



PA SENATE DEMOCRATS

2025 - 2026

PRIORITIES

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2025-2026 PRIORITIES

AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR ALL

We are in unprecedented times and many families are fighting against economic headwinds. Inflation has been reignited by Republican federal economic policies and wages have not kept pace.

Fight Inflation and Put Families First

- Inflation wasn't perfect by the end of 2024, but it had been put in check. Less than 100 days into Trump's term, the Republicans undid all of the progress that it had taken the Democrats four years to accomplish. The country just went through an extended period of inflation largely caused by the post-COVID recovery. The current economic climate – a dipping stock market, dwindling retirement and increased inflation – can be placed entirely on the current administration and Congressional majorities. But we do have state options available to help reduce the pain. It's time to:
- Fight the Trump tariff policies
- Build more affordable and middle-class housing and provide assistance to update home weatherization and appliance efficiency
- Diversify our energy generation sector so that our utility bills are manageable and are not subject to wild increases due to weather events
- Provide working families an earned income tax credit to put money back in households
- Bring down prescription drug prices and reign in healthcare costs
- Prevent corporate consolidation through strong anti-trust enforcement

Increase the Minimum Wage

Governor Shapiro has proposed an increase to Pennsylvania's minimum wage to \$15 an hour and we stand with him! The 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 wage had lost 35% of its purchasing power compared to 50 years ago and it has only gotten worse.



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Invest in Mass Transit

Public transit agencies across Pennsylvania have reached critical crossroads. Big and small agencies need additional state assistance. The availability of high-quality public transit provides access to jobs, increases worker productivity, increases transportation system efficiency, and protects family budgets by reducing vehicle and transportation costs. The Senate Democrats are ardent supporters of increasing state funding for regional mass transit systems.

Provide Access to Childcare

Providing access to high quality childcare will go a long way to providing parents job opportunities that may be inaccessible otherwise. Our caucus is advocating for an increase of \$55 million for childcare employment retention and recruitment efforts in this year's budget, to provide more access to affordable services, along with reasonable increases in future years to keep pace with increases in the cost of living.

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.

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.

Encourage Small and Disadvantaged 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 Pennsylvanians the opportunity to establish small and diverse businesses that in the past have been unattainable. The Senate Democrats are focused on small business loans, access to capital for growth, technical assistance, and employee training support.



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End the Pay Gap

In 2024, women earned 85% of what men earned, according to a Pew Research Center 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 2022. 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 83 cents (a pay gap of 17 cents on the dollar);
- Hispanic or Latina women earned an estimated 65 cents (a pay gap of 35 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 93 cents (a pay gap of 7 cents on the dollar).

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

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.

Provide Access to Affordable and Healthy Housing

The Pennsylvania Senate Democrats 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 and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund (PHARE). 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 by this, 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.



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EDUCATION

We have made big strides in providing additional funding to public schools over the past decade, 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 a high-quality education regardless of where they live, what they look like, or how they learn. Pennsylvania Senate Democrats are focused on removing roadblocks and providing robust, fair, and equitable educational opportunities for all the Commonwealth's students.

- We must continue to meet our constitutional mandate and address the court's ruling to equitably fund our schools. Over the last two years we have made progress by providing \$2 billion in new funding for K-12 schools, raising total K-12 public education funding to over \$11 billion for the first time in Pennsylvania history.
- The Senate Democrats introduced, fought for, and won passage of the Student Teacher Stipend Program, one step in addressing our educator personnel shortage. A lot remains to be done, but we will continue to find innovative programs to attract professionals to careers in public education.
- School buildings must be safe for our students to learn in. We have been leading the charge to provide state investments in school infrastructure and recently achieved enactment of the Public School Facilities Improvement Program. Unfortunately we need billions of dollars in more funding to address the years of nascent state funding, so we will continue fighting.
- 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 strengthening PASSHE schools and community colleges.
- Reform charter schools and charter school funding so that they meet the same rigorous standards that our school districts must attain.
- Recent studies have shown that there remains systemic racism within our state's system of higher education. We need to root out racism at every level, but we cannot 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.
- Provide mental and behavioral health treatment access, especially as we exit the pandemic.



