Annual Report

2016

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W. CURTIS THOMAS
181ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT
Democratic Chair,
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State Rep. W. Curtis Thomas

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Important Toll-Free Numbers
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PACE Cardholder Service .............................. 1-800-225-PACE
Property Tax/Rent Rebate Info .................... 1-888-222-9190
Unemployment Compensation ................... 1-800-692-7469
Workers’ Compensation Helpline ............ 1-800-482-2383
During 2016, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas hosted various employment opportunity events for constituents within the 181st Legislative District.

The events were held to help connect attendees with family-sustaining jobs and job training opportunities.

The public sector job fair, held in February at the William H. Gray III Youth Center, boasted numerous employers from the city of Philadelphia, state and federal agencies and included 10 job-training opportunities. Thomas hosted a private sector job fair in October, also at the William H. Gray III Youth Center.

Both job fairs highlighted workshops within the events. An expungement clinic was held to focus on how a criminal history can affect employment, along with possible legal remedies. And, the Smart, Strategic Job Search Success Workshop focused on educating attendees about finding suitable job openings and how to have a successful interview.

In conjunction with fellow Philadelphia state Rep. Donna Bullock, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas was pleased to cohost a Small-Business Symposium with the goal of helping local entrepreneurs grow their small businesses.

Held at the Women’s Christian Alliance, attendees heard from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and other local entrepreneurs who have used government programs and services to help expand their businesses.

“There are many resources available to small-business owners through the state that are underutilized by the very men and women who need them the most,” Thomas said. “Starting and growing a business from scratch can be difficult work, which is another reason why I was so pleased to be able to host this event.”

In addition, state and local agencies, nonprofits and other organizations were on hand to provide attendees information about government contracting and consulting, startup training, financing, and real estate assistance.
1300 Fairmount project kick started through state funds

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas was proud to announce in late 2016 that a $3 million state grant to transform a pivotal junction in the North Broad region of the city was approved by Gov. Tom Wolf.

The funding was derived from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program. The program as a whole is a statewide economic development program that provides grants to local communities for the construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational and historical improvement projects.

As it pertains to this project, the funding will be used to help develop the 1300 Fairmont project, which is located adjacent to the Divine Lorraine building. Once developed, the site will include a large supermarket, two levels of dedicated above-ground parking, two residential towers, and 27 residential row homes.

“These funds will help renovate and revitalize an important corridor for our community so I am thankful that Governor Wolf understood the importance of this project,” Thomas said. “Besides increasing the livability and quality of life for the area, this grant is also bound to create jobs and new opportunities for community members.”

Thomas leads effort to honor former Police Commissioner Willie Williams


Thomas spearheaded a public support campaign urging the Philadelphia Police Department to change the name of its administration building to name it after Williams.

“The police administration building is well-known throughout the city and beyond and would be a perfect opportunity to honor former Commissioner Williams’ life and lifework,” Thomas said. “Williams served the community with dedication, integrity and passion and had incredible foresight about issues we still struggle with. Before the media wrote headlines about it, he fought against the open-air drug markets operating with impunity in our city and spoke out against the spread of illegal guns on a national level.”

Williams also was responsible for greatly strengthening police-community relations during his tenure as commissioner and improving crucial aspects of the department by decentralizing stations throughout the city and increasing diversity in the upper ranks.

“Williams was an inspiring figure for many in our community and the impact of his work is still evident in Philadelphia today. His legacy should be honored and preserved for future generations and I believe the best way to do that is by renaming the police administration building in his honor,” Thomas said.

To read about additional efforts Thomas took to memorialize Williams, please refer to Page 3 under the Community section.

Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

House Bill 2368 – Would amend Title 58 (Oil & Gas), in unconventional gas well fee, further providing for distribution of fee and for statewide initiatives.

House Bill 2172 – Would amend the Tax Reform Code, in bank and trust company shares tax, further providing for imposition of tax, for ascertainment of taxable amount and exclusion of federal obligations, for apportionment and for definitions.

House Bill 2171 – Would amend the Tax Reform Code, in personal income tax, further providing for imposition of tax; and providing for imposition of severance tax on natural gas extraction.
House adopts resolutions honoring two leaders from Philadelphia

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives adopted two condolence resolutions sponsored by Rep. W. Curtis Thomas, which honor the legacy of Willie L. Williams and Samuel Staten Sr.

