



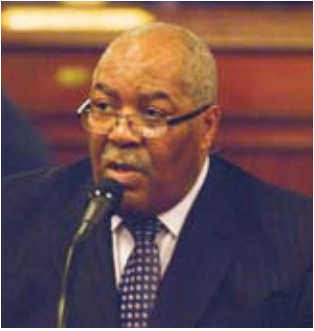
State Representative  
**W. CURTIS THOMAS**  
181<sup>ST</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



**2010 ANNUAL REPORT:**  
CELEBRATING OVER 20 YEARS OF  
PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST



# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SERVICE



Since 1989, I have represented the people of the 181st Legislative District in the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The boundaries of our district have changed three times during the decades due to reapportionment, growing our population from 52,000 to approximately 60,000. When I first took office, the district reached south and included Chinatown, Penn's Landing and South Street. Now, the district stretches north and includes parts of Olney, Feltonville and Nicetown-Tioga. Although the size and shape of our district have changed over the years, the 181st continues to be unique with diverse communities that resemble the United Nations.

In my first term, I founded the **Legislative Housing Caucus** to address affordable housing issues facing Pennsylvanians. The West Poplar area of the district was one of the most crime-ridden, deteriorated communities in the city. People were being murdered in Cambridge Plaza and the surrounding area as a result of the drug wars that raged in the neighborhood. Over the years, I have assisted in transforming that community by securing millions for new housing development and housing rehabilitation in the district. The demolition of Cambridge Plaza and the building of the Nehemiah Homes through state and federal investment began the great transformation. Now, a community where 70 percent of the residents were renting can proudly point to 50 percent homeownership. Housing stock that was once worth \$40,000 or less is now valued at \$100,000 or more. West Poplar also boasts the highest concentration of decent, affordable housing for seniors in the city.

Education in the district has greatly improved and now includes some of the best schools in the city. Increasing the level of education of district residents is one of my priorities. My office sponsors interns each year and I have mentored many young people from the district's public housing developments including the Palmer twins, the Gillespie twins and the Johnson twins who have all graduated from college thanks to our intervention.

One who has worked to close the digital divide, I introduced legislation that created and chaired the **Information Technology Subcommittee** under the **House Intergovernmental Affairs Committee** (1995). Through my leadership, the subcommittee developed a "**Digital Excellence Blueprint**" for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. I have held many leadership positions that have increased my influence and that of our district in the Commonwealth. My appointment to the **Joint State Government Commission on Stroke Prevention** resulted in the establishment of a Stroke Trauma Center at Temple University.

I was excited to take on the position as chairman of the **House Urban Affairs Committee** in 2009. This position allows me to direct the movement of legislation on issues such as abandoned properties, landlord/tenant conduct, neighborhood improvement districts, housing and city audits that impact Philadelphia and all cities in Pennsylvania. I look forward to the diverse challenges of this chairmanship.

However, the accomplishments of which I am most proud include securing funding for the Mt. Tabor Cyber Senior Village, Nehemiah Homes and Lutheran Settlement senior housing; establishing the State Representative Awards to honor students in the district for academic excellence; leading the effort to redesign William Penn High School as a 21st Century Career and Technical Academy; establishing the 181 Public Safety Patrol at district schools; establishing the 181st Kid's Zone to provide information and services to families; assisting 20 students in getting admitted to Lincoln University and securing funding for a Parent Advocacy Program in the 181st.

We know what is needed to improve the quality of life in a community – improved educational opportunities, a combination of homeownership, rental and subsidized housing and committed, involved residents. We have stood together through good times and bad. Although our city, state and nation are facing challenging times, I am sure that with your support I will be successful in my continuing advocacy on behalf of the residents of the 181st Legislative District. I am totally committed to making our district a better place to live and work and welcome you as a partner.

**W. Curtis Thomas**  
State Representative  
181st Legislative District

### NO on Expansion of Use of Deadly Force

Rep. Thomas joined other members of the Philadelphia Legislative Delegation in voting against legislation that would have expanded the use of deadly force in Pennsylvania. The bill, which was vetoed by Governor Rendell, would have further allowed people to use deadly force without having to retreat. Presently what some call the “Castle Doctrine,” allows a person to use deadly force against an intruder into his or her home. This proposed legislation would have expanded the locations in the present law to include the porch, yard, vehicles and public locations.

