



State Representative

PAUL COSTA

34th Legislative District

Legislative Update

333 Main Capitol Bldg. • P.O. Box 202034 • Harrisburg, PA 17120-2034 • (717) 783-1914 • Fax: (717) 705-2564
501 Braddock Ave. • Braddock, PA 15104 • (412) 273-3400 • Fax: (412) 273-3434

Consumer Convenience Package

August 2016 brought to the commonwealth the largest liquor reform package since prohibition ended 80 years ago. The changes made by H.B. 1690 have been requested by many consumers across Pennsylvania for years.

Signed into law June 6, 2016, and taking effect Aug. 8, 2016, the historic, bipartisan liquor reform opened the doors for consumers and the commonwealth alike. Not only did it provide consumers a one-stop shop experience, but it also created a new revenue stream for Pennsylvania.

The Consumer Convenience Package provides the following benefits to the community:

- Grocery stores can now apply to sell wine.
- State-operated liquor stores can open on holidays and have longer hours on Sunday.
- Wine producers can apply to ship wine directly to consumers.
- Restaurants, hotels, grocery stores, bars, and taverns can sell up to four bottles of wine for take-out.
- Convenience stores and delis can now sell six packs.

This bill was especially important to me, as I've been advocating for consumer convenience within the liquor system since first becoming the Democratic chairman of the House Liquor Control Committee. At that time, the idea of leasing the entire liquor system for private management of wholesale and retail operations had been proposed.

Doing so would have added yet another layer of bureaucracy to the system; it would have led to an increase in prices; and it would have put the jobs of our fellow residents at risk. Luckily that wasn't the case, as thousands of existing jobs were maintained thanks to this legislation.



Pennsylvania begins roll-out of Medical Marijuana Program



Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program, signed into law on April, 17, 2016, became effective on May 17, 2016, and is expected to be fully implemented sometime in 2018.

Pennsylvania is still on track to meet that deadline, with a number of dispensaries across the state approved for the cultivation of medical marijuana. The first dispensary opened Jan. 17 in the Lehigh Valley.

I, as did a number of House Democrats, supported this bill in the process to becoming state law. While the bill itself was controversial across the board, House and Senate members from both sides of the aisle worked to push this bill to the governor's desk and give residents who would benefit from medical marijuana the relief they need.

As of late December 2017, it's reported that over 10,000 patients have registered for the state program, with nearly 2,000 patients certified by a physician to participate.

Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program allows for the use of medical marijuana products for individuals diagnosed with one of the following severe, debilitating, or life-threatening medical conditions:

- Cancer
- HIV/AIDS
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- Parkinson's disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Epilepsy
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis
- Huntington's disease
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Glaucoma
- Sickle cell anemia
- Autism
- Damage to the nervous tissue of the spinal cord
- Seizures
- Terminal illness
- Severe chronic or intractable pain

It's important to note that the state's Medical Marijuana Act limits medical marijuana to be distributed in the forms of a pill, oil, topical cream, vaporization or nebulization, tincture, and liquid. The Medical Marijuana Act does not allow for the dry leaf or plant form of marijuana.



How to apply for the Medical Marijuana Program:

Applying for Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program isn't as difficult as it may seem, provided you have a working knowledge of the program.

Your first step is to visit the Patients and Caregivers Registry page on the state Department of Health's Medical Marijuana Program webpage and create a patient profile. If you are a parent, guardian, or caregiver, be sure to create a patient profile under the appropriate Caregiver registration.

The address is:
<http://padohmmp.custhelp.com/app/login>.

Following the creation of your patient profile, you'll need to obtain a physician's certification that you suffer one of the 17 serious medical conditions listed in the Medical Marijuana Act. From there you'll head back to the Patients and Caregivers Registry page and pay for a medical marijuana ID card. Your final step is to obtain your ID card from an approved dispensary in Pennsylvania.

Note: Only registered, certified physicians are permitted to recommend your approval for the Medical Marijuana Program. A list is available online at www.health.pa.gov.

Important facts about Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program:

It's important to note the following when considering this program:

This program does not protect individuals against federal prosecution. The U.S. Department of Justice has the authority to enforce civil and criminal federal laws relating to marijuana possession and use, regardless of state law.

- Patients who are residents of Pennsylvania and have a serious medical condition as certified by a physician will be able to obtain medical marijuana at dispensaries that are located within the state and have a validly issued permit from the department. A "caregiver" who is elected by the patient and is registered with the department will be able to obtain medical marijuana from a dispensary within the state that has a validly issued permit from the department.
- A caregiver is an individual who is 21 years of age or older, unless otherwise authorized by the department, who is designated by the patient; a parent, legal guardian or spouse of a patient that is under the age of 18; and/or designated to be a caregiver by a parent, legal guardian or spouse of an individual approved by the department if no parent or legal guardian is appropriate or available.

