

State Representative Dan Miller

Newsletter



SUMMER/FALL 2019

Serving the 42nd District

Mt. Lebanon, Dormont, Castle Shannon, and Baldwin Township with parts of Scott Township and Brookline



Unity Concert at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

INSIDE:

- Criminal Justice Reform
- Environmental Concerns
- Disability and Mental Health Summit

Committee Assignments:

Judiciary • Education, Co-Chair, Subcommittee on Special Education
Human Services • Labor & Industry

Caucus Memberships:

Autism & Intellectual Disabilities • BlueGreen Alliance • Climate • Early Childhood Education
Firefighters & EMS • Government Reform • HOPE (Heroin, Opioid Prevention, and Education)
LGBT Equality • Steel

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Criminal Justice Reform

A criminal justice system where people are treated fairly and equally doesn't seem to be too much to ask. But I believe that if you ask 10 random people whether they think our system disproportionately impacts people of color or poor people, nine of them would answer "yes."

Decades of failed policies, ignorance, and racism have sentenced a generation to the margins of society, embedded in poverty, excluded, and often without hope. Additionally, an extremely toxic relationship has developed between many communities and law enforcement. Most often this is due to legislative neglect, where police are left to address societal shortcomings while policymakers play politics; but when this is combined with a racist history or the hate-filled acts of a few, it leads, over time, to a dangerous breakdown in trust between the people's government and the people.

Harrisburg has done little to assuage or address these concerns. Much of the Judiciary Committee and many of its bills are locked in an antiquated understanding of criminal justice. Stuck between a misguided appreciation of deterrence and the Nixon-Reagan-Clinton era "tough on crime" political rhetoric, we have filled our prisons, decimated families, limited opportunities, and most assuredly criminalized a bunch of sick people. In the meantime, mandatory minimum bills, new felonies, and bills increasing penalties continue to receive the most attention in the Capitol. We now have a system where only the foolish would risk the penalties of actually exercising their right to go to trial. Furthermore, it is one in which the poor are often inadequately represented, as even the most earnest of public defenders struggle to stay afloat while Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation that fails to provide any funding to its public defender officers.

Debtors' prisons are not supposed to exist in this country, and the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution requires inquiries into a person's ability to pay criminal fines. But despite the efforts of some counties and courts, the commonwealth is still sending people to jail for not paying costs, kicking them out of first-time offender programs for not paying fees, and, in too many jurisdictions, still requiring bail amounts that are disproportionately keeping poor people in jail. In other cases, people are sacrificing their procedural safeguards on government authority in exchange for going home. These challenges are made worse by the legislature's unwillingness to properly fund the court system, which has, within 20 years, seen its reliance on collecting fees from defendants for its operating expenses grow from near 1% to an estimated 14% next year.

The state has also failed to provide treatment options for

people with addiction or mental health issues. The state rightly closed its mental health hospitals decades ago, but without real access to community-based systems, the largest daily mental health providers are now typically the county jails. Pennsylvania only now is embracing the reality that addiction is a disease, but it has increased stigma and increased isolation for many instead of easing them into an easy-to-access system of recovery. Pennsylvania is starting to reevaluate its addiction, mental health, education, and workforce development programs in jails and prisons, which is long overdue (although these options should not be easier to get inside rather than out). Some jurisdictions like Allegheny County are moving creatively to coordinate services once a person is released, but these efforts often rely upon foundation money rather than a consistent state stream of support, meaning that it isn't universally available and can be sporadic. And thanks to Governor Tom Wolf and a bipartisan push, the commonwealth is making some modest progress in helping people with criminal records get back to work. However, even the recently enacted Clean Slate Act only applies to certain minor offenses and only after 10 years have passed since a person's last conviction. The reality is that far too many people are being criminalized, far too many are never really integrating into the economy, and the cycle of poverty continues.

In the middle of all of this are the men and women of law enforcement. Let me start with the obvious - we need them. We need the best of them, and we need them to be extremely well-trained for a difficult job. They are the embodiment of government authority to citizens, and this great responsibility requires more support than what they are getting now.

But we also need them to be accountable for their actions. The system of trust and consent of the governed that our country is built on requires it - arguably more so in relation to the police than to any other job. The reality is that some of the officers are in the wrong line of work, and, while you can say that about some lawyers, legislators, teachers, etc., none of them are licensed by the state to carry a weapon in performance of their work. A poorly trained, poorly supervised or racist officer can kill someone.

