



State Senator

CONNIE WILLIAMS

Serving the 17th Senatorial District

REPORTS

MAY I HELP?

■ OFFICES TO SERVE YOU

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- State Budget Information
- Medical Malpractice Update
- Legislative Initiative

Dear Friends,

September 2004

Early in July, the state budget for 2004-05 was adopted. The final \$23.280 billion plan includes more funding for education and for libraries.

The package of bills that we adopted included legislation that will provide every homeowner with property tax relief and will provide a new revenue source for the state. It is a first step toward moving away from our reliance on property taxes.

One victim during the final weeks of session before summer recess was medical malpractice liability reform. I have included an update to explain what happened and what plans we have to continue the debate in Harrisburg.

Finally, I'd like to update you on a new legislative initiative designed to protect children in child care and invite you to attend town meetings that I will host this fall.

As always, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and opinions and my staff and I are available to help with any state related matter.

All my best,

Connie

SENATOR CONNIE WILLIAMS

Save the Date

Senior Expo 2004

October 14 • 10 am – 2 pm • Plymouth Meeting Mall

Please RSVP to

(610) 992-9790 or (610) 853-5433



CONSTITUENT SERVICES IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD:

ARDMORE

Senior Citizens Center

4th Thurs. of each month • 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

CONSHOHOCKEN

Marshall Lee Towers

3rd Fri. of each month • 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

HAVERTOWN

Center for Older Adults

2nd Fri. of each month • 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

KING OF PRUSSIA

Upper Merion Senior Service Center

2nd Wed. of each month • 11:15 a.m. – 1 p.m.

NARBERTH

Narberth Library

2nd Tues. of each month • 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

NORRISTOWN

Norristown Senior Center

3rd Thurs. of each month • 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

WAYNE

Wayne Senior Center

1st Wed. of each month • 10 a.m. – noon.

MORE TO COME . . .

MY OFFICE CAN HELP YOU WITH:

STATE APPLICATIONS

Birth and/or Death Certificates
Driver's Licenses • Notaries
State Income Taxes
Vehicle Registrations/Renewals

SENIOR CITIZENS' ASSISTANCE

Guides to Senior Citizens' Benefits and Rights
PACE and PACENET Applications
Property Tax/Rent Rebate Forms
Reduced Auto Registration Forms
Social Security Benefit Information

PHEAA

Applications and Information on College Grants and Loans

PAMPHLETS

Various publications from state agencies that explain programs, promote tourism and announce events throughout Pennsylvania

VOTER INFORMATION

Absentee Ballot Applications
Election Calendars • Registration Forms

Highlights of the 2004-05 State Budget

In the early morning hours of July 4th, the governor signed into law a state spending plan that increases state support for education and represents the first movement away from property taxes. The final plan includes:

- New funds to local school districts **\$300 million**
- Basic education subsidy **\$150 million increase**
- Special education subsidy **\$18 million increase**
- Accountability Grant program **\$200 million**
- Head Start state fund supplement **\$15 million**
- Tutoring programs **\$47 million**
- Approved Private Schools **\$23 million**
- Library funding **\$57.9 million**
- Farmers' Market Coupon program **\$2 million**
- Elm Street and Main Street initiatives **\$19 million**
- AIDS programs **\$7.801 million**
- Community colleges **\$12.3 million increase**
- State System of Higher Education **\$18.8 million increase**



State Funding for Schools in the 17th District

	Funding in Millions	
	FY 2003-2004	FY 2004-2005
Basic Education		
Colonial	\$2.462	\$2.511
Haverford	\$2.565	\$2.616
Lower Merion	\$2.984	\$3.119
Norristown Area	\$6.681	\$7.129
Radnor	\$1.529	\$1.565
Upper Merion Area	\$1.738	\$1.772
Special Education		
Colonial	\$1.805	\$1.841
Haverford	\$2.144	\$2.187
Lower Merion	\$2.606	\$2.658
Norristown Area	\$3.579	\$3.651
Radnor	\$1.135	\$1.158
Upper Merion Area	\$1.271	\$1.297

■ Property Tax Reduction Coming

Pennsylvania homeowners are expected to receive the largest decrease in property taxes in the state's history under legislation signed into law in July.

Senate Bill 100 will provide property tax reduction throughout the Commonwealth. In 66 of 67 counties, every homeowner will receive some property tax reductions. In Philadelphia, the same state funded tax relief will provide for a wage tax reduction. Qualifying senior citizens in Philadelphia will also receive additional state funded property tax relief.

In just the last decade, property taxes have increased by roughly 55 percent statewide. Property taxes place an unfair burden on our communities, senior citizens and working families. This happened because the state share of school funding has declined, placing the burden on local school districts that rely primarily on property taxes to fund schools.

The new law will allow every school district to reduce its reliance on residential property taxes by a minimum of 10 percent. By combining property tax relief with new education funding the state's share of school funding will rise to 44 percent from its current level of 34 percent.

The new law gives school districts the choice of either opting in or not and returns control over future property tax increases to the voters.