Williams, who passed away in April 2016, began his career in 1964 as a Fairmount Park guard but would go on to become the first African-American police commissioner of the Philadelphia and Los Angeles police departments.

As police commissioner of the Philadelphia Police Department, Williams broke up open-air drug markets operating in the city, targeted residences that were being used to facilitate the drug trade and spoke out about the increased flood of illegal guns in the community.

Staten, who also passed away in April 2016, was a longtime leader of the Philadelphia Laborers union and renowned champion for local charities.

In 1970, after working as a construction laborer, Staten became a Local 332 field representative. In 1973, he was appointed assistant business manager, and in 1978 he was elected business manager, a position he held until 2008. He officially retired in 2010.

Staten, who is credited with raising millions of dollars for charity, was a mentor to many and an inspiration to leaders throughout Philadelphia.

Members of the Philadelphia Delegation stand in support of Rep. Thomas as he shares remarks and expresses remorse over the loss of Willie L. Williams and Samuel Staten Sr.
Thomas joins with the community to deliver 100 Thanksgiving baskets

In November 2016, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas praised community members, the Columbus Group and the Urban Affairs Coalition for helping his staff make it possible to deliver Thanksgiving baskets to families in the community. Thanksgiving is all about expressing gratitude for what we have and giving back to those who aren’t as fortunate,” Thomas said. “I am very grateful to all the community members and organizations who made the distribution of baskets possible.”

Before the holiday, Thomas and his staff delivered more than 100 baskets to local families in need.

“It is always nice to see the smiling faces of the recipients and know that these baskets have made a difference and allowed them to fully celebrate Thanksgiving with their loved ones,” Thomas said.

Tuskegee Airmen honored on 75th anniversary

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas received unanimous support in April 2016 for his House resolution honoring the Tuskegee Airmen on their 75th anniversary.

“I would like to thank my colleagues for their support in acknowledging and uplifting this dedication made on behalf of the skilled pilots known as the Tuskegee Airmen,” Thomas said. “Today we celebrate their accomplishments, both on the battlefield and at home. I am confident the outcome of World War II would have not been what it was without these brave men.”

Thomas said he was honored to be able to help celebrate the first African-American fighter squadron on their 75th anniversary. The Tuskegee Airmen were established in March 1941 at the Motion Field airbase in Tuskegee, Ala.

“During World War II about 1,000 men participated and 66 were lost in the line of duty, which was one of the lowest loss records of any escort fighter group,” Thomas said. “This resolution holds a special place in my heart because my father was part of this contingent and I am so very proud of his service.”

Thomas on the Tuskegee Airmen: “Their legacy serves as a reminder in this country that all men are created equal, and that, with enough effort, hardworking individuals can achieve great things.”
Community health fair expo a success

Calling it a great community success, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas said he was overwhelmed with gratitude that close to 100 participants, vendors and staff participated in his community health fair expo in February 2016.

The event was held at the Columbia North YMCA and provided participants with information from nutrition to fitness instruction.

“We had a nutritionist, wellness providers, fitness instructors and many more vendors at the event,” Thomas said. “Many people are interested in being fit and healthy and this expo provided them with the tools to possibly make that happen in their lives.”

In addition, participants received information on CHIP, the state’s Children’s Health Insurance Program for uninsured children, and other information on state-related services, programs and benefits.

Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

- **House Bill 1908** – Would remove the Traffic Court of Philadelphia and add the Traffic Division of the Philadelphia Municipal Court.
- **House Bill 2075** – Would designate a portion of Ridge Avenue in Philadelphia as Samuel Staten Sr. Avenue.
- **House Bill 2367** – Would require outpatient drug and alcohol treatment facilities to provide certain therapies and services to patients.
2016-2017 state budget increases Philly school funding, avoids repeat of impasse

For the first time in 10 years, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas voted for the state budget. Thomas said he was willing to support the 2016-17 spending plan because of increased education funding it then provided and because it put Pennsylvania on the right path moving forward.

The new budget took a major step toward restoring the four years of Corbett-Republican cuts. It included $250 million more for K-12 education.

