



State Senator **JUDY SCHWANK**

September 2023

Proudly Serving the 11th Senatorial District



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- DCED Secretary Visits Reading

ON THE COVER: On August 11, I joined Governor Josh Shapiro at Millmont Elementary School to highlight a historic Basic Education funding increase and Universal Free Breakfast for public school students.



Serving You

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Hello Friends,

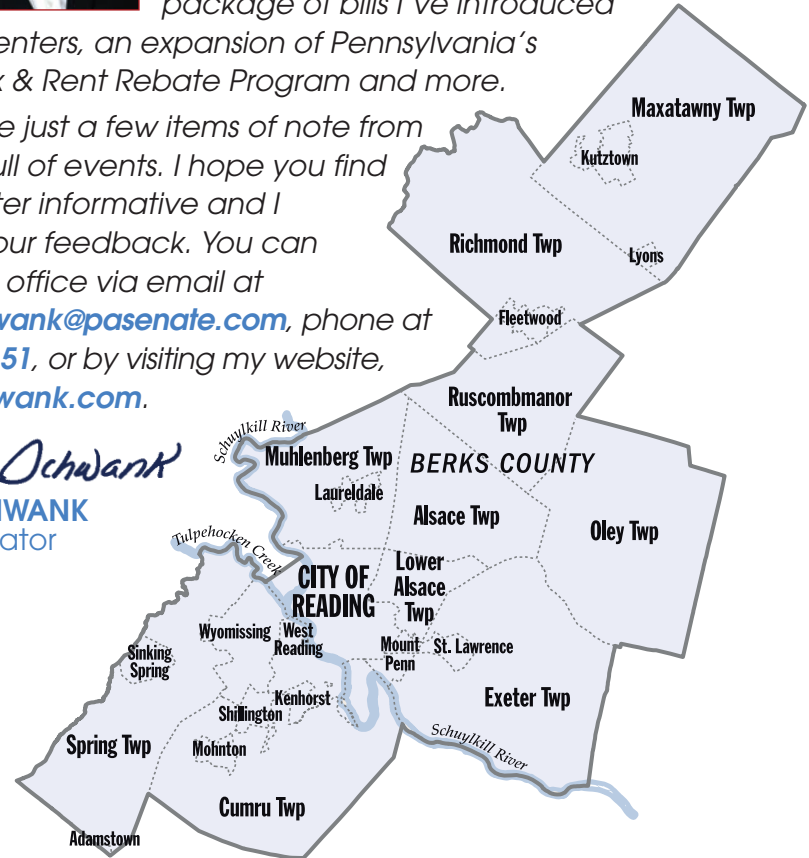
It's hard to believe Summer is drawing to a close and back-to-school time is upon us. I hope this newsletter finds you and your families in good health. In these pages, you will read about an exciting healthcare workforce development project that recently broke ground, a major legislative accomplishment on an issue near and dear to my heart, a package of bills I've introduced

to protect renters, an expansion of Pennsylvania's Property Tax & Rent Rebate Program and more.

These are just a few items of note from a summer full of events. I hope you find this newsletter informative and I welcome your feedback. You can contact my office via email at

SenatorSchwank@pasenate.com, phone at (610) 929-2151, or by visiting my website, SenatorSchwank.com.

Judy Schwank
JUDY SCHWANK
State Senator



How We Can Help

Whether you need assistance navigating state agencies, figuring out which resources you are eligible for, or obtaining your REAL ID, contact my office so that we can work together. Come see us for:

- Unemployment Compensation
- Rental Assistance
- Mortgage Assistance
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate
- Utilities Assistance
- Workers' Compensation
- CHIP and SNAP
- REAL ID and PennDOT Questions
- Driver's License
- Medicare / Medicaid
- Nursing Homes
- Questions about DHS
- Birth and Death Certificates
- Prison Inquiries
- Consumer Complaints and Protections
- Problems With State Agencies
- Questions About Legislation
- And Much More!

We rely on our connection with you to stay aware of the needs in our community. We work for you, and your voice matters.

■ RACC Weitz Healthcare Pavilion

One of my most important jobs as a state legislator is returning state resources to our area. This can be a long and complicated process at times. However, I'm always happy to go to bat for outstanding projects that move Berks County forward. One of those projects I'm proud to support officially broke ground in July. Reading Area Community College's Weitz Healthcare Pavilion will transform Weitz Hall into a state-of-the-art medical training facility. Our community needs more healthcare workers in various settings, like nurses, home health aides, and laboratory technicians. Once completed, this facility will house all of RACC's healthcare offerings in one building, increase course offerings and accommodate 80% more students.

This project checks a lot of boxes. It will help develop our healthcare workforce since 90% of RACC graduates stay and work in Berks County. Healthcare worker shortages are a problem all over the country. This is one way to ensure we have the dedicated, highly trained healthcare workers needed to keep our community healthy. But most importantly, RACC offers students tremendous educational opportunities at an affordable price. For these reasons, I was proud to secure \$5 million in Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant funding for this project.

I'm looking forward to returning when the project is completed.



I was happy to meet many of the students at the RACC groundbreaking.



The New RACC Weitz Healthcare Pavilion



■ Act No. 5 of 2023

One of my priorities in the state legislature has been addressing Pennsylvania's startlingly poor maternal mortality record. Pennsylvania ranks 26th

in the nation in maternal mortality rate with 82 deaths per 100,000 births. Maternal morbidity, which refers to any short-term or long-term health condition that leads to pregnancy and birth complications, is even more

prevalent. Research published in Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology finds that 100 women suffer from severe maternal morbidity for every maternal death. In 2021 alone, roughly 120,500 women nearly died from childbirth.

