



PA Senate Democrats

2020 Priorities



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JOHN P. BLAKE
22nd Senatorial District
Lackawanna, Luzerne (part)
and Monroe (part) Counties



LISA M. BOSCOLA
18th Senatorial District
Lehigh (part) and Northampton
(part) Counties



JAMES R. BREWSTER
45th Senatorial District
Allegheny (part) and
Westmoreland (part) Counties



MARIA COLLETT
12th Senatorial District
Bucks (part) and Montgomery
(part) Counties



JAY COSTA
43rd Senatorial District
Allegheny (part) County



ANDREW E. DINNIMAN
19th Senatorial District
Chester (part) County



LARRY FARNESE
1st Senatorial District
Philadelphia (part) County



WAYNE D. FONTANA
42nd Senatorial District
Allegheny (part) County



ART HAYWOOD
4th Senatorial District
Montgomery (part) and
Philadelphia (part) Counties



VINCENT HUGHES
7th Senatorial District
Montgomery (part) and
Philadelphia (part) Counties



PAM IOVINO
37th Senatorial District
Allegheny (part) and
Washington (part) Counties



TIM KEARNEY
26th Senatorial District
Chester (part) and Delaware
(part) Counties



DAYLIN LEACH
17th Senatorial District
Delaware (part) and Montgomery
(part) Counties



KATIE MUTH
44th Senatorial District
Berks (part), Chester (part) and
Montgomery (part) Counties



JOHN P. SABATINA
5th Senatorial District
Philadelphia (part) County



STEVE SANTARSIERO
10th Senatorial District
Bucks (part) County



JUDITH L. SCHWANK
11th Senatorial District
Berks (part) County



SHARIF STREET
3rd Senatorial District
Philadelphia (part) County



TINA M. TARTAGLIONE
2nd Senatorial District
Philadelphia (part) County



ANTHONY H. WILLIAMS
8th Senatorial District
Delaware (part) and Philadelphia
(part) Counties



LINDSEY M. WILLIAMS
38th Senatorial District
Allegheny (part) County



The Senate of Pennsylvania Democratic Caucus



PA Senate Democrats 2020 Priorities

ELECTION ACCESS & REFORM

The integrity of our entire system of government depends on the integrity of our elections. The process for electing our public officials has to be fair, accessible and dependable. No matter where you live or what party you're registered with, you should have unbridled access to the ballot box.

WE SHOULD:

- Secure voting rights for all by cracking down on voter intimidation and onerous Voter ID laws.
- 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 registration.
- Allow people to vote absentee without an excuse. The list of acceptable “excuses” for voting absentee is too restrictive and discourages people from taking advantage of this legal way to vote.
- 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.
- Redistricting reform. Government works for the people when it’s representative of those people. Gerrymandered districts do not allow for that representation, and we have to change our process of drawing our maps.



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HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

One basic tenet underpins the efforts of the Senate Democrats: health care is a human right.

As a country and a state, we have a moral and ethical obligation to provide access to healthcare to deliver the best opportunity for people reach their full potential.

Whether it’s battling drug and alcohol addiction, treating mental health issues, addressing permanent, chronic, and high-risk health problems, or simply helping a sick child, we all confront circumstances that require health care throughout our lives. We are better off using collective action than fighting them on our own.

Providing insurance, access to safe hospitals and services, and ensuring equitable opportunities to receive care are at the heart of the Senate Democrats agenda.

WE MUST:

