



PA SENATE DEMOCRATS

2023 PRIORITIES

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ECONOMY AND JOBS

The last three years have been unprecedented. The pandemic, political upheaval, inflation, and international conflict have all had their toll on the national economy and our own pocketbooks. We can do more to help all Pennsylvanians by implementing popular and proven programs and policies.

INCREASE THE MINIMUM WAGE

Governor Shapiro has proposed an immediate increase to Pennsylvania's minimum wage to \$15 an hour and we stand with him! The old adage that a rising tide lifts all ships still holds true. An increase to \$15 would directly benefit nearly 1.5 million workers, or 25 percent of Pennsylvania workers.

Especially during times of inflation, we must increase the purchasing power of wage-earning Pennsylvanians. Prior to this inflationary period, the minimum had lost 30 percent of its purchasing power compared to 50 years ago. This is unacceptable in an economy as strong as ours. We must pass Senate Bill 12 in this legislative session.

INVEST FEDERAL IIJA AND IRA MONEY WISELY

The Pennsylvania Legislature and Governor worked in a bipartisan fashion to thoughtfully and strategically invest the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding last year. We made historic investments in housing, front line worker recruitment and retention, juvenile and adult mental health programming, and law enforcement and community violence programs. We can do this again with the massive funding coming from the federal government for infrastructure and energy investments..

FIGHT INFLATION AND PUT PEOPLE OVER PROFITS

It's clear that a rebounding economy and tight labor markets are causing inflation in the US economy, but big business is taking advantage of the crisis to jack up prices and hit record profits on the backs of consumers. We must protect people from corporate inflation by cracking down on price gouging, promoting greater competition in the marketplace, and supporting small businesses and regional supply chains over international interests. We must fight inflation by eliminating the scarcity of essential commodities that all people have a right to - housing, energy, and transportation - by building 21st century infrastructure for Americans.

It's time to:

- Build more middle-class housing
- Build our energy sector away from volatile global fossil fuel markets by investing in renewable energy
- Bring down prescription drug prices and reign in healthcare costs
- Prevent corporate consolidation through strong anti-trust enforcement
- Protect Americans from Price Gouging

PUBLIC SECTOR OSHA COVERAGE

Not all workers in Pennsylvania are treated equally. Our caucus intends to resolve this inequity. The Occupational Health and Safety Act, commonly referred to as OSHA, covers private sector employees and provides safety and health standards in the workplace and enforcement mechanisms to ensure the law is followed. However, public sector employees in Pennsylvania are not provided the same protections as private sector employees and we want that to change. We intend to change this by providing state level OSHA protections for public sector employees.

MANDATE EARNED SICK LEAVE

Healthy employees are productive employees. We need to ensure that people have time off to take care of themselves and their families. Choosing between a paycheck and going to the doctor shouldn't be a choice at all. In addition to the benefits for employees, earned sick leave leads to fewer sick days for the overall workforce, less turnover, better use of preventive care, and higher workplace productivity.

ECONOMY AND JOBS

END THE PAY GAP

In 2021, women earned 82% of what men earned, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office analysis of median hourly earnings of both full- and part-time workers. Based on this estimate, it would take an extra 42 days of work for women to earn what men did in 2020.

In recent years, the pay gap was considerably greater for women in most historically underserved racial and ethnic groups than for White women, according to the Census Bureau's published ACS data on full-time workers. **For example, for every dollar earned by White men in 2021:**

- Black or African American women earned an estimated 63 cents (a pay gap of 37 cents on the dollar);
- Hispanic or Latina women earned an estimated 58 cents (a pay gap of 42 cents on the dollar);
- White women earned an estimated 79 cents (a pay gap of 21 cents on the dollar); and
- Asian women earned an estimated 97 cents (a pay gap of 3 cents on the dollar).

We must adopt policies that eliminate the pay gap and lift up the income of all women.

INVEST IN EMPLOYEES

Under our plan the state will provide programs and training to improve the income and conditions of workers. Customized job training, connecting community colleges and technical schools with employers, improving worker investment board resources, creating career readiness councils are at the top of our agenda. Improving paychecks, benefits, and working environment is the heart of the Senate Democrats' priorities.