To receive state funds for property tax relief, all school districts must impose 0.1 percent local EIT. All of the funds generated by the increase in the local EIT will remain within the community to fund property tax relief. Those districts that do not currently impose an EIT will be able to defer imposing the mandatory 0.1 percent contribution until the fall of 2007. After this time a referendum must be on the ballot for voters to approve a shift to

wage taxes to fund additional property tax relief. This will begin the switch from property taxes toward a more progressive system that relies on income taxes and increased state support for a greater portion of funding for public schools.

I would have preferred that a referendum not be part of the final legislation, however, proponents had enough votes to support it. To make the referendum a little easier on schools, I worked with Senate leaders and with the administration to ensure certain exceptions were included. These protect school districts from rising costs due to circumstances beyond their direct control. Among the nearly dozen exceptions are extraordinary increases in special education funding, paying off debt for school

construction projects, implementation of school improvement plans, increases in teacher health care costs, increases in the employees' retirement contribution and responding to a declared emergency or disaster.

The backend referenda will apply to future school district budgets beginning fiscal year 2006/07. If school districts do not raise property taxes up to an inflation adjusted index amount they will not have to seek voter approval.

It is my hope that this is just the beginning of a real dialogue on school funding reform. I will continue to work with Governor Rendell toward his goal of providing 50 percent state funding for local education costs.

Bridgeport Borough Check Presentation

During a meeting in July, Sen. Connie Williams presented Bridgeport Borough Council President John Pizza with two checks from the Department of Community and Economic Development totaling \$60,000. The checks will be used to support the Rambler, which provides free transportation for seniors with PennDOT passes during off-peak hours, and to fund an emergency generator for Borough Hall and the police department.



■ Answers to Questions on Slots in Pennsylvania

■ **How many slot locations will there be?** The legislation allows for 61,000 slot machines at 14 facilities statewide. Up to eight of those locations will be at horseracing tracks that host betting on horse races.

■ **Will this mean jobs for Pennsylvanians?** Yes. Up to 10,000 jobs are expected to be created at the new facilities alone, as well as providing new incentives for tourism-related businesses. Additionally, facilities ranging from \$100 million to \$300 million will be constructed. This will be a boom to the state's construction industry.

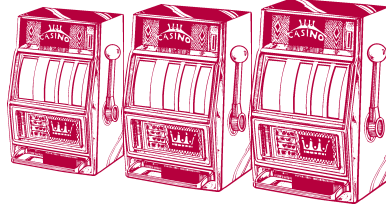
■ **Who will oversee the industry?** A 7-member gambling commission will award the licenses.

■ **Why doesn't Pennsylvania auction the licenses and make more money on these fees?** At \$50 million, Pennsylvania has the highest license fee in the country and by setting a one-time fee, we ensure that license owners not only have the funds necessary to build the establishment, but that these establishments can be built within a reasonable amount of time.

■ **How is the state protecting against corruption?** There are strong licensing requirements, strict background/financial/tax clearance checks. Licensees are prohibited from making political contributions.

■ **I heard that elected officials can own part of these licenses, isn't that a conflict of interest?** The current legislation allows public officials on all levels of government to own up to a 1 percent share of a license, however I do not currently, nor do I plan to own any portion of a license. In fact, I am cosponsoring legislation that will close this loophole and disallow state elected officials to have any financial interest in gaming venues, holding companies, affiliates or associated businesses.

■ **How much will the average homeowner receive in a tax break from slot revenues?** The initial break will be around \$300 based on \$750 million raised in gaming revenue. That figure increases to just over \$400 if the state receives \$1 billion in revenue.



■ **When will homeowners first receive a tax break?** The licenses will be sold later this year and then time will be needed to build the facilities. It is anticipated that the first year tax relief will be available will be 2006-07, but the gambling commission could make the decision to release funds earlier. Part of the delay is to allow for the Property Tax Relief Fund to reach \$500 million and the Property Tax Reserve Fund to reach \$400 million. The state will receive \$700 million in licensing fees, so we anticipate quickly reaching the prescribed levels in both funds. The funds were set up to ensure that property tax relief would continue to be available.

■ **Is there anything built into the system to help people who become addicted?** Pennsylvanians already spend about \$3 billion annually to gamble in other states. The new law does include treatment and help for those who have or develop a gambling addiction. Additionally, the law disallows multiple free drinks, forbids "comps" and prohibits slot parlors from accepting credit/debit cards.

■ **Will this really help the horse racing industry?** This measure will save Pennsylvania's horse racing industry and other related agricultural industries by making our tracks competitive with tracks in neighboring states. We will be able to offer larger purses, bigger races, better horses and better jockeys. At the same time, it will ensure the people working in the barns and doing other work at the tracks will have better benefits and working conditions.

Good Government Day Seminar



In May, Sen. Connie Williams hosted a Good Government Seminar to introduce high school students to the workings of state government. During the seminar, Williams brought together students, community leaders, state leaders and lobbyists. Students were able to debate a bill and learn about current issues. Williams plans to host a similar event in 2005. Pictured with Sen. Williams are students from Upper Merion Area High School.