- **Protect the Affordable Care Act (ACA)** – ObamaCare has covered 20 million previously uninsured individuals. Now Republicans want to take that coverage away. ObamaCare has strengthened the healthcare industry and provided new opportunities to millions. However, should the worst happen, and the Republican Congress or federal courts eliminate ObamaCare we will pass legislation to:
 - Continue to require coverage of pre-existing conditions
 - Cover essential health benefits
 - Cover the children up to the age of 26 on their parent’s health insurance
 - Protect Medicaid expansion
 - Prevent insurance companies from imposing annual or lifetime limits on coverage.
- **Women Have a Right to Reproductive Autonomy** – It is not the job of government to stand between a woman and her doctor, but we consistently see attempts from anti-choice legislators to restrict access to abortion. We will continue to fight all of these attempts.
- **Guarantee that Women and Minorities Have Access to High Quality, Affordable Healthcare** – If health care is a right, it must be provided to all, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, or sexuality. For too long, health care has not been equitably available to women and minorities. Insurance and hospital access has been denied, too expensive, or not covered necessary services in the past. We will fight to ensure everyone has equal access in the future.
- **Fight Opioid Abuse and Addiction** – The opioid crisis has been declared a national and state emergency. We will fight to:
 - Establish more entry points and beds for treatment
 - Strengthen prescription writing guidelines
 - Make naloxone even more readily available to treat overdoses
 - Allow families to petition for mandatory treatment of their addicted loved ones
 - Work with pharmaceutical companies to identify solutions and prevention methods for addiction
 - Impose an assessment on the wholesale import of opioids into Pennsylvania
 - Increase educational addiction programming in schools.
- **Fight for CHIP** – The Children’s Health Insurance Program covers 180,000 kids in Pennsylvania and 9 million nationally. The Republicans have turned it into a political football by using it a vehicle for discrimination and political leverage in Washington D.C. We must continue to fund the program and ensure its existence on the state level.
- **Ensure Additional Funding for Human Service Block Grants** – Moving to a block grant has provided counties with much needed flexibility to address specific concerns such as mental health, drug and alcohol treatment, child welfare services, homelessness, and intellectual disabilities. However, we need more resources to truly address the scope of the problem. Huge cuts were made to these programs under the Corbett Administration that we are still trying to dig out from. The Senate Democrats want more money to go to our counties to help address these pressing issues.



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- **Gun Violence is a Public Health Crisis** – One that We Can Address Through Violence Prevention Policy.
 - 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, as they have become the tool of choice in mass murders.
 - Extreme Risk Protection Orders – This would allow courts to order an extreme risk protection order (ERPO) if a person is demonstrating dangerous behavior, providing 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.
- **Mental Health in Schools** – Recognizing the particular vulnerability that exists in our schools, every school should provide school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers to meet the mental health needs of their students.
- **Universal Background Checks** – 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.

EDUCATION

Our education system is the way that we collectively pitch in to prepare of our children and young people for a productive work life and to contribute to society. We prepare them, so that we can all benefit from their creativity, productivity, and maximized potential. But educating children takes a well-trained and committed workforce, financial resources, parental and community engagement, a healthy educational environment, and children that are ready for schooling.

Additionally, our higher education system, including universities, community colleges, and technical schools prepare or retrain individuals for the next stage in their lives. We must make higher education accessible, affordable, and useful for people that want to take advantage of the great resources that the Commonwealth has to offer.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE MUST:

- **Make a Commitment to Fund Schools at the State Level** – Pennsylvania's constitution requires that, "The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth." This is not a requirement that the Legislature is fulfilling. While the Senate Democrats have prioritized education funding and made great strides at increases, we still have not achieved the goal of funding public education by 50% at the state level. We must do more.
- **Ensure that Children are Prepared for School** – Early childhood education and pre-K, after school and tutoring programs, nutrition and health supports, among other social services provide an important source of assistance to make sure that children are not just in the classroom, but ready to learn.
- **Make Higher Ed Accessible** – Higher Education has become integral in today's high-tech, internationally competitive workplace. However, Pennsylvania now has the 2nd highest student tuition debt among the states, indicating a system that is costly and prohibitive to enter. We must do more to make our community colleges and state system of higher education more affordable so that everyone that wants to continue their education past high school has an opportunity to do so.
- **Public School Building Emergency Repair and Renovation** – Most Pennsylvania public school buildings were built between 1950 and 1959; there are more than 200 Pennsylvania public school buildings built before 1950. Nearly half of those old buildings house students in the School District of Philadelphia, where \$170 million in facility upgrades alone are required. The systems within those buildings — heating, cooling, lighting, electrical, etc. — are broken, inefficient and in desperate need of replacement. We need to provide state funding to remediate the dangerous conditions threatening the health and safety of our children and school personnel.



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ENVIRONMENT

Our environment is a finite resource and the Pennsylvania Constitution mandates that "people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people."

The General Assembly must take this directive seriously and the Senate Democrats are leading on many fronts.