- Providing access to high quality childcare will go a long way to providing parents job opportunities that may be unmanageable otherwise. Our caucus is advocating for an increase of \$66.7 million for Child Care Services in the 2023-24 budget, so that up to 75,000 low-income families will continue to be enrolled in a subsidized child care program through the Child Care Works Program.
- Availability of high-quality public transit provides access to higher paying jobs, increases worker productivity, and protects family budgets by reducing vehicle and transportation costs. When coupled with transit-oriented development (development occurring within a half miles of transit access) transit reduces traffic, infrastructure costs, and improves local efficiency. The Senate Democrats are ardent supporters of state funding for regional mass transit systems.

END WORKPLACE HARASSMENT, RACISM AND SEXUAL ABUSE

We must empower people in the workplace. Providing safe and equal working conditions is the first step. We will not stand for a person's job or promotion to be leveraged for sex. We will not stand for a person's livelihood to be taken away from them because they reported workplace harassment.

ENCOURAGE SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Small businesses improve the economy from the ground up, create new jobs, and build wealth at the community level. We must foster an environment that provides small and diverse businesses with opportunities to be established and grow that have been previously unattainable. Focused small business loans, access to capital for growth, technical assistance, and employee training support are on the Senate Democrat agenda.

ECONOMY AND JOBS

PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO EXISTING BUSINESSES

Whether it's to attract national or multi-national corporations, or provide that last bit of financing for a mid-size company to grow, we must help provide the competitive advantage necessary for Pennsylvania to be business friendly. We have worked hard to make our tax climate more business friendly including reducing the Corporate Net Income Tax in half over the next few years; we have provided many tax credits and exemptions to attract and retain companies, but we plan to do more to grow our business community.

INCENTIVIZE MANUFACTURING

Tax credits and grants to support the most critical sector of Pennsylvania's past and future will ensure a productive economy with family sustaining jobs. Whether it's making sure companies have the capital to grow or the pipeline to find skilled employees, we must make sure that the Commonwealth is doing all it can to support our manufacturing industry.

STABILIZE AND GROW DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES

Many of our cities and larger municipalities are continuing to struggle with budget deficits and debt, aging infrastructure, and stagnant economies. The Senate Democrats plans for the larger economy will go a long way toward turning these trends around. We will also help these communities fight blight by investing in demolition, rehabilitation, and rebuilding, providing technical assistance for budgeting and financing, providing local tax relief through property tax reform, and strengthen local school districts.

PROVIDE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND HEALTHY HOUSING

The Pennsylvania Senate Democrat have consistently stood for the creation of affordable and accessible housing. We've successfully fought for the creation and increase of funding to the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability Trust Fund. Additionally, we are pushing for a state low-income housing tax credit to improve the impact of the existing and successful federal credit. In Pennsylvania, for every \$10 million in affordable housing construction, it will generate \$19.6 million in total economic impact and support 110 jobs. With an economic multiplier effect of nearly 2 and the jobs supported, the impact of building and renovating affordable housing is important to the Pennsylvania economy.

PROVIDE A STATE SOCIAL SECURITY RETIREMENT SUPPLEMENT

Social Security is falling short and the state can step up and help. We should create a state managed retirement fund to supplement the retirement income provided by social security.

EDUCATION

We have accomplished a lot toward providing more funding to public school over the past eight years, But, as the Fair Funding court case rightly points out, we have a lot more to do. Educational opportunities should not be determined by a zip code – ALL students deserve access to high-quality education regardless of where they live, what they look like, or how they learn. PA Senate Dems are focused on removing roadblocks and providing robust, fair, and equitable educational opportunities for all Pennsylvania’s students.