The bill was opposed by the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association and police districts throughout the Commonwealth because it would have made it more difficult to try criminal defendants, including murder suspects, who could then claim “self-defense” after shooting someone. It also would make it more difficult for law-abiding citizens to file complaints against their attackers.

Thomas concurred with the D.A.s, “I stand with our district attorneys and have voted against the amended bill that would have given violent criminals a built-in defense for criminal defense attorneys to exploit.”

Thomas will continue to vote against such legislation should it come up again.

### Confronting 5th Street Violence

In response to several murders that occurred in the area, Rep. Thomas held a news conference to discuss safety initiatives for the 5th Street Business Corridor following the senseless murder of John Adams, owner of Johnny’s Top Cat Club, 5th & Ruscomb streets, who was shot on May 2 near the bar.

Thomas, who has been working with 5th Street businesses on safety and surveillance issues, was joined by a coalition of businesspeople from the 4700-5000 blocks of 5th Street. “I have been meeting with business owners of the corridor about safety measures and this recent murder underscores the need for preventive measures. This part of 5th Street is our international marketplace. It’s a jewel. Unlike other areas, there are no vacant shops. We must work together to keep it safe and promote it as a shopping destination.”

Thomas called on the business community to organize a 5th Street Business Association in order to tap into some of the resources available to assist in establishing safety initiatives. He also will be looking into bringing these same safety initiatives to other business corridors in the 181st District such as the Germantown and Lehigh and the Girard Avenue business corridors.

The club has now been revitalized into a barbershop. Thomas stressed the importance of transforming nuisance properties into assets to the community.



## Law Enforcement Summit

Rep. Thomas held a Law Enforcement Summit in an effort to bring information to the community to help them fight crime. Residents from West Poplar, Northern Liberties, Feltonville, Hunting Park and Nicetown-Tioga attended the meeting held at the St. Paul Community Center.

Law enforcement organizations that participated include the Philadelphia Police Department, Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The summit is an annual event Thomas sponsors to help residents access information to help them combat crime in their neighborhoods.



## Addressing Gun Violence

Rep. Thomas introduced several bills during the 2009-2010 legislative session that would have addressed the rampant gun violence that pervades the city of Philadelphia. **House Bill 1043** would have established the Bureau of Illegal Firearms Trafficking within the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General to monitor the selling of illegal firearms. Other legislation (**H.B. 1044**) introduced by Thomas would have allowed local governments to petition the State Police for the authority to pass local firearms regulations. He also introduced a bill (**H.B. 1045**) that would prohibit the conversion of semiautomatic guns into assault weapons.

“There’s no reason why anyone should bring a weapon with a 30-round clip into a residential area,” Thomas said.

The bills were the focus of a House Judiciary Committee hearing. However, after much discussion, they were not approved by the committee. Thomas will continue to aggressively confront the issue of gun violence until the House addresses the concerns of the residents of the city of Philadelphia who demand that something be done about straw purchases, lost and stolen guns and assault weapons.

Thomas will reintroduce the bills and thinks he will eventually garner support for H.B. 1044 in light of the fact that Commonwealth Court already has upheld the constitutionality of 37 local gun ordinances. “Right now, municipalities’ hands are tied by the Pennsylvania Uniform Firearms Law. But, I think it’s just a matter of time until my bill becomes law.”

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Bringing Home the Bacon for Local Projects

Rep. Thomas was successful in accessing funding for several projects in the 181st District through the Pennsylvania Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program for 2010-2011. Those projects include:

- \$1.5 million for the new Fresh Grocer in Progress Plaza (80 district residents referred and hired)
- \$2 million for Lutheran Settlement for Senior Program (25 full-time jobs)
- \$2.5 million for Norris Square Civic Association senior assisted living community
- \$6 million for Bridge of Hope CDC to build affordable housing, a charter school and establish a dedicated source of revenue through lease of land on the site of the former Wanamaker Jr. High School
- \$1.5 to Hunting Park United for restoration of the football/soccer field adjacent to the Hunting Park Recreation Center. This was obtained in partnership with Rep. Tony Payton who also represents part of that community.



