

State Representative • 115th Legislative District

Maureen E. MADDEN



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Hello Friends,

It has been a year since I was sworn in as your representative, and what a year it has been!

We opened two district offices: one in Coolbaugh at The Mountain Center, and one just off of Main Street in Stroudsburg. For those who have not had the opportunity to visit the Mountain Center, this incredible facility houses an array of agencies that serve the people of Coolbaugh, including a Head Start program, Women’s Resources of Monroe County, Feeding Families Ministries, Habitat for Humanity and Street2Feet, just to name a few. Beginning in January, my district office in Stroudsburg will now offer a public art space featuring the work of artists in our community.

This past year, I introduced legislation to ensure that your First Amendment rights don’t end at the gatehouse for those who live in home owners’ associations, to increase protections against sexual harassment in the workplace, and of course, to reduce the burden of property taxes here in Monroe County. Other issues of importance have been attracting businesses to the area and working on solutions to the pervasive opioid crisis that is invading our communities. Demanding legislative accountability in education funding, as well as challenging unfair water rate hikes for hardworking people have also kept me busy.

In July, we had our first Women’s Day Expo, which provided resources and information to women concerning state programs. It was an inspiring day, filled with speakers and vendors. We are planning our 2018 Women’s Day Expo. Updated information will be posted on my Facebook page in the coming months. Those wishing to participate as vendors should contact Erin DeRosa in my Stroudsburg office at (570) 420-2850.

By far, the most rewarding aspect of representing the 115th is getting out in the community and meeting with constituents. Whether it’s reading to students, recognizing the accomplishments of outstanding individuals, or lending support to the various philanthropic organizations that serve the most vulnerable in our community, every day I am reminded of the generosity, talent and successes of the people in our district.

Speaking with you, hearing your concerns and being your voice in Harrisburg is an honor. I will be holding three town hall meetings this winter to help set our goals for 2018. I look forward to meeting with you and hearing your thoughts on how we make the 115th and Pennsylvania a better place to live and work. Please follow my office’s social media pages, and check your email for further information regarding the town halls.

It has been a pleasure serving you in 2017 and I am looking forward to 2018 with optimism. Please don’t hesitate to contact my offices if you need help with any state-related matter. We’re here to serve.

Sincerely,

Maureen



Referendum passes – What does this mean for property taxes?

In November, voters across the commonwealth voted for a constitutional amendment that amends the Homestead Property Tax. This amendment gives lawmakers the power to allow local taxing authorities to reduce or eliminate property taxes for residential properties.

Why is this amendment so significant? It is the first step in implementing the property tax reform that many Pennsylvanians desperately need. The main problem with Pennsylvania's current property tax policy is that it can be tremendously unfair. Right now, tax relief for a particular residential property is based on the median figure of all houses in a particular district, not based off the value of your individual property. This leads to many homeowners being taxed at rates they cannot afford, and discourages potential homebuyers from purchasing a home. Every Pennsylvania homeowner should be taxed at a rate that is fair and manageable.

The General Assembly has, for over a decade, had the power to eliminate 50% of property taxes (my own bill does this) and they never have. Passing this amendment "permit(s) the General Assembly to enact legislation ..." that eliminates 100% of property taxes on homesteads and farms. If the General Assembly did eliminate property taxes, it would almost certainly have to come up with a way to fill this hole in the budgets of school districts to the tune of billions of dollars. Will having the ability to eliminate 100% of property taxes push the General Assembly to do so in a responsible way, now? I am hopeful that we will see results in some way in the coming year. There is no doubt that I will be fighting with my 202 other colleagues in Harrisburg to make this a reality.

MCTA routes

Since my first days in office, a theme in many of your concerns was the inability to access services in Coolbaugh. Listening to you, I made it a priority to collaborate with the Monroe County Transit Authority (MCTA) and the Pocono Mountain Library on bringing a bus route to the Mountain Center. This building not only houses a Head Start program but also a credit union, a food pantry, Habitat for Humanity, AARP, Women's Resources of Monroe County, my district office and many other services.

I'm proud to say that MCTA has begun operating a bus line to The Mountain Center, starting January 15. I'd like to especially thank Peggy Howarth, executive director of MCTA, and Rich Schlameuss, assistant executive director of MCTA, for their hard work on making this project a reality.



Legislation Corner

Over the past year, I have authored nine bills that address issues from the transfer of school records to real property tax reform. Three bills that I am particularly proud of are my political sign act, expanding sexual harassment protections in the workplace, and real property tax reform.

House Bill 1336

Recently, I introduced the Political Sign Act which would allow the display of political signs up to 30 days before and 48 hours after a general election, superseding homeowners' association bylaws. Your first amendment rights should not end at the gatehouse. While I'm still in favor of homeowners' association bylaws that provide important guidelines and set legitimate conditions and restrictions for tenants, the use of signs should not be banned entirely.

