



# Report to the People

Summer 2019

*State Representative*  
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*19th Legislative District*

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## Supporting our veterans when they return home

As you may know, I make it a point to rarely discuss my military career. However, I have seen and experienced first-hand the challenges that many of our veterans face when they return home from service.

Even though their service may have ended, many of our men and women still feel the effects of their time in the military. Suffering from an undiagnosed, service-connected mental health disorder or traumatic brain injury can often result in difficulties adjusting to civilian life, including struggles with the law. Those traumas can also make it hard to find employment.

That's why I've introduced legislation to help our veterans through these difficult periods of their lives. The first would build upon Pennsylvania's monumental Clean Slate Law by providing limited access to criminal records when a medical professional certifies the veteran has an undiagnosed, service-connected mental health disorder or traumatic brain injury.

Our veterans deserve the opportunity to create a better life here at home without a criminal record following them at every turn – especially when they did not receive the medical care they deserved between their service and now.

My second piece of legislation would also help veterans transition from military to civilian life by encouraging employers to hire veterans through a tax deduction program. Too often, veterans struggle to find meaningful employment, which contributes to other challenges they may be facing.

Our veterans are one of our greatest resources: men and women who have answered the nation's call, and who have served selflessly in the public's interest. Although we can never serve our veterans in quite the same way they served us, we can and should do what we can to welcome them back into our communities, and to give them the tools and opportunities they need to succeed.

## Update on State Correctional Institution Pittsburgh

The 22-acre, State Correctional Institution Pittsburgh (SCI Pittsburgh) closed mid-2017 after being in service, off and on for over 130 years. This was despite efforts by Sen. Wayne Fontana and me to keep the correctional institution open, desiring to keep inmates closer to their families in order to reduce recidivism and to keep jobs in the area. However, Gov. Tom Wolf made assurances that the state would engage the community as it pertains to the future of SCI Pittsburgh.

Two years after its permanent closing, a North Side nonprofit called Manchester Bidwell Corp. has a tentative agreement with the state Department of General Services (DGS) to buy the site for \$1. This purchase price is dependent on whether the nonprofit can conduct certain studies on the property and on the approval of the legislature.

A selling price of \$1 for a 22-acre parcel of land with structures built atop it is not unprecedented, even as extreme as that may sound. According to DGS, surplus property is first offered to other state agencies, but when that is not possible, it is made available to the public via a bidding process or legislative conveyance.

This is done to offload the responsibility of maintenance and to put the property in the hands of an entity or person who will care for it and give back to the community. DGS estimated annual maintenance costs of \$2.2 million for the former prison, making this deal a cost-saving measure for the state. Additionally, the \$1 price tag is not entirely reflective of the actual cost to the Manchester Bidwell Corp., since the nonprofit will be paying for the cost of inspections, environmental tests and redevelopment of the site.

The public will have an opportunity to read and comment on the deal before it is approved. Nothing is set in stone and final approval is contingent on several factors, one of those factors being input from the community that will be impacted by the site's redevelopment.

As I have stated before, I will not sign off on the deal until the Brightwood community says 'OK.' There will be a public meeting in August on the SCI Pittsburgh sale. Details are TBD but will be posted on my Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/RepWheatley](https://www.facebook.com/RepWheatley)) when announced. There is also a 270-day due diligence period that ends in October 2019. More information related to DGS surplus property can be accessed at [www.dgs.pa.gov](http://www.dgs.pa.gov).



# Working for You – Updates on ongoing community issues

## Oakland

One of the major development projects announced this year is a new 13-story research and office building on Forbes Avenue to replace the current Murdoch Building. Built as a partnership, Wexford Science + Technology and the University of Pittsburgh constructed the building to contain three floors of parking, and plans for a restaurant and community meeting space. This is just one of several projects in the works for Oakland's new 'Innovation District,' as the neighborhood undergoes a massive redevelopment centered on the university. Like many neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, this redevelopment brings both opportunities and challenges.