*Members of Hunting Park United work restoring and beautifying the park surrounding the recreation area.*

## Public Hearing on Economic Development



During spring 2010, Rep. Thomas hosted a House Commerce Committee hearing on economic development and job creation in Philadelphia, which is one of three Pennsylvania counties with systemic unemployment. That's why he felt it was important to hold one of the hearings in Philadelphia. The hearing was one of five hearings on this issue held throughout the state.

As a result of the hearing, Thomas introduced legislation (**H.B. 2242**) that would provide tax credits to Pennsylvania companies for creating jobs and providing on-the-job training to employees. The **"Keystone Job Creation and Training Tax Credit,"** part of PA Jobs Now, a package of bills introduced by House Democrats aimed at putting Pennsylvanians back to work, would increase the existing tax credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per job for training provided when jobs are created. The maximum tax credit a company could receive is \$100,000. The training would have to be provided during the employee's first year in the position. Priority would be given to firms that hire dislocated workers, those unemployed for at least six months, the underemployed and workers in high-priority occupations.

The bill was approved by the House Labor Relations Committee but didn't pass the House. Thomas will reintroduce this legislation in 2011.

## Youth Council Bill Passes House

Legislation (**H.B. 1795**) introduced by Rep. Thomas would establish youth councils within local workforce investment boards. Each state has workforce investment boards that are responsible for maintaining a unified system of state and federal workforce development programs in order to have a competitive advantage. State and local boards also develop plans for workforce development. According to Thomas, there is a high unemployment rate among those 18-24 in the 181st Legislative District and Pennsylvania in general.

Under this bill, the youth councils would:

- Develop the portions of the local plan relating to youth
- Conduct oversight of and recommend eligible providers of youth activities for grants and contracts on a competitive basis to implement youth activities in the plan
- Coordinate local youth activities and perform other duties as deemed appropriate

“I feel that the youth should have input on workforce development programs geared toward them,” Thomas explained. “That’s why I introduced this bill to include them as members of local workforce investment boards. I’m pleased with the support of my House colleagues and will reintroduce this bill in hopes that it passes both chambers.”

## Assisting Minority Businesses

Legislation (**H.B. 2142**) introduced by Rep. Thomas would create a statewide \$5 million bond surety program to assist businesses owned by women and people of color. The bill would help these businesses to be bonded and build the capacity needed to allow them to competitively bid on state and other public contracts. The bill also would provide the companies with technical assistance when needed.

This bill was part of a package based on research conducted by the **House Select Committee on Minority, Women and Disadvantaged Owned Business Enterprises**, of which Thomas was a member. The committee found that these businesses continue to face significant barriers when seeking contract opportunities with the state. The bill was approved by the House State Government Committee, but didn’t pass the House. Thomas will reintroduce this bill during the 2011-2012 session.

## Annual Job Fairs Attract Hundreds

Each year, Rep. Thomas sponsors two job fairs for residents of the 181st District. Due to the dismal state of



the economy, the job fairs were especially important this year. The first was held in March at the William H. Gray Youth Center and focused on public sector jobs in city, state and federal government. The second job fair was held in October at Beloved St. John CDC and focused on private sector recruiters from the Urban League, PA CareerLink and other industries.

*Rep. Thomas greets job seekers.*



*Hundreds of job seekers stand in line to attend the job fair at Beloved St. John’s in October.*



# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

## Fighting Blight

Legislation (Act 90 of 2010) supported by Rep. Thomas as chairman of the House Urban Affairs Committee that will aid municipalities in fighting blight was signed into law. The **Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act** will provide cities and towns across the Commonwealth with tools to address blighted properties. The law defines blighted properties, protects heirs of blighted properties and establishes housing courts.

Thomas organized the Statewide Blight Taskforce, a coalition of housing and municipal organizations, to research and give recommendations on ways the bill could be strengthened. “This law provides municipalities with an important tool for managing the proliferation of blighted and abandoned properties,” he said.