At the same time, police should be upset. The state has dumped a lot on their plate, expecting them to be police officers, social workers, teachers, parents, etc., all while making split-second threat assessments. Let's keep in mind that it was not the police who underfunded schools, failed to grow middle-class jobs, shut down state mental health hospitals, or who make it tough to find or pay for a full

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Criminal Justice Reform

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recovery program. They didn't do any of that - legislators did, either by direct or indirect action, or by simple indifference. Our legislature is, at best, asleep at the wheel. Officers I have talked to are not asking for more weapons; they instead want more options and a real investment in our communities.

Again, while recognizing how tough their job is, none of that explains or excuses misconduct or racism, and when faced with the reality of discriminatory impact in the meting out of the criminal justice system, it is inherent upon policymakers to make the necessary corrections quickly. Ideally, these changes are done in consultation with law enforcement. They should be active partners in rebuilding lost trust. But, in the final

analysis, the responsibility for criminal justice lies with its architect, which overwhelmingly is the state legislature.

None of this is easy to solve, and Pennsylvania is not unique in these problems. The legacy of racism runs deep in our country, and the inequality in our criminal justice system has many sources. But Harrisburg's unwillingness to prioritize these issues is ruining lives and contributing to a dangerous erosion of trust. We need either in-depth and sustained committee action on a variety of fronts with advocates from all sides, or a special session of the legislature to focus on these issues. Justice must be at the heart of our system, and its very definition is a reflection of society's values.

Disability & Mental Health Summit



In March, I hosted my 6th annual Disability & Mental Health Summit. Once again, the summit set a new high for attendees with almost 1,500 people walking through the doors of the three-day event. There also were over 30 workshops to choose from and over 150 organizations in attendance. The Summit is my favorite event that my office and I do and, thanks to the district's friends at Beth El and St. Clair Hospital, it is totally free for people to attend!

Each day started with a fantastic keynote speaker. Former newscaster and advocate Jennifer Antkowiak started off talking about caring for caregivers. She was followed by comedian Gab Bonesso, who shared her own personal mental health story in a way that made everyone smile, and then Department of Labor and Industry Secretary Jerry Oleksiak gave an update on transition and employment issues.

The student program was bigger than ever, with over 140 transition-age students from across Allegheny County participating. Summit attendees heard from Congressmen Conor Lamb and Mike Doyle, Senator Bob Casey's office, and even had the first session with local municipal officials about how they can promote inclusion and combat stigma. The event concluded with a bipartisan, bicameral legislative panel, which this year focused on employment, voting accessibility and behavioral health integration.

Next year's Summit will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the ground-breaking Americans with Disabilities Act! My staff and I are targeting the first week of March 2020 for the event, and expanding partnerships with several key organizations, including the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, Special Olympics and the FISA Foundation. Look for more information soon!



Key Workforce Appointment

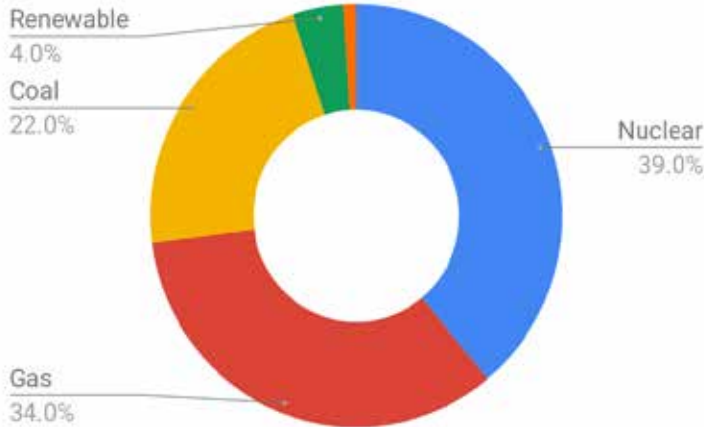
This spring, I was appointed co-chair of the National Task Force on the Future of the Workforce, with a primary goal of improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This task force is comprised of legislators, agency heads, advocates, and self-advocates from across the country and is a collaboration between the US Department of Labor, the Council of State Governments, and the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act, Pennsylvania has made some strides in increasing access for people with disabilities, but the reality is that in most states about 60% of people with disabilities are out of the workforce for one reason or another. Many others face limited opportunities or other roadblocks to full integration. The goal of this task force is to present specific options to states in order to get more people with disabilities into competitive employment. The taskforce hopes to have this work completed in the fall, and I am honored to have been chosen to help in this important discussion.