On July 5, my bill, SB 262, was signed into law after passing both the Senate and the House unanimously and became Act No. 5 of 2023. It will **require the Department of Health to annually publish severe maternal morbidity data using hospitalization discharge data.** This change will allow us the track

and better understand maternal morbidity in Pennsylvania, and that valuable insight will be used while shaping public health policy. This is just a first step. There is much more we can do to combat maternal morbidity and mortality in Pennsylvania, and I believe Act 5's enactment opens the door for continued collaboration on this issue. In fact, \$2.3 million for maternal health programming and the development of maternal mortality prevention strategies was included in this year's budget.



DCED Secretary Visits Reading

On August 10, I welcomed Pennsylvania's new Secretary of the Department of Community and Economic Development, Rick Siger, to Reading. DCED is an agency that provides a wide range of grant funding opportunities to Pennsylvania nonprofits, counties and local governments. With a new Secretary and administration now in place, it was important for our elected officials to have a chance to make a connection with Secretary Siger and show what we've been able to accomplish with state support in recent years.

■ FirstEnergy Stadium

The ongoing renovations at FirstEnergy Stadium will allow the R-Phils to retain its Minor League Baseball license. FirstEnergy Stadium received \$9.5 million in state funding to renovate the ballpark. Renovations are slated to be finished in 2024. Upgrades include new player dressing rooms, off-field bullpens, and the Redner's Event Center, which will be available for use year-round. So many members of our community grew up going to R-Phils games and now take their kids or grandkids to the ballpark for a day of fun. Losing the team was never an option, which is why I advocated so strongly for this funding.



■ Alvernia University's Reading CollegeTowne

Alvernia University's Reading CollegeTowne is at the center of the ongoing redevelopment of downtown Reading. The beautiful new facility is state-of-the-art and offers students a wide range of academic opportunities. It's home to the O'Pake Institute for Economic Development and Entrepreneurship's Spark Business Incubator, which has assisted over 200 entrepreneurs and small businesses. It's also the new home of BCTV. Establishing Reading CollegeTowne was partly supported with \$12.5 million in Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant funding.



■ Goggleworks

Lastly, I joined Secretary Siger at the GoggleWorks to hear about plans for an upcoming project. A vacant building on the GoggleWorks' campus will soon become the home of a commercial kitchen for Helping Harvest that will produce heat-and-eat meals. The space will double as a teaching facility for food service industry employees. The second floor will be the new home of the Reading Science Center, a nonprofit providing students with hands-on STEM learning opportunities. We have another chance to get an exciting project off the ground that I look forward to supporting in any way I can. Most importantly, we showed Secretary Siger and the Shapiro Administration that we can make things happen in Reading when we work together to secure the needed resources.

Renter's Protection Package



In July, a historic expansion of the Property Tax & Rent Rebate program was signed into law. The maximum rebate increased from \$650 to \$1,000. The yearly income cap for renters and homeowners increased to \$45,000. This is the first expansion of the program since 2006. An estimated 175,000 more seniors will now be eligible.

I've heard from many of my constituents over the past three years about the long list of housing issues they are dealing with. One thing that became clear to me through conversations with Berks Countians is that renters deal with predatory practices, and not a lot of state-level legislation offers solutions. That's why I've introduced a package of bills to provide a badly needed layer of protection for Pennsylvania renters.

SB 859 would **establish a reusable tenant screening for Pennsylvania renters**. As the renter's market has become increasingly competitive, it's become more critical for prospective tenants to cast as wide a net as possible when searching for an apartment. However, many landlords will charge prospective tenants an application fee ranging from \$25 to \$75 per application. When searching for a new place to live, these fees become incredibly

costly and redundant. With a reusable tenant screening, a prospective tenant can purchase a screening at a price established by the Consumer Price Index that is good for 30 days. Accepting a reusable screening is not mandatory, meaning landlords can opt out. In that same vein, I'm also proposing **SB 860**, which would **cap application fees at \$25**. SB 860 has bipartisan support in the Senate.

Lastly, **SB 861** would **establish a yearly land rent increase for manufactured home communities**. Manufactured homes are built in factories and assembled on-site. Manufactured home communities provide a source of affordable housing for seniors, veterans and individuals with disabilities on fixed incomes. Since residents own the home but not the land it resides on, large companies can and have purchased these plots of land and substantially increased the

lot rent. The idea for this legislation was brought to me by members of the Douglas Village community in Berks County. Their manufactured home community was purchased by an out-of-state company that's raised lot rent by \$125 a month since 2022.

Relocating a manufactured home is costly and unrealistic for most owners. These folks are just looking for safe, affordable and low-maintenance housing. But instead, Douglas Village and at least five other manufactured home communities in Pennsylvania are being held hostage. That's not right, and SB 861 would disallow any proposed increase that exceeds any percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index for the preceding calendar year to move forward. This is another bill I'm proud to say has bipartisan support in the Senate. All three bills have the backing of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission.

If you have any questions about the Property Tax & Rent Rebate program or need assistance with your application, don't hesitate to get in touch with my office at (610) 929-2151.


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Important Voting Dates

OCT.
23

Last day to REGISTER to
vote or update your
registration.

OCT.
31

Last day to apply for a
MAIL-IN BALLOT.

NOV.
7

ELECTION DAY! Vote in person at the polls from 7am to 8pm.
Mail-in and absentee ballots must be returned by 8pm.

Go to vote.pa.gov for answers to all your election questions.

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UP-TO-DATE

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SenatorSchwank.com