Election Reform Policy Committee Hearing



Safeguarding voter's rights was the basis for a hearing of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee that Sen. Connie Williams hosted this year. The committee examined legislation that Williams sponsored that would protect the public by requiring companies or individuals sending Internet or E-mail or making telephone calls on behalf of candidates to offer proper disclosure. Pictured are (from left) Sen. Ray Musto, Rep. Greg Vitali, Sen. Richard A. Kasunic, Sen. Connie Williams, Rep. Daylin Leach and Rep. Kathy Manderino.

■ Medical Malpractice Insurance Reform on Life Support

Senate Bill 9 and House Bill 2722 are the bills that would have allowed the legislature to begin the process of placing a question on the ballot to ask voters if they would favor caps on non-economic damages. Although S.B. 9 passed the Senate and H.B. 2722 passed the House, neither of these bills was voted on by both chambers and so reform has been stalled.

In the closing days of session, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted 10-4 against reporting H.B. 2722 out of committee for a vote of the full Senate. At the same time, a discharge resolution before the full House to report S.B. 9 out of the House Judiciary Committee failed by

a vote of 107-93. These votes are unfortunate because a majority of both House and Senate members have previously voted in support of caps.

Both bills contain the same language, however, in order to become law, the same bill must pass both the House and Senate. The legislature

completed its business with no further votes taken on the issue of medical malpractice caps before adjourning for the summer.

I will continue to use my vote and my voice to fight to alleviate the medical malpractice crisis and keep doctors in Pennsylvania.

■ Approved Private School Update

Approved private schools – schools that provide education to special needs children with severe disabilities – have faced a funding crisis, which the state budget begins to address.

I have been a vocal supporter of better funding for APS and revamping the funding formula and have worked diligently in Harrisburg to bring the issue to the forefront. I co-sponsored legislation to change the funding formula, which along with input from the administration, has become the basis for the new funding formula that was adopted (H.B. 564).

A student is placed in an APS through joint approval of the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the student's local school district. The schools are funded through a 60 percent contribution from the state and 40 percent from the special education line item of the referring school district.

After the first year under the new formula (which is based on a three year rolling average), funding will be determined by multiplying the payment for the preceding school year by 125 percent of the percentage increase in the appropriation for special education and adding that figure to the previous year payment.

These schools are valuable resources that provide opportunities to allow students to achieve their full potential. I will continue to monitor the funding issue in Harrisburg.

Heuser Park Check Presentation



Sen. Connie Williams presented a \$100,000 check earlier this year to Upper Merion Township to be used for the new Heuser Park project. When complete, the park will boast three baseball fields and two football fields, parking areas and new landscaping. From left: Board of Supervisor member Dan Rooney, Sen. Connie Williams, Rep. Daylin Leach, Upper Merion School Director Cathy Farrell, Dave and Mary Vannicelli and John Biscotti, all of Upper Merion Baseball Association and King of Prussia Football Indians. The check was from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Crosswalk Project Check Presentation



A \$15,000 check from the Department of Community and Economic Development was the last of the funds needed to complete a state-of-the-art pedestrian crosswalk in Ardmore. Sen. Connie Williams was happy to help secure the funds for the new roadway lighting system that warns motorists that pedestrians are crossing.

■ Protecting Children in Child Care

In December of 2002, Act 211 was signed into law. It mirrored legislation that I sponsored requiring petting zoos and other animal exhibitions to provide hand-washing facilities and to post information about the more than 75 diseases humans can contract from contact with animals.

The legislation was a result of an outbreak in 2000 at a Montgomery County petting zoo in which 55 cases of E. coli were confirmed, 16 people were hospitalized and a 4-year-old girl required a kidney transplant.

Children are at the greatest risk for serious complications from E. coli infection because they are more susceptible to infection and because children are least likely to

understand and follow hygiene rules around animals.

In an effort to strengthen the law passed in 2002 and to protect children in child care facilities, I plan to introduce legislation that would prohibit reptiles (such as turtles, iguanas, snakes and lizards) in child care facilities.

Reptiles may account for as many as 3 to 18 percent of the estimated 1.4 million cases of salmonella infections that occur annually in the United States. In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a public advisory warning that 93,000 people each year contract salmonellosis from contact with reptiles and amphibians. The CDC recommends that children, pregnant

women and people with compromised immune systems avoid contact with reptiles and amphibians.

Similar bans on reptiles in child care facilities are going into effect in Wyoming, Minnesota, Arizona, New York and Washington.

Librarian Recognition Awards



For the second year, Sen. Connie Williams hosted the Librarian of the Year Awards.

Because the award program was so popular during its first year, Williams expanded the awards program and honored librarians from a public library and from a school library. This year's winners were Sharon Nardelli of Upper Merion High School and Deborah Purdy of Haverford Township Free Library.

Town Meetings Scheduled

I plan to hold two town meetings in October to explain the tax reform legislation and answer questions on the backend referendum for school budgets.

Please plan to attend one of the following town meetings:

Oct. 7 7 p.m. — Norristown High School Auditorium

Oct. 13 7 p.m. — Radnor High School Auditorium

STATE SENATOR CONNIE WILLIAMS

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