



State Representative

Neal P. Goodman

123rd Legislative District

WINTER 2017 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SCI-Frackville to remain open



Rep. Goodman speaks at a rally in the Capitol and urges Gov. Tom Wolf not to close SCI-Frackville. On Jan. 26, the governor announced that SCI-Frackville will remain open. See the story inside this newsletter for more details.

Capitol Office: 512-E Main Capitol • P.O. Box 202123 • Harrisburg, PA 17120-2123 • (717) 787-2798

District Offices: 39 W. Centre St. • Mahanoy City, PA 17948
(570) 773-3075 • Toll-Free: (866) 861-1311

18 N. 2nd St. • Saint Clair, PA 17970 • (570) 429-1222

INSIDE:

- Millions in state grants aid Schuylkill County projects.
- Bipartisan effort leads to new blight laws.
- A look at legislation I have introduced.

Dear neighbor,

I am honored to again serve as your state representative. I will continue to be a strong advocate for Schuylkill County's interests in Harrisburg.

The 2017-18 legislative session is just a few weeks old, but there already has been a whirlwind of activity. You are probably aware that SCI-Frackville was one of five state prisons considered for closure. I worked with Schuylkill County lawmakers, community leaders, prison staff and their union to convince Gov. Tom Wolf to keep the facility open.

With those 400 family-sustaining jobs saved, I am looking forward to a productive session. Property taxes are the top concern of my constituents. I am again supporting the Property Independence Act that would abolish school property taxes. In addition, I am working on legislation that would help fight blight, secure adequate funding for schools and help senior citizens.

I also want to take a moment to look back at some accomplishments during the 2015-16 legislative session. I was

able to get three bills signed into law – two to help veterans and another to help communities fight blight.

The accomplishments are not just legislative. I helped secure more than \$13 million in grants during those two years. As a result, five dams in the 123rd Legislative District were fixed, nearly 70 fire companies received financial help, Newtown residents got public drinking water, a study was commissioned to see how to prevent Mill Creek flooding in Port Carbon and numerous projects to improve bridges, roads and other infrastructure have advanced.

I am hopeful the next two years will be even more productive.

Sincerely,



I was sworn in for an eighth term to represent the 123rd Legislative District during a ceremony Jan. 3 that marked the beginning of the 2017-18 session of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. It is an honor to have the residents of the 123rd District put their faith and trust in me. In addition, I was re-elected Caucus Administrator, giving me a position on the House Democratic Leadership team, and giving you a voice in the room when we discuss important issues.

Get All the Latest Updates

Connect with Rep. Goodman on social media – you'll get the latest updates on community news, local events and legislative updates.

 @RepNealGoodman

Website: pahouse.com/Goodman



Great news: SCI-Frackville to remain open



Rep. Goodman testifies at a hearing Jan. 23 before a state Senate panel and makes the case to keep SCI-Frackville open.

We were able to breathe a sigh of relief in late January when Gov. Tom Wolf and Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel decided to keep SCI-Frackville open. Those 400 family-sustaining jobs are vital to Schuylkill County's economy, and we could not afford to lose them.

The governor listened to arguments that I, other Schuylkill County lawmakers, community leaders, prison staff and their union made on behalf of SCI-Frackville. We pointed out that Frackville is an efficient, versatile facility that is in excellent physical condition.

Of course, the hard work by the staff of SCI-Frackville and the outpouring of support from the community greatly helped the case to keep the prison open.

Coal region residents always pull together during difficult times, and this was no exception. More than 5,600 people signed a petition urging the governor to keep the prison open. That was an amazing response!

Special thanks go out to state Sen. David Argall, state Reps. Jerry Knowles, Mike Tobash, Kurt Masser, Doyle Heffley and Tarah Toohil, as well as Congressman Matt Cartwright, the Schuylkill County commissioners, Ryan Township supervisors, and the Schuylkill Economic Development Corporation for making the case to keep SCI-Frackville open.