- Commit to fund schools at the state level
 - Provide funding fairly across districts – based on need and size of district
 - Utilize the Fair Funding Formula
- Address the teacher and school personnel shortage by providing school district with the resources to retrain and recruit staff to ensure a high quality education.
- Ensure that children are prepared for school, including access to the technology they need to succeed in the classrooms and the meals they need before and during the school day
- Make higher education accessible to students of all socio-economic backgrounds by adopting and strengthen PASSHE schools and community colleges
- Ensure that school buildings are free of lead, mold, and any contamination that may have adverse health impacts and provide state funding for remediation
- Expand career and technical training
- Nurture a strong education system creates a strong workforce and strong economy
 - CTE and job training programs will meet demands of new economy (including the post-COVID, technology-related job losses)
 - Expand access to and funding for apprenticeships and union partnerships that are imperative to workforce needs
 - Use state and community colleges for job training purposes
 - Work with the private sector to design customized job training opportunities
- Reform charter schools so that they meet the same rigorous standards that our traditional public school districts must attain
- Aid struggling schools so that all students may have the same opportunity to succeed regardless of their zip code
- Recent studies have shown that there remain systemic racism within our state’s system of higher education. We need to root out racism at every level, but we can not tolerate it within our state institutions.
- Retain highly skilled and experienced educators by requiring public schools to pay a minimum base salary that reflects the important work our teachers do
- Address equity and racism in our education systems
- Provide mental and behavioral health treatment access, especially as we exit the pandemic

HEALTH CARE

Reforming our health care system and government response to public health – we must restore public trust through meaningful, systemic change that directly benefits the public, erases inequities in service and availability, and adequately provides resources from state government to address basic tenets of good health effectively and proactively across all communities.

- Health care is a human right. Therefore, ALL individuals should have access to high-quality, affordable health care. We support a public option so that everyone has access to the health care they need regardless of their ability to work.
- We have to invest in retaining, attracting, and educating more hospital staff. The current shortages are undermining access and care so we must address this through state action.
- Mental health care must be addressed. We have made historic investment in juvenile, school based care, and adult mental health care in the last year, but we must make this an annual expenditure and do more to help all Pennsylvanians.
- We must provide equitable access to care for minority communities.
- Continue to support the Affordable Care Act. It's essential that the pillars of the ACA are kept in place, including:
 - Maintaining coverage of essential health benefits including protecting Medicaid
 - Covering pre-existing conditions; and
 - Prohibiting lifetime and annual benefit limits
- We must invest in community care, including community health clinics to provide healthcare in minority and working-class neighborhoods
- Ensure state and county health offices are adequately staffed, properly trained, and held to high levels of transparency and accountability to the public
- Continued support and reliable funding for county human services block grants

PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACY

The false narratives surrounding the 2020 elections, the January 6th Insurrection, removal of democratically elected officials, and Republican voter suppression efforts in Pennsylvania and nationally have to be met with strong opposition. The Republican Party is literally and imminently threatening our democracy.

Further, we have our own election reform platform that provides greater and easier access to the vote, but with equal security.

- Secure voting rights for all by fighting bills that allow state officials or legislatures to overturn election results, repeal mail in voting, reduce access to drop boxes, allow for voter intimidation at the polls, and put onerous Voter ID laws in place
- Make it easier to register to vote. Online registration was a huge step forward, and we can make it even more accessible by allowing same-day and opt-out registration
- Improve mail in voting by ensuring access to voting drop boxes and improving the process for curing ballots with mismatching signatures or voter information
- Provide funding to county election bureaus to assist them to run the most efficient and fair elections possible
- Enact campaign finance reform. The Citizen's United decision from the federal Supreme Court was an abomination that has allowed corporations to have more of a voice in our democracy than its people. Reforms to campaign finance in our state are necessary to make people matter more than campaign contributions in an election.

HUMAN SERVICES

Providing Access to Public Health Supports and Services Across the Entire Lifespan