The largest part of that was a $200 million increase in the basic education subsidy that delivered a $47 million increase to Philadelphia schools. This 4.6 percent increase for Philadelphia was higher than the state average because the new funding was allocated based on the new fair funding formula.

Thomas noted another positive area was the budget’s 2.5 percent increase in funding for higher education, including Temple University and two historically black universities in Pennsylvania, Cheyney and Lincoln, both located in the Philadelphia region.

To ensure the budget was balanced, Thomas said new revenue was needed but he was also glad the General Assembly was able to avoid broad-based tax increases.

Thomas honors local students at annual awards banquet

The State Representative Awards have been honoring academic excellence for 26 years

In October, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas honored students in the 181st Legislative District at his 26th annual State Representative Awards.

Multiple students from public, charter and parochial schools in the 181st Legislative District were honored for academic excellence and contributions to their school and community.

“For the past 26 years I’ve held these awards to honor area students who have overcome the challenges facing them to achieve great things,” Thomas said. “These students have worked very hard in their pursuit of an education, and their efforts should be honored.”

Since 1990, Thomas has honored more than 800 elementary, middle and high school graduates who have been selected by their principals for academic excellence. Each honoree receives a certificate of recognition and a gift comprising some form of technology to assist them with their continuing education.

The 2016 honorees were:

- Nymier Brooks
- Simone Caison
- Nybria Burton
- Tysheera Davis
- Aunyre Bolden
- Deantre Dunn
- Khayir Grant
- Joie Harris
- De’Ajah Hill
- Kendall Jones
- Isaiah Lee
- An’yah Moore
- Anya Parker
- Xyan Rashid
- Talayah Ross
- Hamida Sanford
- Rasheed Robinson
- Abigail Tarway
- Drakkar Thompson
- Nahaj Williams
- Zackarie Zouaghi
- Ludlow Elementary School
- Tanner Duckrey Elementary School
- Parkway Center City High School
- Alliance for Progress Charter School
- Moffett Elementary School
- Philadelphia Military Academy
- John F. Hartranft Elementary School
- Spring Garden Elementary School
- Young Scholars Charter School
- Carver High School of Engineering and Science
- Gesu School
- General Philip Kearny Elementary School
- Hope Partnership for Education School
- KIPP Charter School
- Paul L. Dunbar Elementary School
- Al-Aqsa Islamic Academy
- Gen. George G. Meade Elementary School
- Murrell Dobbins CTE High School
- Bodine High School of International Affairs
- St. Malachy Independent Mission
- La Salle Catholic School

At the event, Thomas also honored several local educators with the Outstanding Teacher Award.
Children and Youth Caucus issues final report to General Assembly


In late 2013, Greenleaf and Thomas called for the formation of the bicameral, bipartisan At-Risk Children, Family and Communities Caucus to examine issues facing children and families in the Commonwealth such as truancy, drop out, delinquency, and family separation due to incarceration.

The At-Risk Children, Family and Communities Caucus held a total of 12 meetings from October 2013 through April 2016. The final report is a summary of all the caucus meetings and includes recommendations to the Pennsylvania Legislature.

So far, the work of the caucus resulted in Act 138 of 2016, which reformed the state’s Truancy Law to make incarceration a last option for the parents of truant children. The new law prioritizes intervention to increase school attendance.

The caucus has also promoted wider implementation of the proven Communities that Care initiative, which equips a wide range of community partners to target specific challenges among their local youth.

“Our meetings and presentations over the past three years have been very enlightening,” Greenleaf said. “We have gained valuable knowledge from other state officials and people working on the ground who have provided us with a deeper understanding of the problems hindering the health, welfare, and the safety of our children and their families. I intend to use these meetings and recommendations as a guide towards more effective policy and investments that can improve the lives of many young people.”

“The presentations provided a good overview of the obstacles that many of our children and families face, especially in more urban areas of Pennsylvania,” Thomas said. “The reality is that many of the problems stem from socio-economic drivers. Address the underlying problems and you will see a positive change. We can use this information to drive state policy and provide further support to the various programs already in place to address our at-risk population. I am heartened to take away from this caucus the knowledge that we can create stronger and more vibrant communities for all Pennsylvanians. Now it is time for the next steps.”