A reminder of House Scholarship availability

I want to remind all graduating high school seniors and their families about the availability of the 2018 Pennsylvania House of Representatives Scholarship.

The four-year scholarship is awarded to two students preparing to enter post-secondary education, and each award is approximately the value of one semester of tuition at a state-related university.

The award for the 2017-2018 school year was \$4,500.

The application deadline is March 1, and applicants must be Pennsylvania high school residents who have a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade-point average; plan to attend a state college, university or career school as a full-time student; and demonstrate leadership and community service.

An essay is also required to apply; this year's subject is how to attract more people to register and vote.

I, along with two other state representatives, created this scholarship program several years ago, and I'm ecstatic to see how our efforts to provide funding opportunities for students are making a difference for those who wish to continue their education.

It's important to note that no tax money is used to fund the House Scholarship program, nor is it affiliated with any political party. The funding comes from private donations, including former and current House members.

Do not miss this amazing opportunity to alleviate some of the financial pressures of pursuing a college degree. Accept this challenge and have a chance at being one of the two students awarded this year's Pennsylvania House of Representatives Scholarship.



Former Woodland Hills High School student Keza Harewood, recipient of a scholarship.



“Just a reminder in these cold days of winter, please bring your pets inside. If it's too cold for you – it's too cold for them.”

Notable grants helping our 34th Legislative District



Allegheny County and the 34th Legislative District have been fortunate this past year to receive a number of state grants to

continue the beautification and restoration of our wonderful community.

That being said, I'd like to talk about several grants that will better assist us in our restoration journey. Recently, I announced a grant awarded by the Commonwealth Financing Authority to help fund the next phase of improvements to Lions Park in Wilkins Township.

This is a perfect example of how to properly utilize state grant money. Keeping our parks updated will give residents a place to frequent and entice others to join our neighborhood.

Phase two of the construction project involves a playground expansion, which includes new play equipment, a deck hockey rink, a dog park, a volleyball court, a horseshoe pit, and a paved walking trail.

Another grant awarded this year by the Commonwealth Financing Authority will help pay for street and safety improvements in the Swissvale and Edgewood boroughs.

The funds will go toward the third phase of the streetscape improvement project in Swissvale's business district along Noble Street, which includes installing 18 decorative street lamps and 18 trees. The funds also will focus on the Regent Square area, which connects the two boroughs.

This portion of the project will involve installing approximately 240 square feet of stamped and dyed concrete crosswalks; two bump-outs on South Braddock Avenue; four disability accessible ramps; and one solar-powered, rectangular, rapid-flashing beacon system.

Another state funding source I'd like to highlight are the PA Small Water and Sewer grants awarded in March 2017. The funds were allotted to Wilkins Township for sewer system upgrades along Mortimer and Highland avenues. A separate grant was secured for Braddock Hills Borough to make structural repairs within its sanitary sewer system.

Most recently, Action Housing will soon begin construction again at the site of the former Homestead Bakery Building as a result of private and public investments, including a grant from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program.

Homestead once was a vibrant business environment, but suffered when U.S. Steel production declined. While this can be devastating to a community, Homestead turned their loss into a gain by being creative and looking for different investments and partnerships.

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P.O. Box 202034

Harrisburg, PA 17120-2034

lpo • kl • 0218

Get a jump on 2017's Property Tax/ Rent Rebate Program applications

Though the deadline to file your 2016 Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program application expired Jan. 2, it doesn't mean you can't get a head start on your 2017 application.

For those unfamiliar with the program, the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program offers property tax and rent relief to older and disabled adults. Since its 1971 launch, qualified applicants have received more than \$6.7 billion in property tax and rent relief.

The program benefits:

- Eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; ■ People with disabilities 18 or older.
- Widows and widowers 50 or older; and

The maximum standard rebate is \$650, but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975. As of December 2017, rebates totaling \$259 million have been sent to homeowners and renters across Pennsylvania.

The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters. If you're unsure of your eligibility, feel free to give my office a call at 412-273-3400. We'll walk you through the process of determining your eligibility for the program and can help you apply.



Rep. Paul Costa speaks at a Memorial Day event sponsored by the North Braddock Amvets.



Rep. Paul Costa having milk at the PA Farm Show.

My office can help you with:

- Car registrations, special tags, duplicate titles and license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Unemployment compensation problems
- Birth certificate applications
- Pennsylvania income tax problems
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding local accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the PUC
- Complaints about road conditions
- Problems or questions about PennDOT
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Disability plates and placards
- PACE cards for senior citizens
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- Local government officials' problems with state agencies
- Fishing, boating and hunting information

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@RepPaulCosta