I hosted a community meeting, providing an open forum for residents to speak their concerns. Hotel owners said the height of the building could potentially block sunlight and the view of Pittsburgh city, which is a major marketing tool toward consumers. Representatives of Wexford Science and Technology assured residents that developers ran

shadow testing to determine if the height of the building will affect the sunrises within the neighborhood. Another concern that was raised was with respect to the loading area behind the building. Members of the community felt it could block traffic.

These meetings have been occurring throughout the summer, and if you have not attended, there are two more coming up this month:

**Wednesday, Aug. 14 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Oakland Career Center**

**Wednesday, Aug. 21 from 6 to 8 p.m. at 218 Oakland Ave. (second floor).**

There will also be additional sessions for public input this winter and spring. You can also find more information at the city's planning website, <https://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/oakland>.

## Hazelwood - Glenn Hazel High Rise

Residents of the Glenn Hazel High Rise came to "The People's Office" for assistance regarding the Glen Hazel housing improvements project. As a result, a meeting was convened on April 10 for all involved parties. State officials, Arco Management and residents of the Glenn Hazel High Rise gathered at the Glenn Hazel Recreation Center to voice their concerns regarding management.

Residents were upset at Arco Management's lack of communication and clarity on the process of relocating tenants to temporary units. Some tenants were being moved to permanent units (where they would stay) and others were temporarily being moved so their units could be updated by the housing authority.

Congressman Mike Doyle, Sen. Jay Costa and I mediated the meeting to develop a more efficient

communication system to keep residents informed, including letters and meetings to ensure a smoother process for the project. The housing authority agreed to and has since replaced their representative with someone who is more familiar with the community to reside on the resident committee (another added result from the meeting) to assist with reporting to ARCO management, the community of Glenn Hazel and the elected officials.



## Ending the driver's license catch-22

PennDOT estimates there are over 1 million suspended driver's licenses in Pennsylvania. A suspended driver's license creates barriers to employment and forces people to make impossible decisions regularly: Does a person drive their child to a doctor's appointment and risk further suspension penalties? Or do they not and risk their child suffering from a treatable illness? That is a predicament a person should never have to be in, and yet too many are.

To address these types of situations, I have been working with several stakeholders, including the courts, citizens and PennDOT, as well as lawmakers across the aisle to craft

an amnesty program in Pennsylvania based on a similar program in California.

The program would provide an amnesty period for driving fines and fees that have become cost prohibitive. The details of this program have been in development across multiple legislative sessions and have finally reached a point where the implementation language works for all parties. The bill is scheduled to be introduced shortly to provide relief to those living under the pressure of suspended driver's licenses. The goal is to get people legally back on the road and out of the cycle of suspensions.

# Photos from around the district



We had a wonderful turnout this year for my 10th annual Golden Luncheon in April.

It is always wonderful to meet with so many people and connect them with services in their community.



In May, I held a town hall meeting in Hazelwood with Sen. Jay Costa and Rep. Summer Lee to talk about issues affecting folks in the community.

I always welcome the opportunity to connect with people in our community to hear about their concerns.

## Working to protect medicinal cannabis patients' rights

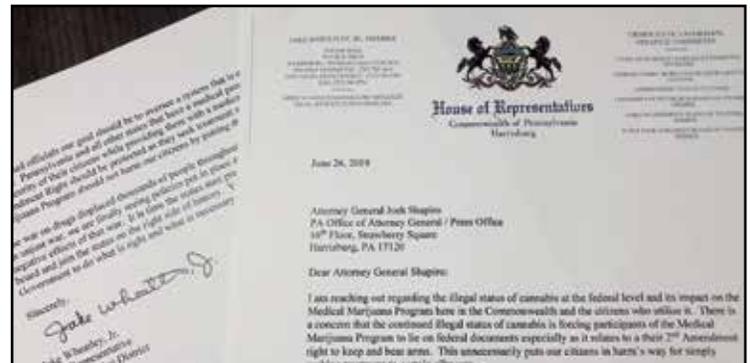
In the two years since it was signed into law, Pennsylvania's medical cannabis program has proven highly successful. Already, we have connected more than 100,000 patients who suffer from debilitating illness with the care and medication they need, and the program continues to grow.