- Maintain the right to abortion and reproductive health care access for all women
- Make childcare accessible and affordable to all working families
- Improve access to and affordability of housing and provide annual funding for the Whole Homes program
- Support childcare workers and providers by providing living wages and adequate reimbursement rates
- Provide earned sick leave and maternity leave essential to the health of women, minorities, and low-wage earners and their families
- Provide support to providers so they can increase and expand services
- Increase pay for employees across the human service sector in both direct care and homecare settings
- Support legislative solutions that recognize social determinants of health and alleviate burdens of economically disadvantaged and health-vulnerable populations
- Prevent gun violence. This is an epidemic in many communities across Pennsylvania and can be mitigated with common sense solutions including universal background checks, Emergency Risk Protection Orders, and limits on access to automatic weapons.
- Fund treatment and mitigation work against Substance Use Disorders (SUDs)
- Ensure medication-dependent individuals can get prescriptions that are affordable and timely delivered
- Address long waiting lists for services for the intellectually disabled community
- Food insecurity is a major barrier to good health over an individual's lifespan, and we must do more at the state level to combat it
- We have to work to end the public benefits cliff. No one should be penalized for making more money and trying to improve their lot in life. We must find ways to extend coverage on important state programs for those increasing their incomes just above means tested income levels.
- Several pandemic era programs are ending at the federal level, including SNAP and Medicaid emergency programs. We need to find solutions for the impacted populations, including providing state funding for the lost federal appropriations.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Climate change is a top existential crisis the world is currently facing. A clean energy future is necessary to provide the commonwealth's workers and residents with family-sustaining jobs, renewable and reliable energy, and a healthy, sustainable existence. PA Senate Dems are supporting policies that focus on transitioning workers and communities to emerging energy jobs, working with our labor leaders to forge a path to this future, and ensuring environmental justice is achieved equitably in all communities.

- Expand the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard (AEPS) to require higher levels of renewable, green energy development
- Work with labor leaders and workers to move clean and green energy economy forward to provide good paying, family-sustaining jobs
- Incentivize net-zero carbon emissions by adopting carbon sequestration programs and other carbon offset opportunities.
- Prioritize infrastructure investments that utilize green technologies, clean and green building techniques and materials, and that funds public transit improvements in our cities and rural areas that will continue to have positive impacts on our climate for generations
- We must find ways to make electric vehicles more affordable, including large fleet vehicles and to provide incentives for more drivers
- Invest in infrastructure and building standards improvements that prioritize public health and safety
- Toxic school buildings are a threat to the health and safety of our students and teachers. The ramifications of lead and mold exposure have a direct impact on students' ability to learn. Substandard heating and cooling systems add additional stress to working environments. We must ensure that our public school buildings do not distract from the education of our students, nor put them or our public employees in harm's way.
- Energy efficiency, particularly in building standards and infrastructure, should be given additional consideration and investment
- Protect our air and water from pollution to keep all Pennsylvanians healthy

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The list of impacted cities to mass shootings is now too long to list. And community violence is increasing as homicides by firearms have been on the rise for many years and according to the CDC there were 1,752 firearm mortalities in Pennsylvania in 2020. That's up from 1,390 in 2014.

Endless community violence, suicides and massacres need to be answered by state action. We need to keep dangerous weapons off the streets and out of the hands of people that are unstable and likely to commit deadly crimes, provide more and improved mental health services, and provide resources to secure vulnerable sites like schools and places of worship.

In the recent legislative sessions, we acted to address some safety concerns related to school and community violence and to protect victims of domestic violence. We adopted legislation requiring schools to conduct safety and security assessment and provided \$200 million in grants to provide mental health resources and secure school building. We further provided \$260 million for grants to support law enforcement, gun violence prevention and prosecution, develop community violence prevention programs.

But in order to truly address gun violence the General Assembly needs to do more. We will fight for the following:

BAN ASSAULT WEAPONS

We must prohibit ownership of assault weapons such as the AR-15, including its high capacity ammunition feeding devices and other accessories, have become the tool of choice in mass murders.

EXTREME RISK PROTECTIONS

Implementation of legislation to allow for courts to order public protection orders if a person is demonstrating dangerous mental health characteristics would provide much needed protection to the public. Such an order would temporarily suspend an individual's access to firearms if there is documented evidence that a person is threatening to harm themselves or others. The person subject to that order must surrender their guns to police and will not be able to buy, sell, or possess other firearms with a judge determining the time frame of this suspension not to exceed one year.

SAFE STORAGE REQUIREMENTS

Too many firearm incidents happen because of improperly securing guns to prevent them from getting into the wrong hands, including children or unwell individuals. Requiring gun locks and safe storage are commonsense prevention options.

MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

Recognizing the particular vulnerability that exists in our schools, we propose a new requirement that each school must provide school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers to meet the mental health needs of their students. Offering these services will go a long way toward intervening with students that might commit the worst violence and to greatly improve school climate and student performance.

UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

While this should be common sense, expanded our current system of background checks to ALL firearm sales has been elusive. Currently certain gun show purchases and person-to-person sales do not require a basic background check. Every firearm sale in Pennsylvania needs to undergo a background check.