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PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACY

It is more important than ever that we protect our rights and freedoms enshrined in the Pennsylvania and US Constitutions. Our democracy and the ideals you were told America was built upon are under threat. Basics like free speech, free assembly, free press, and the separation of church and state are under siege, and we must act together to protect them all.

Further, we have our own election reform platform that provides greater and easier access to the vote without sacrificing the election security.

- Secure voting rights for all by fighting against bills that allow state officials or legislatures to overturn election results, repeal mail in voting, reduce access to drop boxes, and allow for voter intimidation at the polls.
- 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 automatic voter 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 in running the most efficient, fair and secure elections possible.
- Enact campaign finance reform. The United States' Supreme Court decision in Citizen's United 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.



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HEALTH CARE

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.
- Continue to support the Affordable Care Act. It's essential that the pillars of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) are kept in place, including:
 - Maintaining coverage of essential health benefits
 - Covering pre-existing conditions; and
 - Prohibiting lifetime and annual benefit limits
- Protecting Medicaid and Medicaid expansion adopted after the passage of the ACA.
- Maintain the right to abortion and reproductive health care access for all women.
- 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 and behavioral healthcare must be addressed. We have made historic investments in juvenile, school-based care, and adult mental health care, but we must do more to help all Pennsylvanians.

We stand united in supporting our EMS workers and first responders by improving working conditions, expanding recruitment efforts, and forgiving student loan debt so that EMTs, paramedics, and other first responder can continue delivering lifesaving medical care across the commonwealth.



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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Despite the distractions and denials, **climate change remains an existential crisis**. A clean energy future is necessary to provide the commonwealth's workers and residents with family-sustaining jobs, renewable and reliable energy, and healthy, sustainable communities. Pennsylvania Senate Democrats support 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.

- Reinvent the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard as the Pennsylvania Reliable Energy Sustainability Standard (PRESS) to require increased energy generation from renewable, green energy resources.
- Enact the Pennsylvania Climate Emissions Reduction Program (PACER) to reduce carbon emissions and put money into communities transitioning to a green energy future.
- Enact the Pennsylvania Economic Development for a Growing Economy (PA EDGE) tax credit program to spur new energy production capacity and power a next generation economy.
- Work with labor leaders and workers to move a clean and green energy economy forward to provide good paying, family-sustaining jobs.
- 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.
- Update Act 129, our Commonwealth's primary energy efficiency and conservation program, to reduce energy consumption and lower utility bills.
- Support a sustainable agriculture system that ensures healthy food for consumers, as well as profitability for our farmers.
- As federal environmental regulations are weakened or dismantled by the Trump administration, Senate Democrats support upholding important air, water and soil protections and protecting the public, including workers, from toxic chemicals and pollution.



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COMMUNITY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The list of cities impacted by mass shootings is now too long. Community violence is a continuing scourge as homicides by firearms are ever present. According to the CDC there were 1,941 firearm mortalities in Pennsylvania in 2022. 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 assessments and provided \$200 million in grants to provide mental health resources and secure school buildings. We further provided \$260 million for grants to support law enforcement, gun violence prevention and prosecution, and 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:

- **Extreme Risk Protection Orders** – 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.
- **Universal Background Checks** – While this should be common sense, expanding 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 person purchasing a gun 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.



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EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Pennsylvania can be a wonderful place to work, live, raise a family, go to school, and 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 out 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.
- We need to protect the rights of our LGBTQ+ citizens. Right now, we have no statewide nondiscrimination laws that prohibit discrimination in housing, education 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.



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TAX REFORM

Pennsylvania's current tax model doesn't work for working people, but it has the potential reflect the values we have choose to make through the democratic process. Senate Democrats can improve the tax environment in the state and at the local level, starting with 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 a further 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 are 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 programs, we can expand these and make them work for more people. We are also fighting for a refundable tax credit similar to the federal Earned Income Tax Credit.