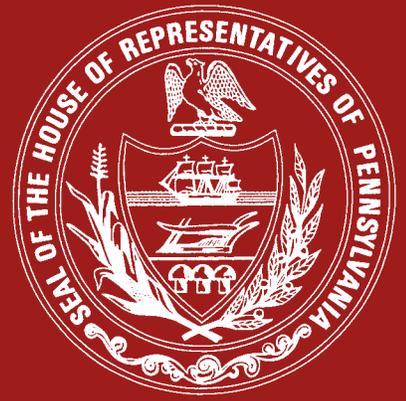


State Representative Dan Miller

Newsletter



SUMMER 2022

Serving the 42nd District

Mt. Lebanon, Dormont, Castle Shannon, and Baldwin Township with parts of Scott Township and Brookline

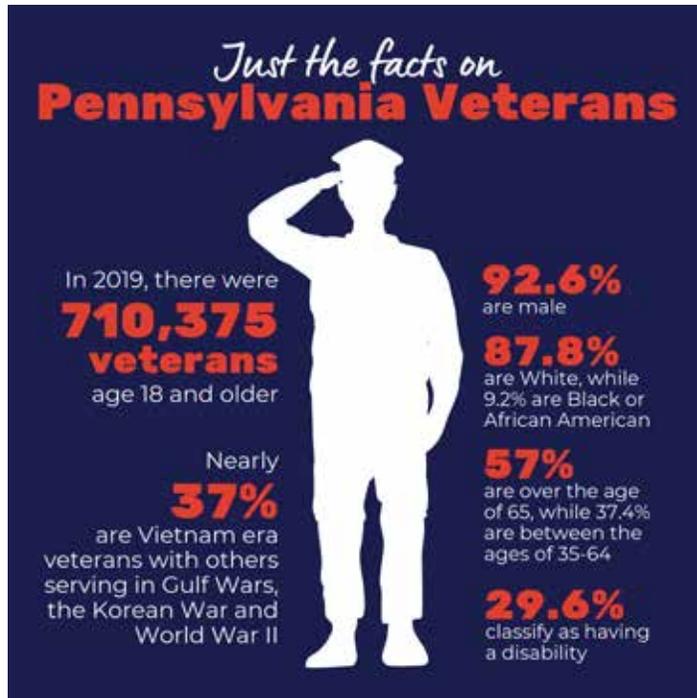


Honoring the 20th Anniversary of September 11th

INSIDE:

Supporting Our Veterans ■ State & Federal School Funding Snapshot
Federal Infrastructure Bill ■ Disability & Mental Health Priorities
Public Safety & Emergency Services

Supporting Our Veterans



We never do enough to thank our veterans for their service, but one way to do so is to make sure they have great opportunities when they transition out. That's why I was so glad to offer a special Veterans Business Support event in partnership with the PA Small Business Development Center at Duquesne University and the Small Business Administration to focus on veteran entrepreneurship. We currently rank fifth in the nation for the total number of veteran-owned businesses, but I think we can do better. Our event focused on how veterans can access the government programs to help start and grow their business and discussed what is available to help them become more dynamic and resilient. This program is available on my website at RepDanMiller.com and we look forward to continuing our partnership with Duquesne in coming events! However, our attention to veteran issues goes beyond just business support, and here are some recent bills that I was glad to support:

[Employment Protections for Members of National Guards \(HB 196\)](#)

Signed into law as Act 31 of 2021 last June, this legislation expanded employment protections currently afforded to members of the PA National Guard to members of the Guard from other states. In short, employers are prohibited from discriminating against an employee because of their membership in the Guard or for their required duty as an active member.

[Exclusion of Veterans' Compensation Benefits from Income](#)

[Calculations \(HB 491\)](#)

Unanimously passed by the House in March, this bill would make a simple change to law that will have a big impact for veterans and their families across PA. As written, qualifying veterans and their unmarried surviving spouses would have 100% of their veterans' compensation benefits and other benefits provided to veterans by the state excluded from income calculations for any program administered by the Commonwealth. This bill is still waiting on a vote by the full Senate.