House Bill 1971

Currently, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (PHRA) treats sexual harassment as a form of discrimination based on sex. Unfortunately, the PHRA only applies to employers with four or more employees. As one can imagine, this definition fails to cover all businesses in the state and thereby leaves potentially thousands of employees without legal protections against sexual harassment. Very simply, my legislation would amend the PHRA to say that for instances of discrimination based on sex, an employer is an entity that employs one or more people.

Property Tax Reform

This past year, I have been working on real property tax reform that is focused on benefiting actual people, and not just a windfall for massive corporations. Since the referendum passed in November, new options have opened up for my property tax bill and I am currently reworking the bill.

Hope for the holidays



On Christmas Eve, the very definition of community could be witnessed at the Pocono Family YMCA.

My office, along with the YMCA and other community partners, decided to put an otherwise empty building to use this past Christmas to provide some holiday cheer to the most vulnerable in our community. We opened the doors to the homeless, and provided them with warmth, food, gifts and overnight accommodations.

Multiple area restaurants donated food, and residents showed up by the dozen with tray after tray of homemade dishes and desserts. Families came and served food and gave up their own Christmas Eve celebrations to help out those with nowhere to go.

I spent the night at the Y, prepared Christmas breakfast in the morning and listened to the issues and concerns of the overnight guests regarding the issues they face daily. Since that night, I have dedicated the last few weeks helping to expedite the process of turning the Pocono Family YMCA into a Code Blue Shelter.

As a Code Blue Shelter, our local YMCA is able to act as a refuge when temperatures dip dangerously low for those who would normally sleep outside. Another Code Blue Shelter will not solve the issue of homelessness in the Poconos in the long term, but it will help provide some comfort to those who suffer through the winter outdoors.



I enjoyed the holiday luncheon with our local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women. I had the opportunity to speak with these impressive high school and college students.

Recognition in the community



An inspiring part of my job is recognizing area residents who give of their time and talents freely to their community. Lorynn Watt, a senior at Evergreen Charter School, is one of those people.

In November, Lorynn was recognized for her efforts raising money and awareness for Juvenile Diabetes. Lorynn was chosen as the Eastern Delegate to the 2017 JDRF Children's Congress. It was my honor to present Lorynn with a citation for her work and a copy of a resolution I sponsored, which was adopted unanimously by the House of Representatives, recognizing November as Diabetes Awareness Month. The event took place at Evergreen with classmates, teachers and staff present.

Hurricane relief

On September 20, 2017 Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico and left behind unimaginable devastation. Here in the Poconos, we came together as a community for two large events to raise money and collect supplies to send to our fellow citizens on the island.



Poconos for Puerto Rico held a fundraiser at the Eastern Pocono Library in Stroudsburg on October 22. The



event was a combined effort between my office, Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez who serves as a commissioner on G.A.C.L.A. (the Governor's Advisory Committee on Latino Affairs), and many members of the community including Shayla Diaz-Brock and Chef Mike Abate. This group spent countless hours organizing, promoting and hosting the event, which raised thousands of dollars and collected over 10 pallets of supplies. Local musician Roy Ramos and the P.A. Dance Network kept attendees entertained throughout the afternoon. The donations were taken to Philadelphia and the governor's office ensured that they were delivered to Puerto Rico.

Equitable education funding focus of committee hearing

Despite having a state funding formula in place, there are still inequities in how our schools are funded throughout Pennsylvania.

As a member of the House Education Committee, I want to look deeper into this issue. To that end, the House Democratic Policy Committee held a public hearing at the Hughes Library in Stroudsburg in late October to provide insight into potential fixes to our state's education funding issues.

When the state adequately and equitably funds education, society as a whole benefits. Graduation rates increase, adult poverty rates fall, incomes rise and crime rates decline. It is important that we take a look at the bigger picture and equitably fund education so that all Pennsylvania children have access to a bright future.

Policy Committee Chairman Mike Sturla added: "As a member of the Basic Education Funding Commission, I had the opportunity to be a part of crafting a new formula that takes into consideration factors including tax capacity, poverty and district conditions. This is an important component in making sure we're directing funds to the schools that need it most. I thank Representative Madden for working to help us further close the education funding equality gap."

Hearing testifiers included Merlyn Clarke, school board member, Stroudsburg Area School District; Jeff Ney, vice president, Pennsylvania State Education Association; and Marc Stier, director, Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center.

Hearing testimony is available at: www.pahouse.com/PolicyCommittee.

A short clip of my comments about the hearing can be found in the Videos section of my website: www.pahouse.com/Madden.

