

Senate of Pennsylvania

April 17, 2019

Pennsylvania Senate Democrats Call for Action on Poverty and Economic Insecurity in Pennsylvania

April 4 marked the 51st anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee. To honor Dr. King's memory, Pennsylvania Senate Democrats held numerous events across the state to celebrate Dr. King and announce a Call to Action in addressing poverty and economic insecurity in Pennsylvania.

At the time of his assassination, Dr. King had just launched the "Poor People's Campaign." The goal of the effort was to focus on the struggles of America's poor. In fact, Dr. King was in Memphis supporting the sanitation workers' strike.

For Dr. King, economic justice was the next step in fulfilling America's ideal that all people are created equally. Giving poor and working-class men and women a chance to enjoy economic security fueled the man who believed the measure of true equality extended beyond desegregation.

A few days before his murder, Dr. King said this about poverty:

"There is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will."

Dr. King's comments were accurate in March of 1968 and they remain true today. While we have the "techniques" and "resources," we have lacked the "will." Our failures couldn't be any clearer today as poverty and economic insecurity still smother people from all walks of life.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 1.5 million Pennsylvanians (12.5 percent of our population) live in poverty, with Latinos (28.7 percent) and African-Americans (24.8 percent) accounting for more than half of the poverty population. More than 700,000 Pennsylvanians live in deep poverty, meaning that their annual income is less than 50 percent of the official poverty level for that individual or family. Nearly a quarter million of those living in deep poverty are children.

Poverty exists in our cities and small towns, in suburbs and rural areas of the state. Allegheny County contains seven municipalities, in which more than half of the children live in poverty. In Carbon County - where coal once thrived - pockets of poverty now exist where industry once boomed.

In central and western Pennsylvania counties like Cambria and Fayette, the poverty rate exceeds 15 percent. Across the northern tier, poverty rates are high and economic opportunity limited.

We also cannot forget the thousands of Pennsylvanians who are experiencing economic insecurity. Economic insecurity is the inability to cope with routine adverse life events while maintaining a decent standard of living. These are the folks living on the edge, one unexpected event from not being able to get by.

Just like the faces of poverty, the faces of economic insecurity are friends, neighbors, and family. They teach our children and care for our seniors. They are veterans and college students. They struggle, but work hard to support their families, contribute to our economy, and make our communities stronger.

Why do they struggle? One reason is Pennsylvania's \$7.25/hr. minimum wage pays poverty wages. Despite holding multiple jobs, they live paycheck to paycheck. Here's some more reasons they struggle: affordable housing is not available; child care is unaffordable; health care is not considered a human right; low wages lead to lower savings, higher debt, and insufficient or nonexistent retirement savings. They struggle because the system is stacked against them; just like it was on April 4, 1968.

In the decades after Dr. King's senseless murder, we have repeatedly failed in our public policy responses to poverty and economic insecurity. That is unacceptable in the richest, most advanced country in the world. Yet, the income equality gap expands, and policies designed to enrich the few at the expense of the many abound.

Senate Democrats are in the midst of 30 days honoring Dr. King's legacy by reigniting his fight to lift children and families out of poverty and improve the economic security of Pennsylvanians. We need your help. We need your voice.

Help us carry Dr. King's message of economic justice for everyone, regardless of race, gender, religion, where we live, or who we love, to Harrisburg. Contact your legislators. Tell them to increase the minimum wage, protect our health care, invest in our struggling communities and fund our schools. Tell them our citizens deserve paid sick leave, quality child care, affordable higher education and career and technical education. Tell them we deserve a justice system that is fair and just and that doesn't criminalize poverty. Raise your voice for whatever issues you support.

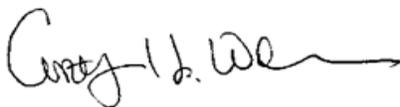
The DREAMER may have been taken from us, but the DREAM must live on.



Senator Jay Costa
Democratic Leader



Senator Vincent J. Hughes
Democratic Appropriations Chair



Senator Anthony H. Williams
Democratic Whip



Senator Lawrence M. Farnese
Democratic Caucus Secretary



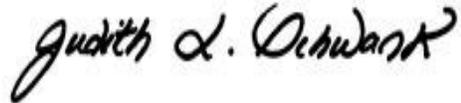
Senator Wayne D. Fontana
Democratic Caucus Chairman



Senator Lisa M. Boscola
Democratic Policy Chair



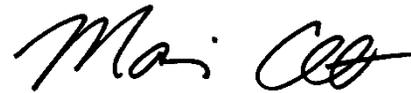
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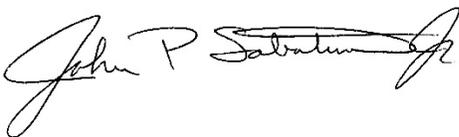
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Senator Daylin M. Leach
17th Senatorial District



Senator Katie J. Muth
44th Senatorial District



Senator John P. Sabatino, Jr.
5th Senatorial District



Senator Steven J. Santarsiero
10th Senatorial District



Senator Sharif Street
3rd Senatorial District



Senator Christine M. Tartaglione
2nd Senatorial District



Senator Lindsey M. Williams
38th Senatorial District



Senator John T. Yudichak
14th Senatorial District