Environmental Concerns

I think most people would agree that in relation to our environment we must do better.

With each new session, I like to focus my efforts on certain topics, in addition to disability and mental health. For the 2019-20 session, I am striving to take a more active role in advocating for environmentally friendlier legislation. Although I've had a 100% voting record in favor of environmental issues, I will be the first to admit that I am no expert on the subject. In the spring, I held two events in which we discussed environmental issues; these conversations were as much for my education as they were for those of you in the community. That said, I want to outline some of the information and the legislation that pertains to these issues being discussed in Harrisburg.



Energy Portfolio

In the first event, we discussed Pennsylvania's energy portfolio. A growing percentage of our energy is coming from renewables. In 2004, the state legislature passed the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards Act (AEPS) which required that 8% of our energy comes from renewable sources such as solar, wind and hydro by 2021. At the time, this was a very progressive stance on renewable energy. Today, not only has the state not met this goal, but it is also outdated; many surrounding states have surpassed us when it comes to promoting environmentally sustainable means to create energy.

Currently, a number of bills in the state legislature would address this issue. While they do not offer an end-all solution, they do offer a path forward. Specifically, a bill recently proposed by state Reps. Carolyn Comitta and Steve McCarter would increase the AEPS Tier I requirement from 8% to 30% renewable energy. The hope is that the increase would be enough to jumpstart investment in the renewable sector.

Plastic

The second event focused on the effects of plastic waste on our environment. We learned about the lasting impact that plastic has on our ecosystems through a screening of *Plastic Paradise: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch*. Afterward, I led a discussion of ways that all of us, as part of the community, can take action at the local level and in our own homes.

During my plastic waste event, I had the opportunity to discuss some of the policy that is being debated in Harrisburg. In particular, a group of bills have been released by some state representatives, in conjunction with PennEnvironment, called the Zero Waste PA legislative package. The bills address the use and disposal of single-use plastics in the commonwealth. For example, one bill that I co-sponsored proposes a ban on using polystyrene containers to distribute prepared foods. After a very long time, these containers break down into microscopic particles that will never go away and can be found in our waterways and even our bodies. Another bill from this package that I'm happy to support would create a 5-cent bottle and can buy-back program. This type of waste accounts for 40-60% of all litter. States with these programs have seen recycling rates for these materials rise from 46% to as high as 80%.

The repercussions of our impact on the environment aren't going to go away. It is imperative that we confront these issues and leave a healthy planet for our children and grandchildren. Without changes to our energy supply and to how we dispose of our garbage, among many other things, our ecosystems will reach a breaking point. I look forward to continuing to educate myself on these issues and to support legislation that will help ensure the health of our planet for generations to come.



In Our Community



Baldwin Township

Baldwin kindly allowed me to host an engaging forum for municipalities regarding state grants and other programs that are designed to help communities grow. I have also had several discussions with Baldwin's new manager on the township's goals, and my staff and I always look forward to participating in the community events!

Brookline

I have had several positive meetings with the URA and Brookline Together, and we continue to work to bring resources to help grow the Boulevard. I always appreciate the great work being done at the Brookline Teen Outreach Center, which continues to be a hub of positive community engagement.



Castle Shannon

Shannon is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, and there are always so many fun community events in which to participate! My staff and I enjoy supporting the efforts of the Council and the Castle Shannon Revitalization Corp. to grow Shannon and improve the quality of life, and we always appreciate the library, which hosts my town halls and pop-up office events!

Dormont

From participating in Community Day and July 4th festivities, to the annual Christmas parade and street fair, there are always a lot of fun events going on in Dormont - plus those events allow me to talk to residents about state issues! I was also very thankful to host so many events at the Dormont Borough Building and the library.



Mt. Lebanon

This year I was pleased to play a role in Mt. Lebanon receiving a \$750,000 state grant for streetscape, sidewalk, and lighting improvements along Washington Road. I also held a lot of events this year at the Municipal Building and the library, as well as with my community partners at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Sunnyhill!