A special thank you to the Pocono Record for writing an informative story about the meeting which can be found at <https://is.gd/EquitableFunding>.



Upcoming Town Halls

Being your voice in Harrisburg is a responsibility I take seriously. It is a crucial part of my job to hear your concerns and ensure you are represented in the Capitol. This winter, I will be holding three Town Halls in order to hear your thoughts. My first Town Hall will be held January 31 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Pocono Mountain Library. As locations and dates are finalized, I will announce these meetings via social media, email and my website. I look forward to speaking with you about the issues in the community and how I can better represent you in Harrisburg.

JANUARY 31

5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Pocono Mountain Library
5500 Municipal Dr. • Tobyhanna, PA 18466

LATE FEBRUARY

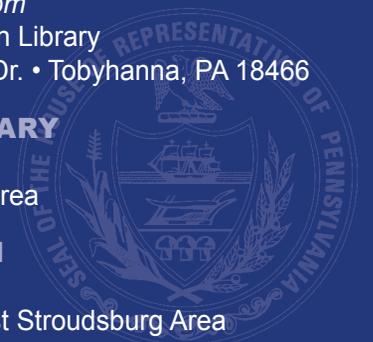
Evening

Paradise/Price Area

LATE MARCH

Evening

Stroudsburg/East Stroudsburg Area



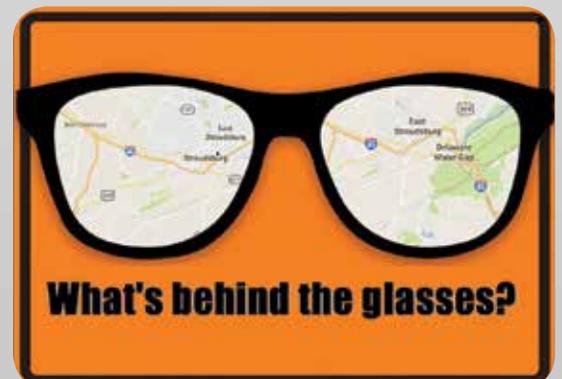
Route 80 expansion

As anyone who has the misfortune of getting caught at the wrong time on I-80 will attest to, this antiquated highway is prone to backups.

While PennDOT is working on how to reduce congestion on this integral part of our community, it's important that any solutions to traffic on I-80 are holistic. To this

end, I have been working with the I-80 Project Impact Task Force, MCTA, my fellow legislators and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative impacts of the Route 80 expansion.

I will keep you updated as this project continues.



Heating aid via LIHEAP now available

The 2017-18 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program – LIHEAP – is accepting applications for heating assistance grants.

LIHEAP offers cash grants of \$200 to \$1,000 that are sent directly to the utility company to defray heating costs for eligible households, and crisis benefits of \$25 to \$500 for households in immediate danger of being without heat, from such emergency situations as broken heating equipment or leaking lines, lack of fuel or utility service termination.

We have LIHEAP applications available at my local offices and also can help you file the application!

Besides my offices, LIHEAP information is available by:

- Contacting the Monroe County Assistance Office, 1972 W. Main St., Suite 101 in Stroudsburg or by phone at 570-424-3517;
- Calling the statewide LIHEAP Client Helpline at 1-866-857-7095; or
- Applying online at www.compass.state.pa.us.

The state Department of Human Services, which administers the federally funded LIHEAP program, mailed applications or information to people who received LIHEAP last season.

This season's income guidelines for both LIHEAP cash and crisis grants are \$18,090 for an individual and \$24,360 for couples, and increases for each additional person in the household.

Calling all local artists



Take a drive through the 115th District, from the murals in Stroudsburg to the various woodworking shops dotted around Monroe County, and you'll see that we have a vibrant community of artists.



What better way to encourage and foster a love of the visual artists and support their talents than to offer the walls of my office as a free, public art space. Starting in January, my district office in Stroudsburg will offer a place for local artists to display their work and the space is open



to the public to come and view the art. Each month, we will feature a new artist and we welcome all ages and mediums, so please contact my Stroudsburg office to exhibit your work in our "Gallery."

Watch 'Monroe Matters' each Tuesday

My monthly cable program "Monroe Matters" airs at 9 a.m. Tuesdays on Blue Ridge Communications News 13. If you can't catch it there, it's also on my Facebook page and website.

We cover a variety of local and state issues each month that I hope you find to be informative and useful. Please contact my office if there's a topic that you think I should address in a future show.





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My office can help you with ...

- PennDOT issues – vehicle registrations, special tags, handicap placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Obtaining and completing state forms
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- Requests for literature – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- PACE prescription-drug cards for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints
- Liquor Control Board concerns or questions
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups