



Winter  
2021

State Representative | 192nd Legislative District

# MORGAN CEPHAS

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## Why I Voted Against the PA State Budget

While the 2020-21 state budget passed in November, it did so without my vote.

I simply could not support a plan that did so little for so many at a time when people need so much.

Ahead of the final vote, I joined my Democratic colleagues in fighting to dedicate \$1 billion Pennsylvania had left in federal CARES Act funding to those struggling the most from COVID-19, including local businesses and restaurants, frontline workers, schools and childcare centers.

However, members of the majority party ignored us and forced through a budget that fails to put you and your family first.

While this was a disappointment, it won't stop me from working tirelessly to provide struggling Pennsylvanians with the financial assistance they need to survive COVID-19 and thrive past it.

### Missed opportunities in the state budget:

- No assistance for **small businesses**
- No support to **keep our schools open**
- No relief for **restaurants to stay afloat**
- No support for **frontline workers**
- No help for **childcare centers**
- No aid for **nonprofits who help our communities**

### Dear Neighbor,

First and foremost, I want to thank you for your ongoing support. I am extremely honored and eager to begin another term representing you, your loved ones and the rest of the 192nd Legislative District in Harrisburg.

There's no question 2020 has been challenging for all of us, especially our most vulnerable neighbors. COVID-19 cases have hit record highs across Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the rest of the country. People have lost their lives, families struggle financially and local businesses fight to keep their doors open.

While things may seem bleak, my goal during this challenging time is to keep you as informed as possible.

In this newsletter, you'll read about available resources for individuals and small business owners in need of financial relief; programs aimed at

helping eligible applicants feed their loved ones and pay their property taxes and rent; and my ongoing work to keep people safe in their homes even during our toughest times.

You'll also learn more about the bipartisan efforts we're spearheading to install long overdue police and criminal justice reforms in the commonwealth.

Over this past year, I have been blessed to have such dedicated staff and community partners, who all share my commitment to put people first.

From free food and personal protective equipment giveaways to virtual events, we've found creative ways to keep serving our communities safely.

Heading into 2021, your health and well-being remain my top priority. As we work toward getting through COVID-19, it remains critical to better rebuild our communities and economy and with an equitable lens

so neighborhoods like ours aren't left behind.

I will continue fighting to secure funding to invest back into our neighborhoods; break down racial barriers; put an end to the gun violence crisis; create good-paying jobs and make sure all students have the proper tools necessary to receive a quality education, whether learning from home or in person.

Through it all, just remember: You are not alone. Even though my office is currently closed to foot traffic, my staff and I are still here to assist you with state-related issues by phone, email and social media.

We will get through this pandemic together. We will make a difference together!

Sincerely,

Rep. Morgan Cephas

# Help Design a New Playground for Lamberton School

I am ecstatic to report that after months of hard work and collaboration, Overbrook CDC has been awarded a service grant from the Community Design Collaborative to develop a playground design for Lamberton Elementary School! The final conceptual design will help guide next steps for the overall project to secure a safe and educational play space for students of Lamberton.

While the collaborative will be providing the design experts and training on playful learning, the local community has been called on to provide their input and help guide the design by way of the community task force.

The Lamberton School Playground Design Community Task Force is comprised of school administrators,

teachers, students, neighbors and industry-specific experts to offer their input and come together to develop an interactive outdoor learning space where children can have fun and build on basic educational and developmental skills at the same time.

If you are a neighbor of the Overbrook Park community interested in offering input on the project, please contact my office to complete a quick survey.



# Plans in the Works to Replace Cassidy Elementary School



A quality education in a safe learning environment should never be based on skin color or ZIP code.

Over the past several years, I've joined parents, students and advocates in sounding

the alarm about the poor conditions of our neighborhood schools, specifically Cassidy Elementary in Overbrook, which has been considered the worst building in the school district.

Now, I'm proud to announce plans are in the works to demolish the school and build a new one.

Over the next several months, I will be teaming up with the school administrators, the families of Cassidy and community residents, to design a new campus for our students, which will include open outdoor green space that incorporates elements of playful learning, state-of-the-art classroom space, indoor athletic facilities and much more.

To join the conversation, please contact my office to complete a quick survey or to get on our email list for meeting notices and updates.

## Planned Construction for the 59th St. Bridge

I want to let you know about a construction project in the works to replace the 59th St. Bridge that connects the Wynnefield and Overbrook neighborhoods.

With the bridge being built in the 1920s, the city announced it will make the necessary structural updates to strengthen its safety for drivers, walkers and cyclists. The work will include upgrades to street lighting and traffic signals and reconstruction/repaving of sidewalks and curbs.