But even the best ideas can have unintended consequences, and the federal government's failure to recognize the 34-and-counting state medical cannabis programs has thrown patients and providers into legal limbo.

Because federal statutes have failed to keep pace with the changing times, patients in Pennsylvania and other states are finding themselves caught between pursuing needed medical treatments and federal laws which prohibit those very treatments.

That is why I have asked state Attorney General Josh Shapiro to use his position to seek changes at the federal level, and to make specific changes to forms and procedures followed in Pennsylvania. Specifically, I've asked him to discontinue the use of certain federal forms during background checks, to modify state paperwork, and to work with local sheriff departments to protect patients' rights when conducting checks.

We need him to be actively advocating on behalf of these



Pennsylvanians, and on behalf of the rights of all people in this commonwealth.

Additionally, I've continued to work with my fellow legislators to push for further changes to Pennsylvania's cannabis laws. Specifically, we've proposed a slate of changes, which run the gamut from decriminalization of small amounts of cannabis to full legalization for responsible adults.

These efforts build on the invaluable efforts of many individuals by crafting comprehensive legislation that would not only decriminalize and legalize adult-use cannabis, but would rectify decades of injustice while also investing in the people and future of our commonwealth.

# Harrisburg Update



This year, the General Assembly passed the budget on time and although there were aspects of the budget that did not receive the support they should have, there were no tax increases. We were able to make significant increased investments in basic education and special education funding.

We also increased allocations for Ready to Succeed Scholarships and increased library funding for the first time since drastic cuts were made in the wake of the Great Recession. There was also a significant investment made to the Board of Pardons to modernize its IT systems to expedite review of clemency applications. In addition to the investments mentioned, we appropriated billions to keep the commonwealth moving forward. However, there is still more we can, and will, do.

Additionally, I have been working on several legislative initiatives aimed at social justice and improving the lives of Pennsylvanians everywhere. One initiative is an adult-use cannabis legalization bill (HB 50), which would legalize cannabis for adults 21 or older. It would also reform the commonwealth's legal system by expunging cannabis-related records and free incarcerated individuals from cannabis-related offenses. I have also introduced legislation that would expand upon the Clean Slate Law of 2018, to provide clean slate opportunities for veterans with criminal records related to undiagnosed, service-connected mental health disorders and/or traumatic brain injuries.

Other legislation in the works includes a bill that would raise the standards for certification and decertification for a law enforcement officer to work as a licensed police officer within the commonwealth. This bill would apply to sheriffs' officers, state police, municipal police officers and correctional officers. In addition to licensing police officers, it would provide the public with a venue where behavioral misconduct concerns would be addressed. Like other professional licenses, this entity would have the ability to decertify officers based on the decision of the board.

Lastly, I plan to introduce legislation related to the disproportionate number of ex-convicts – especially African-American males – who are forced to wait to register to vote even after having served their time. My legislation would permit ex-felons to immediately register to vote, hold public office and provide for a full expungement for non-violent crimes. This is an important step toward reintegrating people who have paid their debt to society. With these proposed policy changes, the goal is to create a more equitable system for the people of the commonwealth. Additional information on this and other legislation can be found at [www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us).



# Aspire To Be Youth Summit

I am proud to announce that my office is hosting an Aspire To Be Youth Summit on:

**Tuesday Oct. 22, 2019**

The focus of the summit is to engage the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs around areas of technology, art expressions, traditional and nontraditional careers, as well as advocacy solutions for peace and social justice.