## Statewide Housing Trust Fund

Rep. Thomas co-sponsored legislation (**Act 105 of 2010**) that amended the State Housing Trust Fund Law to establish the **Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Program**. The program will provide a vehicle to fund housing projects for low- to moderate-income families, seniors, reducing homelessness and the disabled. It also will assist projects that provide mortgage and rental assistance, redevelopment of distressed neighborhoods, housing counseling and foreclosure prevention.

## Transformation of the Board of Revision of Taxes

In February, Rep. Thomas and the House Urban Affairs Committee hosted a meeting to discuss the problem of property tax assessment in Philadelphia. There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the assessments made by the Philadelphia Board of Revision of Taxes (BRT).

The BRT, a state-created agency, is responsible for establishing real estate valuations as the basis for property taxes and hears appeals from city property owners. It consists of a seven-member board appointed by the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania. Although the city can recommend assessments, it cannot take control of the BRT.

As a result of the hearing, it was decided that until this issue is resolved, the city will be restricted from conducting property assessments for two years, interfering with appeals and eliminating positions within the agency’s board.

## Fighting Utilities

Rep. Thomas introduced a bill that would prohibit utility companies from shutting off service within 60 days of a consumer receiving approval for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). It also would require the company to establish a payment agreement with the consumer. This is part of an ongoing battle of Thomas’ to repeal the 2001 law that allowed the rate caps to be lifted and to bring fairness and uniformity to utility companies in Philadelphia. He will reintroduce the bill in 2011.

## Liquor License Denial

A bill introduced by Rep. Thomas would allow the Liquor Control Board to deny person-to-person transfers of liquor licenses to locations within 300 feet of a church, hospital, school, public playground or charitable organization. The bill will be reintroduced in 2011.

## Wheelchair-accessible Taxicabs

Rep. Thomas and the House Urban Affairs Committee held a public hearing on legislation (**H.B. 1914**) that would address the lack of wheelchair-accessible taxis in Philadelphia. The bill would require the addition of 50 wheelchair-accessible taxicabs in the city. Currently, none are available. The bill would authorize the Philadelphia Parking Authority to establish regulations for a lottery system for awarding medallions to certified drivers who meet the criteria to drive wheelchair-accessible taxicabs.

“This bill would have far-reaching implications in providing a needed service that’s available in other cities to disabled citizens in Philadelphia,” Thomas said.

Under this bill, the taxis would be exempt from vehicle age restrictions in the current law if it meets all other specified inspection requirements.

# HOUSING

Homeowners in the 181st Legislative District benefited from several state housing programs offered by the **Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA)** designed to assist residents. Rep. Thomas also has worked with PHFA over the years to garner investment in housing throughout the district. Some of the housing that has benefited from Thomas' partnership with PHFA includes William B. Moore Manor, Gray Manor, Guild House East, Guild House West, Gladys B. Jacobs Apartments, Ascension Manor I and II, Old Kensington Pavilion and Casa Aponte Apartments. The agency has also recently provided \$5.2 million in support for Warnock Homes – the first affordable housing project in the Hartranft/Fairhill community.

## Homeownership

PHFA provides 30-year fixed-rate mortgages to first-time homebuyers through a network of more than 100 participating lending institutions. A total of 229 first-time homebuyers in the 181st District received \$13.9 million in mortgage funds through this program in 2010.

## Renovate and Repair Program

PHFA works with lenders and housing organizations throughout the state to help homeowners improve and maintain their homes with loans for energy efficiency, livability and accessibility modifications. During 2010, a total of four homes in the 181st district were renovated or repaired with \$66,343 in financing from this program.

Other programs to assist homeowners offered by PHFA include: **Homeowners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program, Refinance to an Affordable Loan Program, Home Equity Recovery Opportunity Program, and Housing Counseling Program.** Contact Rep. Thomas' district office for more information on these programs.

# FOCUS ON EDUCATION

## Thomas Fights for Charter School

Rep. Thomas testified before the School Reform Commission (SRC) on behalf of the Walter D. Palmer Learning Partnership Charter School on Sixth Street to request that funding be restored to the school. The SRC recently eliminated some of the funding for the school and Thomas has been a vocal supporter of the school during this dispute. Many children in the 181st District attend the school, which has consistently shown improvement in test scores and high attendance rates. The school also provides a healthy learning environment and has a commitment to student safety. Thomas continues to support the school and will work with all parties involved to reach an agreement concerning full funding by the SRC.



*Dr. Walter Palmer thanks Rep. Thomas for his testimony before the SRC.*

## Annual State Representative Awards

Rep. Thomas and students in the 181st District celebrated the State Representative Awards to honor those who have achieved academic excellence during the school year at the award ceremony held at Temple University's Ritter Hall. Graduating grade school and high school students in the district are selected by their principals to be recognized. This is the first time all awardees received a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond and laptop computer.

Approximately 500 students have received the award since its inception in 1991. Since then, several awardees have gone on to graduate from Howard University, St. Joseph's University, Lincoln University, Cheyney University, Philadelphia Community College and many other schools.



*Rep. Thomas congratulates honorees at the 2010 State Representative Awards.*



*A 2010 State Representative Awardee (left) accepts his new laptop and U.S. Savings Bond from 181st District office intern Darius Barnum (right) who attends LaSalle University.*

### *Students who were honored are:*

Clymer Elementary School  
Dunbar Elementary School

Morrison Elementary School  
Kearney Academic Plus  
Ferguson Elementary School  
Harrison Elementary School  
Hartnaft Elementary School  
Ludlow Elementary School  
Fairhill Elementary School  
Potter-Thomas Elementary School  
Spring Garden Elementary School  
Moffet Elementary School  
Cooke Elementary School

Sherrie Rucker  
Nayonna Keel  
Clarence Lee Hamilton  
Thuy Chu  
Cydney Strickland  
Ebony Brown  
Kelli Ross  
Anamarys Amoyo  
Michelle Avila  
Eric Casanova  
Virginia Rodriguez  
Tamantha Lancaster  
Dionte Gill  
Tyrell Maddox

## *Students who were honored (continued):*

St. Peter the Apostle School  
St. Malachy Roman Catholic School  
Bodine High School for International Affairs  
William Penn High School

Mastbaum High School  
Philadelphia Military Academy at Elverson

Parkway School  
Philadelphia High School for Business & Technology  
Little Flower Catholic High School for Girls  
Hope Partnership for Education  
Al-Aqsa Islamic School

LaSalle Academy  
Youth Build School  
Young Scholars Charter School  
Walter D. Palmer Charter School  
Wakisha Charter School

Curtis Hite  
Tyquil Chamberlain  
Bryce Simmons  
Kareem Martin  
Dewayne Rawlings  
Monique Pennington  
Darryl Roberts  
Maureen Carey  
Faylin Johnson  
Avery Martin  
Amanda Baldwin  
Nikia Hooks  
Refa Haj  
Alaa Shehata  
Paige Jordan  
Vannelis Ramos  
Kerrivah Heard  
Julia Easley  
John Carr

## **Kid's Zone Distributes Book Bags**

The 181st Kid's Zone distributed 100 book bags filled with school supplies to needy students in September. The Kid's Zone was established by Thomas to provide safe corridor supervision to elementary schools in the district. The program employs 25 adults from the district who patrol the streets surrounding the schools in the morning and afternoon to ensure students have safe passage to and from school. Since this successful program began, violence around the schools has decreased. The program distributes book bags at the beginning of each school year.



# SENIORS

## Red Carpet Senior Expo

More than 100 seniors in the 181st District attended Rep. Thomas' Red Carpet Senior Expo held in October at the William H. Gray Youth Center. Residents from the 12 senior living developments in the district were treated to professional photos on the red carpet to commemorate the event. The seniors enjoyed a delicious lunch, fun activities and information from various vendors on health care, prescriptions, wills, estate planning, housing, rent rebates and property taxes.

## Latino Senior Luncheon

Rep. Thomas also sponsored a Senior Luncheon with the Latino Partnership for Seniors at the Chateau in Frankford. A great time was had by all who attended.