[Guaranteeing In-State Tuition for Reassigned Military Families \(HB 941\)](#)

My friend Rep. Frank Burns introduced this legislation to guarantee in-state tuition at public institutions of higher education in Pennsylvania for dependents of members of the military, veterans, and civilian defense employees in cases where the family relocates between the time the student accepts admission and the first semester begins. Currently, in-state tuition rates for these families are only guaranteed upon the first day of the semester. The guarantee would additionally apply at community colleges in PA. This bill passed the House unanimously last June but is currently waiting on a Senate vote.

[Veterans' Pension Program Increase \(HB 1220\)](#)

This legislation aims to further recognize the sacrifices made by veterans who have lost sight, a limb, or were paralyzed while in the line of duty by increasing monthly payments out of the Blind Veteran's Pension and the Amputee and Paralyzed Veteran's Pension programs from \$150 per month to \$250 per month. This increase is long overdue since the current rate has been in place since 1999. To help these payments keep pace with inflation in the future, payments would be tied to the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, a key measure of inflation. This bill passed the House unanimously last November but is currently waiting on a Senate vote.

[Increasing and Expanding Veterans' Burial Benefits \(HB 1421\)](#)

Veterans' burial services are a solemn and important part of the thanks we give those who served. Currently, burial details offered at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies, Fort Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, and Washington Crossing National Cemetery are provided via contract with outside veterans' groups. This legislation would allow the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the state agency that oversees burial services in PA, to request the assistance of National Guard members in providing burial details. Additionally, veterans' groups contracted for burial details would see their compensation increase from \$150 per day to \$250 per day.

State & Federal School Funding Snapshot

Over the last couple of decades, the state proportion of education spending for our K-12 schools (and our post-secondary schools) has declined. This has brought about increased reliance on local property taxes, as well as greater disparities between districts and is a partial driver of college costs and student debt. With the governor’s urging and in a bipartisan fashion, the state has taken some modest steps forward in reversing these trends in recent years. With the state budget on the horizon at the time of this writing, I am optimistic that the 2022-23 budget will make similar progress.

Of course, it is not just state and local funding that fund our schools. Traditionally, federal dollars have represented a small proportion of our school budgets, although sizeable pandemic-related funding has now been funneled to every district. Three rounds of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds have been dispersed – two under the previous administration and one under the current (part of the American Rescue Plan Act). This unprecedented level of assistance should provide game-changing opportunities to strengthen our schools against future learning challenges and to better prepare teachers, administrators and our students.

Poverty has long been shown to impact the chance of educational success, which was made abundantly clear during COVID as wealthier school districts had

a much easier time transitioning to online learning than others. Even in our own school districts, some students received about a month less of schooling than others just because they didn’t have a laptop. It is now indisputable that no student in Pennsylvania is prepared to learn without access to the internet at home. It is also just as obvious that teachers need to have the skills to design in-person lessons that can be quickly transitioned effectively to virtual instruction. The state needs to ensure both goals are met in every school and in every district. Our state constitution rests that responsibility in the hands of the General Assembly, and we must rise to meet that challenge.

Special Education costs remain a challenge for many districts. These costs are not likely to decrease, and in truth, many districts are under-supporting their kids and staff now. Unfortunately, the federal government has long since abandoned much of its obligation in this arena, leading to increased need for state assistance. I do expect an increase from the state in the coming budget, but more must be done to improve academics and inclusion and to stabilize the special education workforce that makes such learning possible. They are critical to learning.

These are some of the important topics behind state and federal education funding. I hope that the legislature doesn’t forget its role in helping all of our students be prepared for the jobs of tomorrow.

District	May 2020 (ESSER I)	January 2021 (ESSER II)	March 2021 - ARPA	Total
Baldwin-Whitehall SD	\$505,960	\$689,759	\$5,151,976	\$6,347,695
Chartiers Valley SD	\$292,307	\$361,861	\$2,702,826	\$3,356,994
Keystone Oaks SD	\$424,500	\$218,248	\$3,316,373	\$3,959,121
Mt. Lebanon SD	\$218,248	\$225,862	\$1,687,018	\$2,131,128
Pittsburgh Public Schools	\$11,146,817	\$13,416,089	\$100,207,995	\$124,770,901

Federal Infrastructure Bill

Pennsylvania has long been near the bottom nationwide regarding the upkeep and maintenance of our infrastructure. Harrisburg has struggled to reach compromise and clarity as to appropriate levels of funding and funding sources. For example, the last major transportation bill shifted almost \$500 million annually for public transit onto the back of the Turnpike - which is one of the

reasons it now has tremendous debt and has increased tolls year after year.