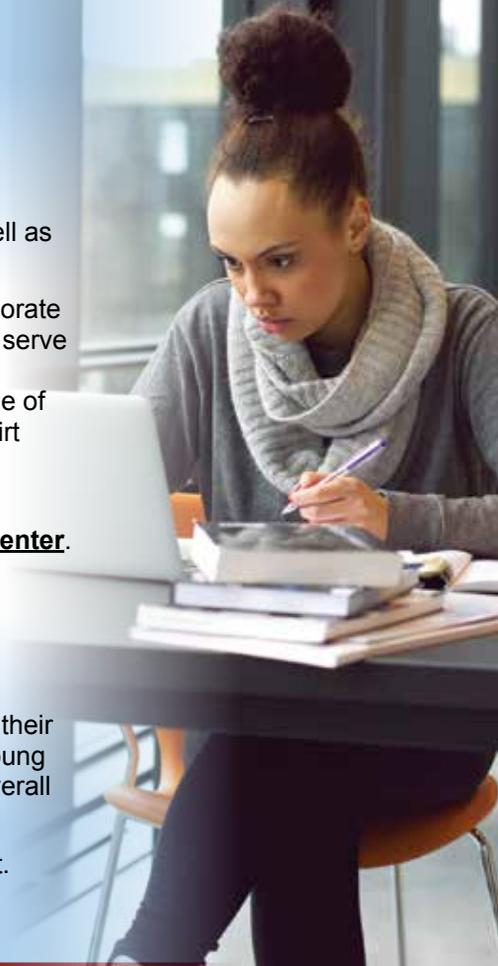
We are connecting with local entrepreneurs, as well as leaders in the non-profit and corporate sectors who have built successful platforms by way of tech, art and media enterprises to serve as a resource to the youth. Participants will engage in project-based learning workshops where students will receive a critical understanding and/or create something from any one of the following subjects: Creative writing and blogging; techniques for video blogging; T-shirt design and heat pressing; music development for song structure and engineering; and advocacy and art productions.

The summit will have two parts, both taking place at the **Duquesne University Power Center**.

- **Part 1** – High school students will be engaged through project-based learning related to the foci mentioned above. High school students throughout the 19th District will also be recognized by receiving a citation award for distinct contributions around advocacy, organizing, and creative art and tech business models.
- **Part 2** – Young adults ages 18-25 will be able to showcase their artwork or business to their peers. There will also be information/resource tables that can potentially help further young adults' aspirations related to college, trade/tech programs, entrepreneurship, and an overall improved quality of living.

There will be prizes, giveaways and performances to ensure a lively and enjoyable event.

Hope to see you there!



## The People's Office can help you with:

- Car registrations, special tags, handicap placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Issues with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Inquiries about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Issues with insurance companies
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program problems or questions
- 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
- Information about federal, state and local government agencies

**If you need help with any state or government-related services, please feel free to contact my office at 412-471-7760 for assistance.**

## 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Health and Wellness Weekend



**Friday, Aug. 16 thru Sunday, Aug. 18**

**Free Food, Resources, Entertainment, Health Screenings, Giveaways and More!**

**Friday, Aug. 16, 2019** Opening Night Mixer  
5:30 to 9:30 p.m. at Alloy 26 inside Nova Place

**Saturday, Aug. 17, 2019** Historic Hill 5K Run/Walk/Ride  
Registration: 6:30 a.m.  
Start times: Bike Ride 8 a.m. • Race 8:30 a.m.

**Saturday, Aug. 17, 2019** Community Appreciation Day  
Noon to 5 p.m. Between Centre Ave. & Elmore St. and Centre Ave. & Grove St.

**Sunday, Aug. 18, 2019** Health Expo for African-American Living @ 1 to 4 p.m.  
Warrington Recreation Center  
329 E. Warrington Ave.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15210



## Pathways 2 Pardons Campaign Kickoff Event

Hosanna House  
807 Wallace Ave. • Wilkesburg, PA 15221  
**Tuesday, Sept. 3, 2019** • 5:30 to 8 p.m.

A one-stop shop for to streamline the process of pardons and to educate and assist those who are eligible for pardons in an efficient way.



## Veterans Resource Fair and Town Hall



**With Rep. Sara Innamorato and I**

Duquesne University Ballroom

**Sunday, Sept. 29, 2019** • Noon to 5 p.m.

Connect and engage with 30 national, regional and local veteran non-profit organizations concerning services and benefits, and interact with local and state officials.

This resource fair and town hall is a great opportunity for veterans and their families to learn about and connect with state, federal and local resources related to jobs, health and overall well-being.