Recommendations in the final report include:

- Funding evidence-based programs that have been proven to reduce youth violence and drug abuse.
- Support legislation establishing a Youth Court Program in Pennsylvania.
- Support funding for the Juvenile Court Judges Commission.
- Invest in delinquency prevention and intervention programs.
- Provide technical assistance and peer mentoring to communities.
Thomas discusses need for defibrillators in Philly schools

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas held a news conference in April to discuss the lack of defibrillators in local schools and the need to correct that deficiency.

He discussed the need for each school in Pennsylvania to have a defibrillator as part of its first aid kit, and ways the community can help ensure these important medical devices are available.

Thomas said he was inspired to hold the news conference after learning that at least 13 public schools within the 181st Legislative District did not have access to a defibrillator.

Thomas holds roundtable discussion on Community Schools program

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas held a roundtable event in July with the Mayor’s Office of Education to gather public input about Philadelphia’s Community Schools program.

The Community Schools program, which is being championed by Mayor Jim Kenney and many others, emphasizes a school’s role as a center for the community and an access point to support services. At the roundtable, Thomas and members of the Mayor’s Office of Education sought public input on how these schools can better serve the communities where they reside.

Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas

- **House Resolution 974** – Would direct the Joint State Government Commission to study the issue of higher education student loan debt and to report to the House of Representatives with its findings and recommendations.

- **House Bill 2285** – Would require institutions of higher education to provide students with education loan disclosures; and confer powers and impose duties on the Department of Education.

- **House Bill 2218** – Would amend the Public School Code, in school finances, repealing provisions relating to approval of unfunded debt in certain distressed school districts, to distress in the Philadelphia School District and to an education assessment center.

- **House Bill 1738** – Would amend Title 75 (Vehicles), in other required equipment, further providing for general requirements for school buses.
Thomas discusses closure of St. Joseph’s Hospital

In January 2016, Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined community leaders and constituents to discuss the closure of St. Joseph’s Hospital, which occurred in March 2016.

Thomas had expressed concerns on the timing of moving patients safely to other locations during the process to close the facility on West Girard Avenue.

“My concern is that there is not enough time to ensure that these patients will get the quality care they need,” Thomas said. “Not every hospital deals with drug/alcohol behavioral patients, and we need to be sure that these patients are taken where they need to go.”

Thomas also worried for the more than 1,100 part-time and full-time employees who were without a job once the facility closed. He said he has been working with the North Philadelphia Health System, Hospital Health Care Workers Union local 1199c, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, and Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.

“I was informed that more than 700 of those employees were able to avail themselves of the Department of Labor and Industry’s Rapid Response team,” Thomas said. “While these efforts were a good start, I was afraid there wasn’t enough time to allow these employees to secure new meaningful employment.”

St. Joseph’s Hospital is still under the North Philadelphia Health System. The organization filed a bankruptcy motion regarding its planned sale of the hospital for $8.1 million to MMP Hospital Partners LLC.
Medical marijuana law implementation makes progress in Pa.

With Gov. Tom Wolf’s signing of Act 16 of 2016, Pennsylvania became the 24th state in the country to legalize medical marijuana.

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas voted for the law because he said it’s a commonsense way to help people who are suffering in their daily lives – from children who are experiencing daily seizures, to veterans enduring post-traumatic stress disorder and many others who need this medication to relieve their pain.

Statistics show that states that have legalized medical marijuana have shown a decrease of nearly 25 percent in annual prescription drug overdose deaths. The statistics also show that there have been zero overdose deaths from marijuana.

Once the regulations are in place, doctors will be able to prescribe certain forms of cannabis to people who meet the proper requirements and suffer from one of the 17 approved medical conditions. Under the new law, medical marijuana cannot be smoked, but can be prescribed in pill, oil, topical or liquid form.

Until the law is fully implemented, the legal use of medical marijuana in Pennsylvania is limited to children. A parent or guardian can bring medical marijuana from another state for a child, but the parent or guardian must first obtain and carry a Pennsylvania “safe harbor” letter to possess the drug legally. The state has already approved more than 230 applications for safe harbor letters.