Scott Township

Scott hosted my annual district Economic Development Roundtable this year, and I was very grateful to Commission President Frank Bruckner and Township Manager Denise Fitzgerald for opening their doors. I also appreciated working with Scott regarding public safety concerns for religious institutions and in navigating the expansion of St. Clair Hospital.



Committee Updates

There are 24 different House committees, each having both Democratic and Republican members. Every representative is given several committees to participate in. Here are some of the issues my committees have been working on this session:

Judiciary

Each session it seems a representative pushes a merit selection legislative package that would change the state constitution as it relates to how we elect our judges. In my opinion, the latest efforts will, in essence, gerrymander judicial elections and disenfranchise some 8 million voters from the process. I simply believe that campaign finance reform and perhaps greater conflict oversight would be more helpful than telling Pennsylvania's voters that they somehow aren't good enough to make these decisions for themselves. Accordingly, I do not support these two bills that have recently been reported out of the House Judiciary Committee:



Merit Selection of Statewide Appellate Court Judges & Judicial Reform

HB 111 would generate candidates for three legislatively drawn regions from an appointed commission. The governor would nominate from the commission's list, subject to Senate confirmation. After four years on the bench, these judges would have to run for retention.

Regional Appellate Court Districts

HB 196 would eliminate statewide judicial elections and instead require the General Assembly to draw judicial maps for "geographical diversity."

Labor & Industry

Strengthening Collective Bargaining:

Throughout my career, I have always been an ardent supporter of organized labor. In today's time of large-scale income inequality, I believe that the middle class would benefit from increased unionization. That is why I support HB 1178, which would strengthen workers' ability to form unions and collectively bargain.



Worker Safety Bill: Many state employees work in dangerous and harsh conditions, specifically road maintenance workers, firemen, police officers, and correction officers, among others. Despite their dangerous work, these employees are not protected under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), which protects workers from health and safety hazards. As such, I have co-sponsored HB 1082, which would offer these protections to Pennsylvania public sector workers that perform some of the most dangerous jobs in the Commonwealth.

Minimum Wage: At \$7.25 an hour, Pennsylvania currently has the lowest minimum wage in the region. While some who receive the minimum wage are teenagers new to the workforce, many are adults, often with children, who are struggling to find a path to the middle class. While I expect the amount of increase to be negotiated, I believe that raising the minimum wage is right and that it should be indexed to inflation.

Human Services Committee

Adolescent Substance Use Care:

While the recently reported drop in the number of overdose deaths seemingly indicates some progress has been made in the opioid crisis, addiction is still a major issue and much work remains to be done. My annual Substance Abuse Forum at St. Paul's explores issues around access to treatment, understanding substance use disorder and other areas of concern. Last fall, one of the sessions addressed the challenges involved in providing appropriate care for adolescents with substance abuse issues. Panelists discussed the need for screening and referral training for pediatricians, the unique characteristics of adolescent treatment and the shortage of adolescent treatment programs. More recently, the House Human Services Committee took up this issue at a public hearing. While the shortage of treatment programs was once again identified as a critical need, positive suggestions for adolescent recovery support were also offered. Nevertheless, my continued belief is that the legislature is moving too slowly. I will continue to push for resources and increased access to care.



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Committee Updates

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Education

Beyond Safe

Schools: Over the past two years, much discussion in the House Education Committee and throughout



Pennsylvania has centered on what can be done to make schools safer. In 2018, Act 44 created a \$60 million fund for school safety and security. Most of this money was spent to purchase security-related equipment designed to improve the safety of district buildings. As we all know, building safety does matter – but so does the behavioral health and well-being of students.

This spring, I spearheaded a package of legislation titled Beyond Safe Schools, which is a three-part approach to addressing these needs. Supportive Educators, teachers and other school personnel who are trained to recognize the signs of trauma and implement best practices to support students, are central to this plan. In addition, Supportive Programs and Services require that mental health education is added to existing health and wellness curricula and bullying prevention is taught at all grade levels.

Finally, I have introduced HB 1500 to help provide Support for Supports. The goal of this bill is to increase students' access to school counselors, psychologists, social workers and nurses. Schools will evaluate their needs based on school population, ensuring that adequate staffing levels of these critical personnel are maintained.