*Seniors were treated to Red Carpet photos at the Senior Expo.*



*The seniors had a great afternoon lunching, dancing and having big fun! Rep. Thomas greets the crowd at the Latino Senior Luncheon.*

# AROUND THE DISTRICT

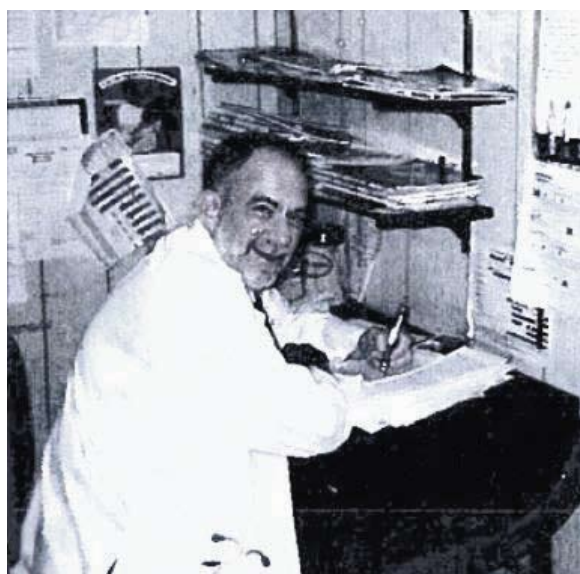
## Thanksgiving Baskets

Each year, Rep. Thomas provides Thanksgiving food baskets to needy families in the district. This year, 100 families in the district received baskets to help them enjoy the holiday during this time of economic hardship.



## Honoring Dr. Jaffe

Rep. Thomas honored Dr. Joel Jaffe for 40 years of service to the community through his office at 7th & Brown streets.



## Honoring Women Ministers

Rep. Thomas hosted a Women's History Month breakfast honoring nine female ministers in the district for their work transforming the lives of children and families in the community. The event benefited the women and children of Haiti. Those honored were:

Rev. Repsie Warren, Sanctuary of the Helping Hand Church

Rev. Mary Moore, Mt. Tabor AME Church

Rev. Martha A. Lang, Mt. Tabor AME Church

Rev. Beatrice Streeter, St. Marks Outreach Baptist Center

Rev. Donna Jones, Cookman UMC

Rev. Delois Johnson, Hancock St. John UMC

Rev. Della Jamison, Refuge Evangelical Baptist Church

Rev. Leslie Callahan, St. Paul Baptist Church



*Rep. Thomas makes a presentation to Rev. Martha Lang of Mt. Tabor AME Church.*

## First Annual Girard Fest

Rep. Thomas' office provided technical and financial support for the first Girard Fest which showcased businesses and organizations along Girard Avenue from Front to Fourth streets. The successful event included vendors, food, four stages of live music, children's activities and a flea market. A great time was had by all!



# NOTES

# 181ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT OFFICES

*Capitol Office:*  
301 Irvis Office Building  
P.O. Box 202181  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2181  
(717) 787-9471 • Fax: (717) 787-7297

*District Office:*  
530 West Girard Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19123  
(215) 560-3261

Website: [www.pahouse.com/thomas](http://www.pahouse.com/thomas)



## IMPORTANT TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

### State Government

PACE Cardholder Service .....	1-800-225-PACE (7223)
Property Tax/Rent Rebate Info .....	1-888-222-9190
Unemployment Compensation .....	1-800-692-7469
Workers' Compensation Helpline.....	1-800-482-2383

### Emergency & Special Needs

CDC Hotline (AIDS/Immunizations/Autism/STDs) .....	1-800-342-2437
Coalition Against Rape .....	1-888-772-PCAR (7227)
Crime Stoppers.....	1-800-4PA-TIPS (472-8477)
Domestic Violence Hotline .....	1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
Elder Abuse Reporting Hotline (care facilities) .....	1-800-254-5164
Elder Abuse Reporting Hotline (in-home).....	1-800-490-8505
Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) .....	1-866-857-7095
Legal Aid Locator (AARP national network) .....	1-888-687-2277
Mortgage Assistance.....	1-800-342-2397
PA Department of Health .....	1-877-724-3258
Poison Control Center .....	1-800-222-1222
Senior Law Helpline .....	1-877-727-7529

### Children & Youth

Healthy Kids Helpline (PA CHIP).....	1-800-986-KIDS (5437)
National Runaway Switchboard .....	1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)
PHEAA Student Grants/Loans .....	1-800-692-7392
Special Kids Network (referral service).....	1-800-986-4550
Teenline (crisis intervention).....	1-800-722-5385