



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

WINTER 2022

# Kristine Howard

167TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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## Dear Neighbor,

As one legislative session ends and another begins, I'd like to reflect on what we've accomplished and where we can go from here. I would also like to welcome the residents of East Caln, East Goshen, and West Vincent to the 167th Legislative District.

I introduced nearly three-dozen pieces of legislation this session and secured millions of dollars in grants for the district, including funds to protect and expand open spaces and to provide for emergency services. This coming session, I hope to continue the important work I started four years ago when I was first elected to serve our communities.

In addition to providing an update on what's going on in Harrisburg, I want to ensure that everyone is aware of the resources available to use right here at home.

Happy Holidays,

*Kristine C. Howard*



**988** is the new **911**  
**for suicide prevention.**

# NEW LEGISLATION

## PREVENTING FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

Domestic abuse is a scourge to be combated, and it is a multi-faceted problem that includes not only physical violence, but emotional abuse as well. An additional, comparatively unrecognized, aspect common in abusive situations is financial exploitation.

While this form of abuse may escape public awareness, financial exploitation is a bitter reality for far too many people. From deception, intimidation, and undue influence over someone's finances to actively causing financial dependence by interfering with employment or education, financial exploitation takes many forms.

While Pennsylvania offers fairly comprehensive protections from abuse in general, our laws are woefully inadequate at addressing the menace of financial exploitation.

This is why I am currently finalizing a bill that would expand existing protections for older adults and care-dependent people and create new protections for everyone from financial abuse. This legislation will protect countless families, older adults, and care-dependent people from this nearly invisible ruination.



## THE PHOENIX CREDIT

The robust job market is not without frustrations for many job seekers, including thousands of Pennsylvanians who left careers to raise a family, recharge, or reevaluate their future.

Unfortunately, many employers see these candidates as risks, despite their prior experience and qualifications. In particular, those who have been out of the labor force for more than two years often find it nearly impossible to secure employment matching their abilities.

To remedy this, I have introduced a bill that would create the Phoenix Credit, a tax incentive encouraging companies to expand their imaginations when it comes to hiring. Greatly increasing a candidate's salary relative to previous employment or bringing a candidate back into the labor force after an absence of two or more years would allow the company to receive a healthy tax benefit each year a Phoenix employee is with the company, up to three years.

The Phoenix Credit would not only help returning workers, but also those who may have been unable to build sufficient resumes due to circumstances beyond their control, such as entering the job market during a recession.

Furthermore, this bill would create incentives for companies to create returnships, which are paid, intend-to-hire internships that serve to transition employees back into full-time roles.

Finally, this bill would create a tax credit for the Phoenix employees themselves who enter or re-enter in-demand industries identified yearly by the Department of Labor & Industry, thereby addressing labor shortages.

The Phoenix Credit is a necessary first step in minimizing the gender pay gap, as well as ensuring fairness and preventing despair in the workforce.



# RECENTLY SIGNED INTO LAW

**OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS WORKED WITH THE GOVERNOR TO PASS A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT PIECES OF LEGISLATION, INCLUDING ...**

## **ACT NO. 112 OF 2022**

In November, the House and Senate unanimously passed legislation that honors those who actively serve their country and their families by making the Blue Star Family plate available to families of active-duty service members. The plate will display a Blue Star, which will signify a family loved one is an active-duty service member.

And thanks to an amendment from Sen. Carolyn Comitta, Act 112 includes the creation of the Pennsylvania Pollinator Habitat Program and the Pollinator License Plate, programs that Sen. Comitta and I worked together to introduce as separate bills.

The Department of Transportation, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Department of Agriculture will work together to develop and establish the program to create native grass and perennial wildflower-filled habitats along our state highways to support the migration of pollinators, including bees, and will not only reduce maintenance costs, but beautify our state and protect our crops.

## **ACT NO. 155 OF 2022**

As Volunteer Fire Departments across the commonwealth struggle to recruit and retain firefighters, this law allows 17-year-old junior firefighters to attend and complete the Interior Firefighting Module with Live Burns and Vehicle Rescue Technician training programs, enabling these junior firefighters to have the necessary training to be "interior qualified" upon turning 18 years old.