While the legislature continues to kick the question of sustainable funding down the road, Pennsylvania and local governments struggle to keep our heads above water as far as meeting current needs, let alone planning for our shared future.

Thankfully, Pennsylvania is set to receive approximately \$26 billion over the next five years in federal funding to rebuild and reimagine our infrastructure due to the Biden administration's bipartisan bill. This generational opportunity, if used appropriately, will relieve backlogs and expand project scope that is otherwise still years away in our current state of political reality.

Infrastructure development typically provides a high return on investment. Such projects address needs while creating a substantial number of family-sustaining jobs for our trades and related sectors. While the majority of the funding will be spent on our highways and bridges, many other physical infrastructure projects will also be completed. Above is a snapshot of what to expect.



Roads and Bridges

Approximately \$11.3 billion of the federal aid will go to highway and road reconstruction, and another \$1.6 billion for bridge replacement and repairs. Projects will include a focus on climate change mitigation, resiliency, and safety measures for all users.

Environment

\$3.8 billion will provide the biggest ever investment in environmental clean-up and reclamation of abandoned mine lands (a state goal for decades), which will assist with the restoration of polluted streams and creeks in 43 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, as well as a portion of \$4.7 billion to help plug, remediate, and reclaim "orphaned" oil and gas wells, which can leak out toxic gases and liquids for years after the sites are closed.

Public Transit

Pennsylvania stands to receive an additional \$2.8 billion in federal funding for its various public transit agencies. As per ridership, the bulk of that funding will land in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh regions.

Replacing Lead Pipes

Pennsylvania, with roughly 160,000 lead service lines in place now, will receive about \$1.4 billion over the next five years

to make significant advances in this area. This is the largest investment in this problem to date to improve water infrastructure and ensure clean, safe drinking water.

Expanding Internet Access

The infrastructure bill gives a \$65 billion investment in broadband, including \$42.5 billion in new funds for broadband infrastructure. Each state will get at least \$100 million at first, with the rest to be doled out via a formula-based grant program. In addition, through an extension of the Federal Communications Commission's pandemic-era "Affordable Connectivity Benefit" program, as many as 2.9 million Pennsylvanians will become eligible for a \$30 monthly subsidy on household internet services, and providers will be required to make cost information more easily available so families can shop for a better deal. Both projects will come in handy in our state where 14% of Pennsylvania households do not currently have an internet subscription, and 3.1% of Pennsylvanians live in areas where, under the FCC's benchmark, there is no broadband infrastructure.