THIS INCLUDES:

- **Fighting Climate Change** – Climate Change is real. Denial only delays the inevitable and increases the price tag and technical difficulty of the eventual solution, if it's not too late already. Greenhouse gases from human activity are the primary driver of climate change. Worldwide, net emissions of greenhouse gases from human activities increased by 35 percent from 1990 to 2010. Emissions of carbon dioxide, which account for about three-fourths of total emissions, increased by 42 percent over this period. The Senate Democrats have proposed to increase the percentage of renewable energy required to power or electric grid and to enter a regional greenhouse gas initiative that would create a cap and invest program to require reductions in carbon emissions.
- **Renew Growing Greener** – We need fund a new round of Growing Greener programs. This should include renewable energy investments, cleaning up legacy pollution, protecting and improving watersheds and open spaces, and helping our agricultural industry.
- **Pipeline Safety** – The Marcellus Shale drilling boom and hydraulic fracking have set off a massive pipeline construction surge that is intruding and threatening many communities. Pipelines are encroaching on residential communities, schools, and water sources creating potential hazards that must be addressed. Environmental laws and regulators must keep up with this new phase of construction to protect communities, families, and our children. And pipeline development need to be held to a high standard and accountable for their construction.
- **Addressing Drinking & Sewer Water Contamination** – Pennsylvania's drinking water systems are unfortunately repeatedly and dangerously showing signs of age and pollution contamination. Aging pipeline infrastructure that has been found to be leaching lead into our drinking water, Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have been found in municipal water systems across the Commonwealth, and threats from oil and gas drilling are just some of the all too common dangers our citizens are confronting. The Senate Democrats want to find solutions to fund these poisonous situations.
- **Maintaining the State Forest Drilling Moratorium** – Pennsylvania has an amazing treasure in our state forests and parks. Much space has already been leased away in our forests for gas drilling development. What is left must be protected for the enjoyment and use of our many recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and off-roading.



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PROVIDING PROTECTION TO ALL VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

And though we passed substantial legislation reforming the statute of limitations for victims of childhood sex abuse, more needs to be done.

OUR CAUCUS STANDS BY OUR VOTES LAST FALL TO PROVIDE:

- An immediate two-year, civil window for victims of both childhood and adult sex abuse.
- A complete repeal of the statute of limitations for criminal charges to be brought against a perpetrator regardless of the victims age.
- More resources to help victims recover from the trauma that was imposed on them.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORM

Further, we need to continue the good work that the Senate Democrats have done reforming our criminal justice system. The Justice Reinvestment Initiative and Clean Slate law have improved our correction system, provided many former offenders paths to productive lives, and saved hundreds of millions in taxpayer dollars.

OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM CAN BE IMPROVED BY:

- Reducing the amount of time and resources devoted to probationers who have completed sentences for past crimes while allowing them to fully re-integrate back into society.
- Currently, probation terms can far exceed the original sentence handed down at trial and create indefinite periods during which even a minor violation could result in re-confinement. In many cases, prolonged terms of probation result from technical violations that can perpetually extend the clock on the probation term. Technical violations could range from committing minor traffic offenses to traveling out of state – violations which anyone not on probation could easily incur in the course of life. This is inconsistent with the spirit of the law, which aims to rehabilitate rather than punish offenders.
- Providing a path to parole eligibility for individuals serving certain life sentences without parole.
- Providing for release of 'short-sentence' offenders once a minimum sentence is reached and certain provisions are met, including no commission of violent crimes or certain sexual offenses, no gun or high-volume drug delivery offenses, and no misconduct while incarcerated. This will provide significant cost savings for the state.
- Streamlining the process of accessing substance use disorder treatment for incarcerated individuals, which can lead to earlier release from prison.
- Financing the use of best practices in probation supervision statewide, using evidence-based practices to help county probation departments assess the unique risks and needs of each individual on probation.
- Providing better communication to victims of crimes about their rights, the availability of services, and the disposition an offender's parole status.
- 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.