Credit also goes to Schuylkill County Municipal Authority, Frackville Area Municipal Authority, Wheelabrator Frackville, the Pennsylvania State Corrections Officers Association and SCI-Frackville Superintendent Kathy Brittain.

Protecting benefits for veterans

Pennsylvania thanks our veterans for the sacrifices they made by providing them with small stipends. However, these benefits could have disqualified veterans from the state's popular Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

To address this problem, I wrote legislation, now included in Act 117, that ensures Pennsylvania veterans are not shut out of the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program because a state-provided stipend related to their service puts them over the income limit.

Some of the veteran benefit programs addressed include the Blind Veterans Pension and the Amputee and Paralyzed Veteran Pension, both of which provide a maximum of \$1,800 to a veteran per year. The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is limited to those with maximum income of \$35,000 per year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for those who rent.

I have introduced legislation that would ensure these benefits do not prevent veterans from qualifying for the state's prescription drug assistance programs, PACE and PACENET.



Bipartisan effort leads to new blight laws

I was pleased to work in a bipartisan manner with state Sen. David Argall to get two significant bills signed into law that will help Schuylkill County communities fight blight. We worked together to shepherd proposals through the House and Senate to give local government additional funding options and stricter time periods in which property owners must address known code violations.

A law that I authored, Act 133, reduces from 18 months to 12 months the time a purchaser of a building has to correct known code violations or demolish the structure. The genesis of the law was a conversation I had with Mahanoy City Code Enforcement Officer William Killian, who pointed out that small code violations often become major code violations in 18 months, and if you have large code violations, an 18-month wait often leads to the need to demolish a building.

Sen. Argall's legislation, Act 152, allows counties to collect up to \$15 for each deed and mortgage recorded at the County Recorder of Deeds office to be used exclusively for demolition. Run-down properties drive down the value of neighboring properties and serve as a haven for criminal activity, and local government needs funding to attack the problem.



Rep. Goodman presents Mahanoy City Code Enforcement Officer William Killian a copy of a bill that reduces from 18 months to 12 months the time a purchaser of a building has to correct known code violations or demolish the structure. Goodman wrote the law based on a conversation he had with Killian.

A look at my legislation

Here is some legislation that I have introduced or will introduce soon:

- **Made in PA** – A “Made in PA” program would encourage Pennsylvanians to buy products made in the commonwealth with a new “Made in PA” logo placed on products made in Pennsylvania and are not covered by the blue and gold PA Preferred label used on agricultural products.
- **Gift card expiration ban** – One bill would prohibit expiration dates for gift cards and gift certificates sold in Pennsylvania and ban inactivity fees that reduce the value of the card or certificate purchased. A second bill would keep the federal five-year expiration date on gift cards as permitted by federal law, but would continue to prohibit inactivity fees.
- **Turkey hunting** – My bill would prohibit the use of calls that mimic the sound of a hen turkey 30 days prior to the beginning of the spring gobbler season.
- **Trail cameras** – Trail cameras and other viewing devices would be added to the section of the Game Code that covers theft and destruction of tree stands, blinds, and decoys. It also increases the penalty for violations to a first-degree summary from a second-degree summary. A summary 1 conviction carries a fine of \$1,000 to \$1,500



and a maximum jail sentence of 3 months. Also, new in my bill will be a mandatory hunting license revocation of one year for the guilty hunter, triggering the requirement for a violator to attend a remedial hunter education and safety course.

- **Mentored junior hunting** – This would expand Pennsylvania's mentored hunting programs to include people ages 12-17.
- **New Game Commission district** – My legislation would divide the 8th district into two, establishing a new 9th district that would include Schuylkill, Berks, Lehigh, and Northampton counties. The 8th district now contains those four counties plus Bucks, Montgomery, Chester, Delaware and Philadelphia. Dividing the districts would provide hunters from both regions a commissioner who is geographically closer and more attuned to their issues.
- **Increase pension for blind, amputee and paralyzed veterans** – Currently, Pennsylvania veterans who suffered service-connected injuries or diseases that caused blindness, paralysis or the loss of two or more limbs are eligible to receive a pension of \$150 per month. My legislation would increase the pension to \$200 per month.



