits. As attorney general, the governor sued to block the health-care reform law, and now Republicans in the state House are moving legislation that would prohibit state officials from letting it go into effect in Pennsylvania.

But facts are facts: The real story is that the Affordable Care Act is already working for millions of Pennsylvania residents and small businesses, and we must allow the law to fully take effect.

I am currently collecting stories on how the federal Affordable Care Act has helped people right here in Philadelphia. If you have a story to share, please visit my website, www.pahouse.com/Payton to submit it.

INSURING PENNSYLVANIANS WITH PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

If you are one of the many Pennsylvanians who have been unable to secure health-care coverage due to a pre-existing condition, PA Fair Care may be able to help.

PA Fair Care is a temporary state program that offers low-cost insurance to qualifying individuals with pre-existing conditions until federal health insurance reform takes effect in 2014.

Applications are now being accepted for June 1 enrollment.

Applications can be completed online at www.PAFairCare.com. Those without Internet access may apply with assistance from the toll-free helpline 1-888-767-7015 (TTY 1-888-767-7018) from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Benefits include preventive care, physician services, diagnostic testing, hospitalization, mental health services and prescriptions. The cost to enrollees is a subsidized premium of \$283.20 a month.

To be eligible for PA Fair Care, applicants must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or lawful resident
- Be a Pennsylvania resident
- Have a pre-existing health condition
- Be uninsured for the previous six months

If you're like me and are one of the millions of Pennsylvanians who suffer from a pre-existing condition such as asthma, you know how critical it is to have quick access to health care. This program may help you. Please contact my constituent service office at 215-744-7901 if you would like to know more or would like assistance applying.

Electric rate caps expired – what's next?

In 2011, caps expired on electric rates established by a 1996 law deregulating the generation of electricity. PECO customers throughout southeastern Pennsylvania now have the opportunity to do some comparison shopping and select the supplier of their choice. It is important to note that PECO will continue to deliver electricity to your home, regardless of which supplier you select.

To help you choose the supplier that best meets your needs, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission has established the PA Power Switch website, www.papowerswitch.com, to provide impartial information to residential, commercial and industrial customers.

While you do not have to change your supplier, it may be worth visiting PA Power Switch to see the options available to you.



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Raising awareness about child abuse



From left – Adult survivor Rhett Hackett, Children’s Alliance Executive Director Chris Kirchner, Rep. Payton and Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams speak out against child abuse.

Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month is observed in April to raise awareness about children who are victims of sexual abuse. I joined with other elected officials, community leaders and the Philadelphia’s Children Alliance to speak out against this terrible crime and to show my support for victims.

While it’s important to raise awareness during April, we must not forget that every day in neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia, families are impacted by child sexual abuse. We must break the silence that allows sexual abusers to continue victimizing children and help children who are suffering from this horrible abuse recover and heal.

Sign up for e-mail updates!

Sign up to receive e-mail alerts about my progress in Harrisburg and local events going on in the district. Visit my website at www.pahouse.com/Payton, click “Contact Me” and fill out the form. You also can select what topics you’d like to hear about.

We need your help! Report run down playgrounds

Please help me keep our community playgrounds a clean, safe and fun place for our children to play. If you know of a playground in the 179th District that needs a community cleanup effort, please contact my constituent service office at 215-744-7901.

I’ll be organizing clean ups and looking for volunteers over the next few months, so please stay tuned for future announcements.



Children join in a community cleanup of the Ziehler Playground at Broad and Olney streets in Olney.