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- **Expand Career and Technical Training** – CTE courses give students the academic, technical and employability skills needed for postsecondary and workplace success. A CTE background can lead to fulfilling careers that provide a great source of income. Careers in health sciences, business, marketing, information technology, STEM, among many others can be rewarding and lead to very successful vocations.
- **Prevent High-stakes Graduation Assessments and Reform our Testing System** – Assessments are a necessary part of the education system to track proficiency and growth of students, teachers, and schools. But testing has taken on a life of its own and become a source of distraction and stress for students and teachers and syphoning off valuable time in the classroom. We must come up with a system of testing that captures the information necessary to provide the data we need while not undermining the quality of education our children receive.
- **Reform Charter Schools** – Charter and cyber charter schools are now an integral and embedded part of our state and local education system. However, we can improve their performance, hold them more accountable educationally and financially, and prevent them from undermining our traditional public schools. We must address comprehensive charter school reform to address all three of these goals.
- **Provide Assistance to Struggling Schools** – Pennsylvania has school districts and buildings that are in trouble and the only source of immediate assistance has to come from the State. Whether it's financial, educational, or both, we must create diagnostic programs to identify problems within schools and customize solutions to improve administrative, instructional, and learning performance.
- **Provide Our Children with the Tools to Maximize Their Potential** – Strategic investments in programs that will provide our children with the resources necessary to help ensure a bright future must be a priority. Funding a statewide summer reading pilot program to ensure children read at grade level, establishing mentoring programs for kids as they transition from middle school to high school, and providing state resources for after-school programs focused on areas such as STEM education are all actions we can take to help our kids maximize their potential and lay the foundation for future success.
- **Retain Highly Skilled and Experienced Educators** – Teachers are the backbone of our education system. For children, teachers are their earliest mentors, provide essential life tools throughout the education experience, and prepare them for the next stages in life. We must protect their profession from vicious and unfair ideological attacks and provide them with safe working conditions, reasonable compensation and benefits (including setting a new floor for teacher salaries at \$45,000 per year), and ongoing professional development opportunities so that they remain on the cutting edge of their practice.

ECONOMY

A centerpiece of the Senate Democrats agenda are jobs, the economy, and providing a just foundation for progress of working people. We want to empower working people to find fulfilling work, earn better paychecks and benefits, and build wealth over their careers that will provide for their families and themselves in retirement. A fair economy that accrues opportunities and rewards for all people, not just those at the top rungs of the economic ladder is achievable.

WE MUST:

- **Increase the Minimum Wage** – The old adage that a rising tide lifts all ships still holds true. 800,000 Pennsylvanians would see an increase in their paychecks if a modest increase from \$7.25 to \$9.00 was made in 2020. That would add nearly \$1 billion to the paychecks of working people and significantly boost economic activity in the state.



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- **Invest in Employees** – Under our plans 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. With unemployment at all-time lows, it is time for all Pennsylvanian's to benefit from the improving economy. Bettering paychecks, benefits, and working environment is at the heart of the Senate Democrats priorities.
 - Providing access to high quality child care will go a long way to providing parents job opportunities that may be unmanageable otherwise. Our caucus is advocating for \$77 million to be added to the state appropriation for high-quality child care services to provide access to 5,000 additional eligible infants and toddlers.
 - Availability of high-quality public transit provides access to hirer 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 ½ 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 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 minor owned businesses with opportunities to be establish 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.
- **Provide Incentives to Existing Businesses** – Whether it's to attract multi-national corporations or provide that last bit of financing for a mid-size company to grow, we must step up to provide the competitive advantage necessary for Pennsylvania to be business friendly. We have worked hard to make our tax climate more business friendly. We have provided many tax credits and exemptions to attract and retain companies. But we plan to do more to grow our business community.
- **Require Mandatory Paid Sick Leave** – Healthy employees are productive employees. We need to ensure that people are earning 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, paid sick leave leads to less sick days for the overall workforce, less turnover, better use of preventive care, and higher workplace productivity.
- **Incentivize Manufacturing** – Tax credits and grants to support the most critical sector of Pennsylvania's past and future will ensure a productive economy supporting family sustaining jobs. Whether it 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.



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Nobody likes paying taxes, but they reflect the public investments we have chosen to make through the democratic process. That doesn't mean we can't improve the tax environment in the state and at the local level. At the top of that list are property taxes. But 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% 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.
- **Adopt the Fair Share Plan for 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 "Fair Share" 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.
- **Reducing the Corporate Net Income Tax and Eliminating Loopholes** – Unlike the PIT, at 9.99%, Pennsylvania has one of the highest corporate tax rates in the country. But our tax code is riddled with loopholes, exemptions, tax credits, and deductions that could all be used to reduce the tax rate and provide a level playing field for all businesses, rather than just those that have the lobbying strength to get special treatment. Plans exist to cut the rate by 30 or 40 percent but not reduce state revenue, including closing the so-called "Delaware Loophole". This is a fair path forward that the business community should embrace.

SOCIAL AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

PREVENTING DISCRIMINATION

Pennsylvania is 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, disability or creed.

THIS INCLUDES:

- Providing statewide, nondiscrimination laws that prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, or accommodations based on a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Providing the LGBTQIA 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 comfortable and welcome in this Commonwealth.