The time for debate has passed. It's clear that guns are a problem that needs to be addressed and without legislation we are going to continue to see the awful events of the past repeat themselves. We must take action now.

EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Pennsylvania can be a wonderful place to work and live, to raise a family, to go to school, to start a business. We must ensure that those opportunities are available to all our residents, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation or creed.

- We must fight racism in all its forms and in all its places. Hate crimes are skyrocketing, racism is rampant in our politics and our institutions, and it has become normalized by right-wing elected officials and pundits. This must come to an end as we seek justice for all. Expanding and better enforcing our hate crimes statute, recognizing and rooting racism in our institutions, better training for law enforcement, and a focus on post-secondary schools for both educating our citizens and ensuring fair access to an education are just some of the ideas we are embracing.
- This means preserving women's rights, making sure their access to health care and reproductive rights are protected, that they receive the same pay for the same work, and that they are free from sexual harassment in the workplace.
- We need to protect the rights of our LGBTQ citizens as well. Right now, we have no statewide nondiscrimination laws that prohibit discrimination in housing or employment based on sexual orientation or gender. Many of our neighboring states do, and it's time we join them in making everyone feel comfortable and welcome in this commonwealth.
- Providing the LGBT community same protections against hate crimes afforded to other minority groups. Many of our neighboring states do, and it's time we join them in making everyone feel safe and welcome in this Commonwealth

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Re-entering a community after serving time in prison can be difficult, and it's one of the factors that leads to higher rates of recidivism. We can:

- Reform our probation and parole systems to reduce the total amount of time a person can be on probation or parole, eliminate or reduce the impact of technical violations, and reduce the power that prosecutors and judges have for prolonging terms for getting out of probation and parole.
- Create programs to ease the re-entry process can be enormously helpful in getting a person back on their feet
- Continue to reform the expungement process, so that more minor offenses can be wiped from a person's record so they don't spend the rest of their lives paying for a single mistake.
- "Ban the Box," a provision that prohibits employers from asking job applicants if they've ever been convicted of a crime in the first round of their screening process. Too often, checking "Yes" in that box will automatically disqualify an applicant.
- Eliminate incarceration for someone who fails to pay their cash bail. Paying a cash bail is simply not possible for some people and locking them up for failing to pay that is a policy that punishes them again for not having means.

TAX REFORM

We made historic changes in our tax code last session by cutting the Corporate Net Income in half and adopting tax credit programs that will encourage business development in environmentally beneficial sector, biomedical and semiconductor industries, and alternative fuel companies. This will stimulate our economy and create jobs. We also created for the first time a childcare tax credit to assist working families with these expenses and the low income housing tax credit to encourage the development of affordable housing.

Nobody likes paying taxes, but they reflect the public investments we have chosen to make through the democratic process. However, we can still improve the tax environment in the state and at the local level. At the top of that list are property taxes. Opportunities for improvement exist throughout the tax code to make the business climate better, lessen the burden on working people, and provide families with more money in their pockets.

We can improve the tax atmosphere by:

ELIMINATING OR SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCING RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TAXES

Property taxes are antiquated, unfair, and inequitable. They are further a deterrent to people aging in the homes that they have worked throughout their lives to own. And they act as a disincentive to homeowners improving and maintaining their homes. The Senate Democrats have a plan to provide substantial property tax relief and eliminate the property taxes of 60 percent of homeowners by providing rebates. But as a caucus, we're willing to talk about any plan that fairly eliminates residential and farmstead property taxes.

UPDATING THE PERSONAL INCOME TAX (PIT)

The PIT rate of 3.07% in Pennsylvania is among the lowest in the country in states that impose the tax. Included in paying the PIT are many businesses that have a structured as "pass-through entities." The Senate Democrats have a plan that will lower the PIT for individuals, while treating business or passive income differently. This will raise money, potentially to pay for property tax relief, reduce individual income tax bills, and tax business income more closely to corporate income.

INCREASE TAX CREDITS FOR HOUSING AND WORKING FAMILIES

While we did create the Childcare Tax Credit and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program we can expand these and make the work for more people. We are also fighting for a refundable tax credit similar to the federal Earned Income Tax Credit.

THE SENATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

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