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Federal Infrastructure Bill

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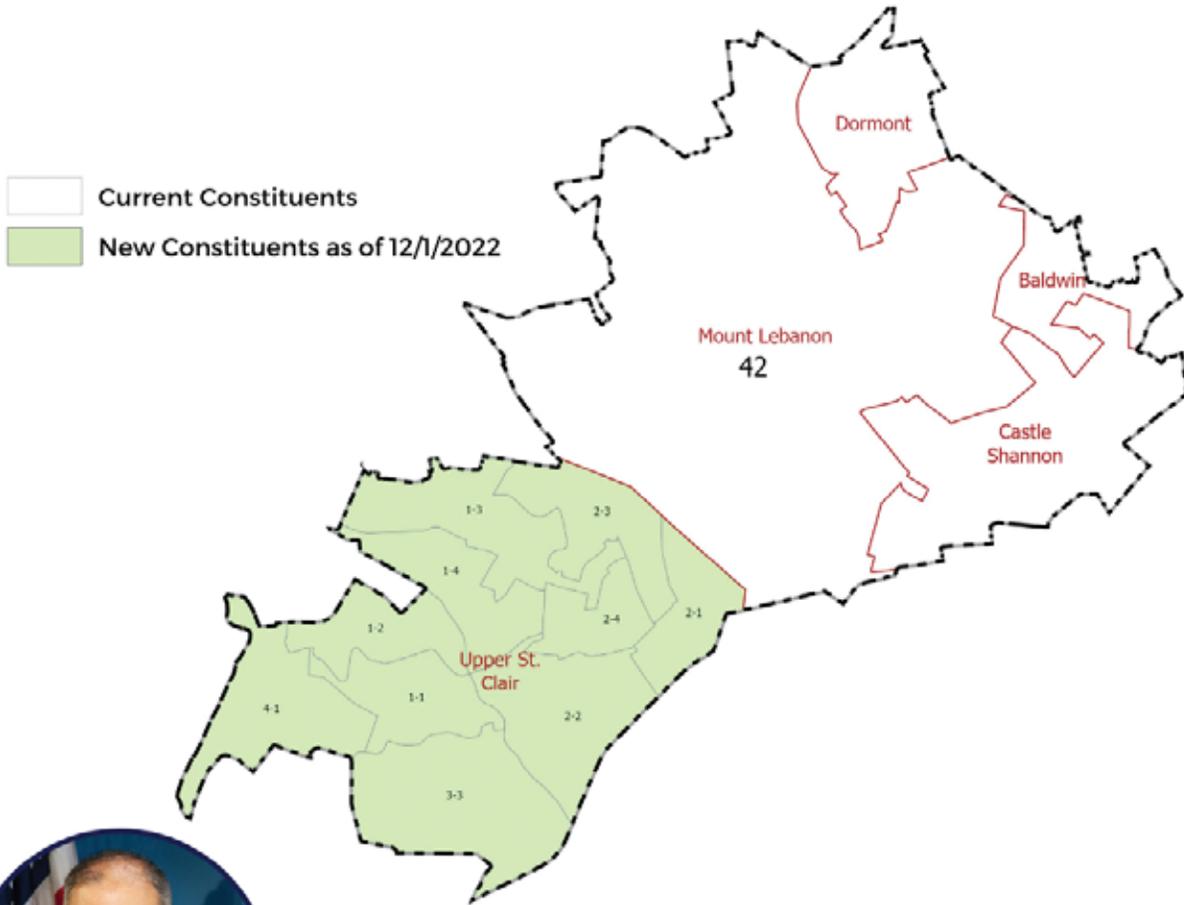
Airports

Pennsylvania will receive an estimated \$355 million for its fleet of commercial airports.

Energy Efficiency

Low-income Pennsylvanians will benefit from a portion of the bill's historic \$3.5 billion investment in weatherization, which will reduce energy costs for families, as well as \$10 million for new training centers and energy efficiency job programs, and \$40 million for energy auditor job training. We also expect an allocation of \$171 million in a national initiative to grow the publicly accessible electric vehicle charging network across the state.

Redistricting comes to the 42nd Legislative District



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Disability & Mental Health Priorities

As always, disability and mental health issues remain one of our key legislative priorities, and we were very excited to offer our annual Disability and Mental Health Summit programming again this spring. Thanks to our partners at Beth El, St. Clair Hospital and Highmark Wholecare, we presented 20 information sessions on a variety of topics – including our bipartisan legislative panel – and had dozens of organizations participate in our resource fair. Many of these sessions are now available for viewing at RepDanMiller.com.

In many ways the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing problems in this area. Even before COVID, salaries for many who work in the field were too low, thousands of disabled Pennsylvanians were on waiting lists for supportive services, and too many health professionals suffered from heavy caseloads. Most people with disabilities are not in the workforce and stigma continues to be a massive roadblock when it comes to seeking help.

To be fair, there have been some steps forward. The changes to medical assistance benefits for workers with disabilities has been positive. The adoption by the state of the Employment First initiative is a good initial effort to improve employment opportunities. Moving people from institutional settings to more community homes is morally and legally the right thing to do – but the state must also make sure that a competent and professional staff is in place when they get there. In too many ways, the state underinvests and overpromises.

There obviously remains a lot of work to be done and to the right, I have listed some of the bills that I have authored that could help but are still awaiting consideration by the majority. It is very important that the state recognizes its unique position in helping people reach their fullest potential and independence.

House Bill (HB) 2522 would require insurance plans to cover the necessary wheelchair maintenance twice a year to ensure that people with mobility disabilities have full access to their wheelchairs.

HB 2182 would require all government websites to be compatible with software that helps people with vision loss to read and hear the information.

HB 2180 would help promote social inclusion by requiring schools to analyze and report the level of participation of students with IEPs in extra-curricular activities.