To learn more, visit www.health.pa.gov, click the “Pa. Medical Marijuana” link, then click “Patients and Caregivers.”

Pennsylvania is continuing to make progress toward full implementation of the law, which is expected sometime next year. The state Department of Health is working on regulations for growers/processors and health care providers. More information on that is also available at www.health.pa.gov.

New state laws designed to combat opioid crisis

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas is proud to report that in late 2016, the legislature took several steps forward in fighting the opioid and heroin epidemic that continues to affect every community – urban, suburban and rural – throughout Pennsylvania. Gov. Tom Wolf signed several bills into law that are designed to fight back against this public health crisis.

As part of the package, Act 123 of 2016 authorizes state and federal agencies and health care facilities to serve as drop-off locations for unused, unwanted and unexpired drugs. The law also allows pharmaceuticals that are collected at disposal events to be incinerated at permitted facilities, instead of solely being disposed of as hazardous waste.

Other new laws include:

- Act 125 of 2016 – Limits opioid prescriptions for minors and in hospital emergency rooms;
- Act 126 of 2016 – Requires continuing education for current doctors and training for new health care professionals on safe opioid prescribing and addiction treatment; and
- Act 124 of 2016 – Requires prescribers to register with the Pennsylvania Prescription Drug Monitoring Program and check the database each time they prescribe opioids or certain other drugs to patients.

Thomas commends Gov. Wolf’s leadership in calling for swift legislative action on the above laws, and hopes that the spirit of bipartisanship will continue throughout 2017-18 on this very important topic.
Thomas hosts public hearings on violence in the community

Rep. W. Curtis Thomas joined members of the community including clergy, local families, community leaders and local law enforcement for two public hearings to focus on solutions to end continued violence in the community.

“No one wants to violate the purpose or spirit of the Second Amendment, but demanding background checks on the purchase of all guns in the state isn’t too much to ask for,” Thomas said. “The violence in our community is undeniably linked to straw purchasers and guns in the hands of those who are legally barred from possessing them. Some of the solutions to these problems have even been considered by various committees in the House and Senate but, due to political pressure from special interest groups, none have received the true consideration they deserve.”

During the 2015-16 session, which ended in November, there were 105 bills introduced in the General Assembly on the issue of gun violence. None of those bills made it to Gov. Tom Wolf’s desk for his signature.

“It is an unfortunate reality that a majority of rank-and-file members and members of House and Senate leadership are members of the National Rifle Association, and therefore, will not allow commonsense legislation to be considered by a committee or the full House or Senate,” Thomas said. “Commonsense legislation is critical to limiting the availability of guns in the hands of the wrong people.”

Thomas called for legislation to expand the background check process for potential gun owners to include mental health, criminal and domestic violence history. In addition, Thomas urged his colleagues in the General Assembly to consider legislation that would require all internet sellers, and gun show vendors to secure a license and conduct background checks on all gun transactions.

Thomas said a lost-and-stolen law, which would require gun owners to report missing firearms in a certain amount of time, was also crucial to ensure that legally owned guns stay in the hands of their owners.

In addition, Thomas believes that penalties for adults responsible for underage children gaining possession of a gun should be increased. Thomas also urged public officials on the federal, state and local level to support the establishment of an Internet Investigation Center to track illegal online firearms sales.

“Sensible regulations on the purchasing of guns is a good place to start, but we need to simultaneously increase the availability of quality training and job opportunities specifically for the youth in our community,” Thomas said. “Too often those involved in illegal gun violence are not in school, are homeless or are severely underemployed. Laws making it harder for certain individuals to get their hand on guns are a great start but that is only half the battle.”
Relevant legislation introduced by Rep. Thomas


House Bill 1910 – Would expand the definition of personal information in Pennsylvania’s Breach of Personal Information Notification Act to bring the state in line with how the federal government and some other states define personal information.

House Bill 1911 – Would set a 30-day timeframe in the state’s Breach of Personal Information Notification Act and that would require notice of breach be provided to the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General.

House Bill 2369 – Would amend the Breach of Personal Information Notification Act, providing for disposal of materials containing personal information.

House Bill 1738 – Would require public school buses to be equipped with retractable seat belts.
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