## **ACT NOS. 111 AND 158 OF 2022**

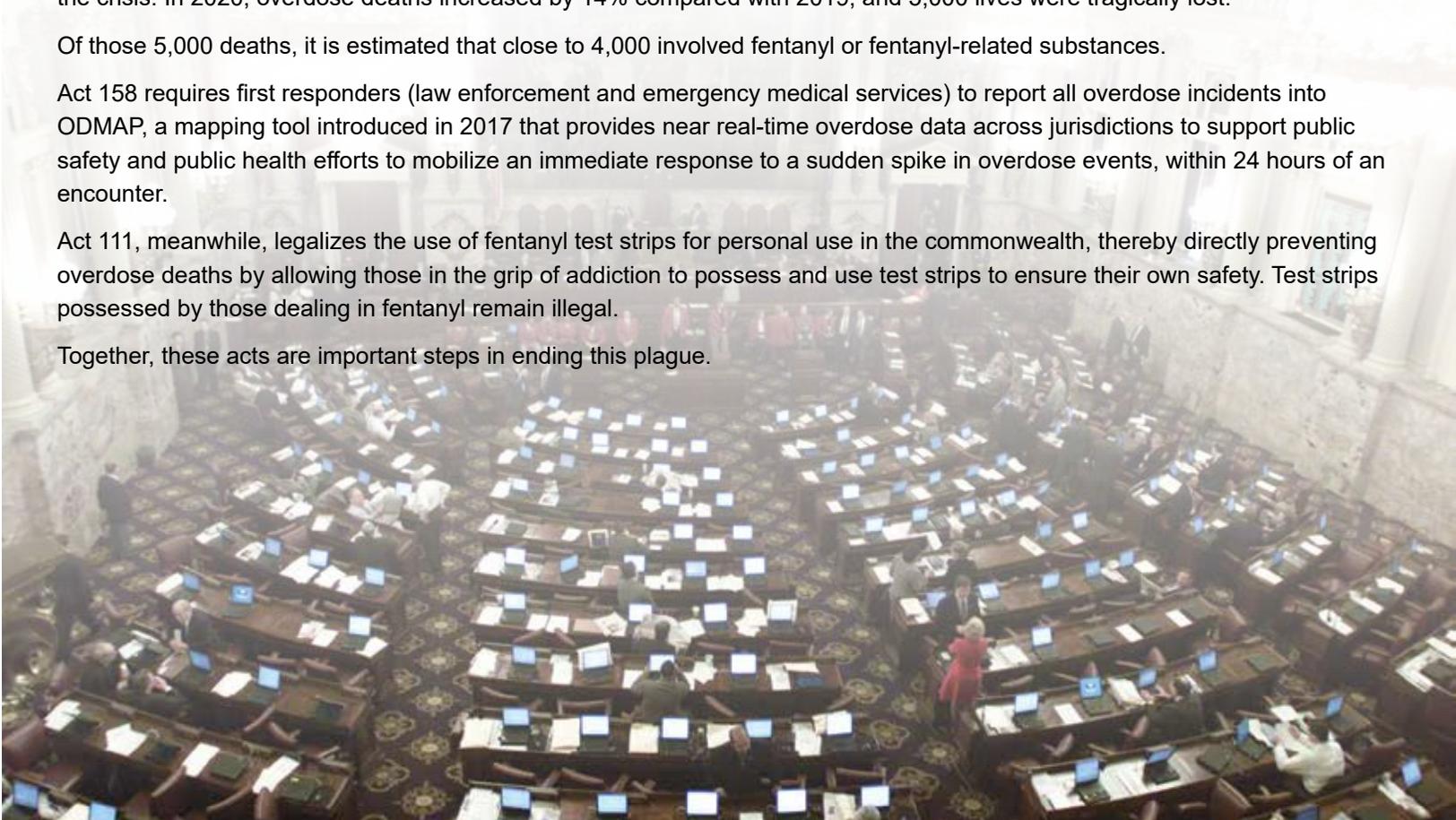
The opioid crisis continues to wreak havoc in communities across our commonwealth, and recent years have only exacerbated the crisis. In 2020, overdose deaths increased by 14% compared with 2019, and 5,000 lives were tragically lost.

Of those 5,000 deaths, it is estimated that close to 4,000 involved fentanyl or fentanyl-related substances.

Act 158 requires first responders (law enforcement and emergency medical services) to report all overdose incidents into ODMAP, a mapping tool introduced in 2017 that provides near real-time overdose data across jurisdictions to support public safety and public health efforts to mobilize an immediate response to a sudden spike in overdose events, within 24 hours of an encounter.

Act 111, meanwhile, legalizes the use of fentanyl test strips for personal use in the commonwealth, thereby directly preventing overdose deaths by allowing those in the grip of addiction to possess and use test strips to ensure their own safety. Test strips possessed by those dealing in fentanyl remain illegal.

Together, these acts are important steps in ending this plague.



# REAL ID Update

While REAL ID is optional for Pennsylvania residents, beginning May 3, 2023, Pennsylvanians will need a REAL ID-compliant driver's license, photo ID card, or another form of federally acceptable identification (such as a valid passport or military ID) to board a domestic commercial flight or enter a federal building or military installation that requires ID.