HB 1825 would create the School Counseling Services Act, which is designed to enhance access to mental health services and strengthen relationships between guidance counselors and students.

HB 721 would create a mental health bed registry to help hospitals find appropriate treatment options for people who agree to seek help.

HB 547 would create a new Department of Accessibility and Inclusion focused on making sure that all state programs are integrated with accessibility and inclusion in mind.

HB 411 would recognize that to increase community participation and engagement, adult changing tables in certain locations are a logical extension of the ADA.

HB 250 would establish disability and mental health education curriculum goals in school health classes.

HB 247 would require schools to report the number of suicides or attempts on school property to our Office of Safe Schools.

HB 114 would provide for greater hiring and promotion authority for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

HB 102 would improve access to school counselors, psychologists, social workers and nurses.

HB 92 would index salary rates for our DSPs to help stabilize the workforce and improve career possibilities.



Public Safety & Emergency Services

As a former Mt. Lebanon volunteer firefighter, I felt blessed that we were so well supported by our community. This financial commitment allowed us to mix career and volunteer components with the very best of equipment and allowed us to prioritize training over fundraising to increase our chances of saving lives and property. However, I also know that this strong local commitment is simply not possible everywhere, and many police, fire and EMS departments struggle in a variety of ways. That's when the state, working cooperatively with local governments and departments, must help make sure that every emergency department has what it needs to do the job and respond appropriately. That's why I have authored the following bills, which I believe would benefit our first responders and support their hard work. To ensure that our first responders and our communities have what they need to provide effective and quality public safety services, I have authored a legislative package aimed at enhancing emergency services in a variety of ways:

HB 2523: State Grants for Firefighter Turnout Gear

Appropriate turnout gear is a must for any firefighter, and they are expensive for many departments. This bill would create a state grant program to cover the cost of the gear for every firefighter who obtains a Firefighter 2 certification and has been in good standing with their department for two years. The goal of this bill is to help replace fundraising time with training time, and to better prepare our firefighters. Those who qualify would be eligible every five years.

HB 1853: Connecting Firefighters with Preventive Physical & Mental Healthcare

Cancer and heart-related disease in firefighters are a constant concern. Annual physicals designed to address those issues can and have saved lives. Some departments, though, can't afford to cover the costs and some personal insurances won't. This bill would reimburse the annual costs of these physicals for qualifying firefighters.

HB 2516: Defining 911 Dispatchers as First Responders

Dispatchers are often the first of the first responders, and a well-trained dispatcher can save lives with time-sensitive, mission-critical information. They also often bear the traumatic brunt of very personal and harrowing moments, while needing to provide a sense of calm during what could be the worst moments of a caller's life. However, even with these expectations and stressful demands, dispatchers are defined in law as clerical/administrative positions for reporting purposes. This bill would more accurately define their job responsibilities and help them be recognized for what they are – essential first responders.

HB 667: Insurance for all Police Officers

In too many situations, police officers must work multiple part-time jobs, in and out of law enforcement, in order to get health insurance. This bill would change that, to require all officers to be provided healthcare insurance. Not only is this the right thing to do, but it also would encourage the hiring of more full-time police officers rather than relying on part-time officers to minimize benefit costs.

HB 2492: Urban Search & Rescue Expansion

With the collapse of the Fern Hollow bridge in Pittsburgh, many people are talking about our urban search and rescue (USR) capabilities to handle similar or even greater incidents here in western PA. By all accounts the Fern Hollow response was handled appropriately, although Pittsburgh still had to rely on tactical resources from across the state to arrive to complete a full level search. This bill would require the state to establish and fund a second task force team based here in Allegheny County (the other team is based in Philadelphia). This is not meant to weaken the other team at all, but rather to enhance our own capabilities and provide a more direct response for those emergencies that occur closer to home. The creation of a second team was a recommendation after September 11th, and now is the time to bring it to fruition.

It is estimated that 30 percent of first responders develop work related behavioral conditions such as depression and PTSD.

Fire and Emergency Medical Companies throughout the Commonwealth face increased call volume, rising costs, workforce challenges and training needs.

In addition to the risk and trauma inherent in being a first responder, stress factors often include long and frequent shifts, poor sleep, and physical injuries.

Rep. Dan Miller's

Senior Fair

Coming this Fall!



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