Millions in grants for Schuylkill County

I am thrilled that local governments and organizations throughout the 123rd Legislative District secured more than \$8 million in grants from March 2016 through the end of the year. This funding has helped improve health care, aided local fire and ambulance companies, expanded the runway at the county airport, made schools safer and much more.

The grants include:

- \$2 million to Lehigh Valley Hospital-Schuylkill to integrate two facilities in Pottsville, consolidating acute, medical/surgical services at the East Norwegian Street campus while keeping adult and adolescent behavioral health and obstetrics at the South Jackson Street campus.
- \$1.62 million to the Schuylkill County Airport to expand the runway from 4,599 feet to 5,002 feet, allowing larger aircraft to land and improving safety for landing during inclement weather.
- Nearly \$750,000 to 61 local fire and ambulance companies for equipment and facilities.
- \$750,000 to Saint Clair to fix the Lawton Street Bridge.
- \$914,000 to Norwegian Township for a traffic signal at the Route 901/209 intersection and other improvements.
- \$274,500 to Pottsville for improvements to its downtown.
- \$100,000 to West Mahanoy Township to repair and pave Altamont Boulevard.
- \$367,000 to the Schuylkill Conservation District for watershed restoration on Good Spring and Upper Swatara creeks.
- \$101,771 to Schuylkill County for homeless services.
- \$22,952 to the Schuylkill Intermediate Unit, \$24,122 to the North Schuylkill School District and \$29,300 to the Shenandoah Valley School District for school safety improvements.
- \$146,674 to New Philadelphia for a walking trail and fishing pier.
- \$120,000 to Ashland for its Little League complex.
- \$10,000 to Lee's Oriental Gourmet Foods for production improvements.
- \$710 to Anthracite Philharmonic.
- \$769 to the Mahanoy Area Historical Society.



Congratulations to Shenandoah Valley High School graduate Kevin Graff Jr., who last year took first place in the national "Power Equipment Technology" Category at the Skills USA Championship in Louisville, Ky. Kevin is seated in the center.

COSTARS can help save money

Local government and schools in Schuylkill County have saved hundreds of thousands of dollars through the state's cooperative purchasing program, commonly known as COSTARS. Tax-exempt, nonprofit schools, health-care organizations, fire, rescue or ambulance companies, and any entity that spends public money for supplies, services, and construction, can qualify for the program.

To learn more, you can call the COSTARS team at 1-866-768-7827 or visit www.dgs.pa.gov and type COSTARS into the search button near the top of the page.





State Representative

Neal P. Goodman

P.O. Box 202123

Harrisburg, PA 17120-2123

Inside:

- **SCI-Frackville to stay open.**
- **Millions in grants help Schuylkill County.**
- **Bipartisan effort leads to new blight laws.**

lpo.kl.0217

FREE SHREDDING EVENT SET FOR APRIL 20

I am hosting a free community shredding event on **Thursday, April 20** to help fight identity theft and allow you to securely dispose of personal financial documents.

The event will be held from **9 a.m. to 2 p.m.** in the parking area by the **Sears/Bon-Ton entrance to the Schuylkill Mall, 830 Schuylkill Mall Road, Frackville.**

You may bring personal financial documents that are no longer needed, and any other unneeded papers that contain confidential information, such as:

- ✓ Documents containing Social Security, credit card and bank account numbers;
- ✓ Credit card applications;
- ✓ Canceled or unused checks;
- ✓ Insurance and income tax records;
- ✓ Bank and credit card statements; and
- ✓ Pension information.



To ensure everyone has an opportunity to shred their documents, please do not bring more than three standard-size document boxes or household garbage bags of documents. All documents for shredding must be paper. No plastic or cardboard will be accepted. Empty boxes and bags will be returned.