Real ID

Over the past two years, there's been a lot of talk about Real ID. Simply put, after October 1, 2020, people here in Pennsylvania and across the nation will not be able to board a domestic flight or enter a federal facility that requires identification, including a military base, unless they have identification that meets the Real ID criteria set by the federal government.

Here in Pennsylvania, each person will choose whether or not to get a Real ID. Remember, you can continue to use a regular driver's license or state ID for driving or for general identification purposes. Also, keep in mind that a valid passport is considered to be Real ID-compliant – so if you already have a passport, you don't need to get a Real ID driver's license, although you can if you want to.

If you do decide that Real ID is right for you, you will need to provide PennDOT with a set of required documents and pay a one-time Real ID fee of \$30. You will also pay a driver's license renewal fee (\$30.50) at the same time. You don't need to wait until your license expires – you can get your Real ID at any time. You will get credit for any time you had remaining on your old license plus the four years from the renewal, so you won't "lose" time that you already paid for. Your Real ID-compliant license will be issued, and your license will remain Real ID-compliant each time you renew after that.



The documents that are required for Real ID are:

Proof of Identity – Valid, unexpired U.S. Passport OR original or certified copy of a birth certificate with a raised seal

Proof of Social Security number – Social Security card (copies not acceptable)

Two Proofs of Current, Physical Pennsylvania Address – examples include current, unexpired PA license or ID, automobile registration, a bank statement or utility bill with the same name and address that is no more than 90 days old (may be online printout)

Proof of all legal name changes - Certified marriage record, court order or divorce decree from family court – NOTE: if you are using an unexpired passport that reflects your current name as proof of identity, you do not need to provide these additional name change documents.

If you have any questions or need any help, please feel free to email me at RepMiller@pahouse.net or call my office at 412-343-3870.

Contacting Rep. Miller

Hearing from you and working to address your state-related issues is an essential part of my job. Thanks for the honor to serve you, and I hope you will make a habit of reaching out! With the recent rise in local activism, I thought it might be helpful to describe our contact system.



Contacting for assistance:

This is where you, your family, your business, etc., need some type of direct help from my office regarding a state-related matter. You can email, call, or stop in, but it's best not to wait if you have a time-sensitive issue!

Contacting about legislation:

Some people just want to let me know their thoughts on a bill or on one of my votes, and that's OK. Others have a general inquiry about a specific piece of legislation or vote and would like to talk to my staff or to me directly about it. It helps us if you let us know how we can best respond to you. And no matter what, don't forget that we can always set up a phone conference to discuss an issue with you – or you can just stop in! Email, call, stop in, or write an actual letter – my office logs it all so that I stay on top of your concerns or thoughts.

Some constituent services we provide:

... I need help with unemployment benefits

If you are having difficulty getting answers from an Unemployment Compensation Service Center, our office can help you get in touch with them – without having to spend a long time on hold!

... I want to ride the bus for free/senior transit pass

Are you over 65? You can ride any Port Authority bus or T for free! Our office is authorized by Allegheny County to register persons 65 and older for the free Port Authority transit card. Stop in with a photo ID and fill out a quick form!

... I want to get an honor citation for a family member or friend

Are you or is someone you know celebrating a major birthday (over 74) or anniversary (25th, 50th, and higher)? Our office is able to obtain honorary citations and have them presented by either myself or a staff member to commemorate your special occasion.

... I am having issues with Medicaid/CHIP health benefits

Whether an initial application, renewal or coverage issue, our office can help clarify and submit documentation needed for those programs.



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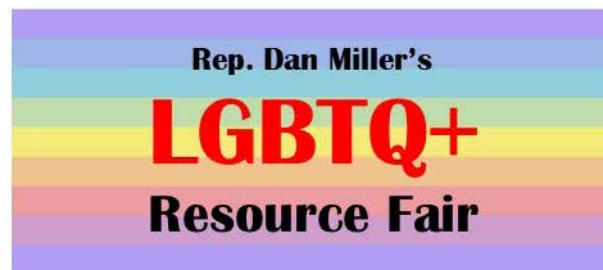
www.pahouse.com/miller

Upcoming Events



September 12th • 9 a.m. – Noon

Salvation Army Pittsburgh Temple
1060 McNeilly Road, Pittsburgh 15226



October 2019

More information to come.