If you wish to fly or enter the covered facilities, the best thing you can do to prepare for REAL ID is to get your documents together. Federal regulations require that PennDOT must verify original versions or certified copies of the following documents for a customer before issuing a REAL ID:

- **Proof of identity:** Original or certified copy of a birth certificate filed with the state office of vital records with a raised/embossed seal — issued by an authorized government agency — or valid, unexpired U.S. Passport or passport card.
- **Proof of Social Security number:** Social Security card in current legal name.
- **Two proofs of current, physical PA address:** Examples include current, unexpired PA license or ID, PA vehicle registration, auto insurance card or utility bill with the same name and address.
- **Proof of all legal name changes (if applicable):** Certified marriage certificate, court order, or divorce decree issued by your county's family court.

My district office does not issue REAL ID cards, but we are happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the process. Visit any PennDOT Driver License Center to have your documents verified and imaged and receive your REAL ID within 15 business days.



# Birth Certificates and Death Certificates

My office can help you obtain copies of birth and death certificates. Certificates cost \$20 each and must be paid via check or money order made payable to "VITAL RECORDS."

# Prepare for Rising Winter Energy Costs

Energy usage is a key factor in the size of winter energy bills, and there are many ways that consumers can control that usage. Energy saving tips include:

- **Pay attention to the thermostat** – Every degree you raise or lower the temperature could impact energy costs by up to 3%. Also, consider a programmable thermostat to automatically lower temperatures while you are away from home.
- **Have your furnace serviced** – Regular furnace maintenance along with clean air filters help ensure efficient operation of your heating system.
- **Insulate and seal leaks around your home** – Adding insulation, installing storm windows and doors, and sealing cracks and air leaks can help you stay warmer and use less energy.
- **Install or repair ceiling fans in high-trafficked rooms** – Many people can reverse the direction of ceiling fans to clockwise to produce an updraft and move warmer air near the ceiling downward, keeping you and the room warmer.
- **Consider resetting your water heater thermostat** – Water heaters are the second highest source of energy usage in the home, and many people have the thermostat on their water heater set too high. Setting the temperature on your water heater a few degrees cooler can help save money on your energy bills.

The PUC's electric shopping website [PAPowerSwitch.com](http://PAPowerSwitch.com) and natural gas shopping website [PAGasSwitch.com](http://PAGasSwitch.com) have interactive sections with more easy consumer tips for saving energy, including the possibility of savings by choosing a new power supplier.

# Unclaimed Property at PA Treasury

Did you know that the Pennsylvania Treasury is currently holding onto \$3.5 billion in unclaimed property?

Did you know that one in 10 Pennsylvanians is owed unclaimed property?

Did you know the average claim is worth about \$2,000?

My office is hard at work on trying to notify constituents of their unclaimed property, but you don't have to wait for us to reach out: you can search Treasury's online database at any time to see if you or friends and family have property waiting to be claimed. You need not pay anyone a fee to search for or claim property from the state. Learn more at [www.patreasury.gov/unclaimed-property](http://www.patreasury.gov/unclaimed-property).

## Property Tax/Rent Rebate Increased This Year!

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians aged 65 and older; widows and widowers aged 50 and older; and people with disabilities aged 18 and older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, and half of your Social Security is excluded from your income calculation. Spouses, personal representatives or estates may also file rebate claims on behalf of claimants who lived at least one day in 2021 and meet all other eligibility criteria. Visit [www.revenue.pa.gov](http://www.revenue.pa.gov) for more information.

**Applications are due by December 31, 2022**

## SEPTA Cards

Pennsylvanians 65 and older can apply for a free SEPTA Key Senior ID Card or renew their current senior card at my district office. Senior cards can be used on SEPTA trains, buses, trolleys, and subways. Current turnaround time to receive a card is around five weeks from the application date.



## Report Potholes

Potholes and other roadway concerns on state roads can be reported by calling 1-800-FIX-ROAD or visiting [www.penndot.gov](http://www.penndot.gov) and clicking on "Submit a Roadway Concern."





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**CONSTITUENT SERVICES**

**STATE GOVERNMENT CONCERNS?  
CALL MY OFFICE**

My office is here to help you with any state-related issue. If you're having an issue, please call, and my staff will do all they can to serve as guides, as needed, as you navigate your concerns through our government.

While most issues can be resolved by phone, many matters may require an in-person meeting. To minimize wait times while allowing us to research your issue and provide the best service possible without the need to rush our visitors, appointments are encouraged. To schedule an appointment, call my office at (610) 251-1070 or email [RepHoward@pahouse.net](mailto:RepHoward@pahouse.net).

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