City officials released the following preliminary timeline for the project:

- Traffic detour plans are expected in 2021 with preliminary engineering expected this summer.
- A final design is scheduled to be finished in the summer of 2022.
- Construction to begin in early 2023 and ending in 2026.
- Community meetings regarding the project kicked off this month and are scheduled during each phase of design.

As more updates are released, I will make sure to pass them along to you.





# In the Community



To kick off the fall, I teamed up with Neighbors of Overbrook Association to wrap trees with spotted lanternfly traps in an effort to protect our environment and to stop the growth of these creatures.



Ahead of Thanksgiving, my office and I teamed up with Independence Blue Cross for our Turkey Drive and Drop for Seniors event. We distributed more than 250 free turkeys, along with reusable masks and hand sanitizer, safely to neighbors outside of Monte Vista apartments and the Wynnefield Place Apartments before personally delivering the rest to a number of recipients throughout the district.



Before COVID-19 hit, we knew 2020 was going to be a big year because of the 2020 census. The census plays a pivotal role in securing federal funding to invest in priorities like education, health care and assistance programs, and everyone's response matters. Because this opportunity only comes once every 10 years, I joined a number of local organizations and leaders, including the Absalom Jones Foundation, Philadelphia Common Pleas Court Judge Tamika Lane, state Sen. Vincent Hughes, Councilmember Curtis Jones Jr., Councilmember Kathy Gilmore-Richardson and Commissioner Omar Sabir, to help neighbors get counted across the 192nd Legislative District. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the 2020 census and help ensure our community was counted!

In our ongoing efforts to protect our community from COVID-19, I joined Rep.-elect Amen Brown, Councilmember Curtis Jones Jr., Pull Up Neighbor and the Players Alliance to give away personal protective equipment, food items and other resources at the Parkside Shopping Center in December. We were able to distribute over 500 food boxes and PPE.

Left: We worked closely with city commissioners during the 2020 Election to make voting more accessible by securing an early voting center at the Overbrook Elementary School to help ensure everyone's ballot was counted. 12,634 people entered this site, and 4,037 voting applications were submitted.

# 2020 Policy Highlights

## 2019-20 Legislative Session Recap



**144**  
Bills  
Co-Sponsored



**26**  
Bills  
Introduced



**34** Resolutions  
Co-Sponsored



### Protecting Renters, Homeowners and Small Mom and Pop Landlords

As a dedicated member of the Housing Working Group, I continue fighting to keep Pennsylvanians in their homes while helping small “mom and pop” landlords survive the COVID-19 pandemic.

I’m joining state Reps. Malcolm Kenyatta and Sara Innamorato in exploring legislation to provide a ‘Right to Counsel’ for evictions, which would mean that low-income tenants would be guaranteed access to a lawyer for their eviction proceeding.

Our plan was the focus of a House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing in October, where we discussed how tenants in Philadelphia currently do not have this right, leading to about 90% of them facing an eviction without the assistance of a lawyer. That is unacceptable and must be changed.

As part of our Safe at Home package of bills, I also introduced legislation to increase funding to the PA Housing Finance Agency to provide more assistance to renters and homeowners, cut red tape for applicants and earmark a portion of the funding for smaller, in-state “mom and pop” landlords instead of giant management companies.

### Fighting for a Fair Criminal Justice System

In my ongoing fight to enact criminal justice reform, I plan on reintroducing bipartisan legislation in the 2021-2022 legislative session to:

- **“Ban-the-box” on college applications:** Would prevent public colleges or universities in the state from inquiring about a student’s criminal history, with the exception of certain criminal offenses, on the initial applications or at any other time during the admissions process.
- **Restore dignity to incarcerated women:** Would build upon the support put in place by the state Dept. of Corrections to ensure incarcerated women have access to free feminine hygiene and incontinence products; update restraint laws to protect pregnant women and their children; and create an environment that supports rehabilitation and re-entry.

### Pushing for Real Police Reforms

There’s no question that Walter Wallace Jr., a husband, father and son from Southwest Philly who struggled with mental health, should still be alive today.

While I respect and am forever grateful to the dedicated men and women in blue who risk their lives to protect ours, they still need to be held accountable for their actions.

As a member of the Police Reform Working Group, I am fighting to prevent similar tragedies by calling for police departments across Pennsylvania to establish Behavioral Health Crisis Response Units that respond to emergency calls in lieu of or as a complement to law enforcement when the nature of the call is related to a behavioral health issue.

This would ultimately help save lives by ensuring that community members have access to first responders with the training needed to deescalate crisis situations safely.

I’m also working on two proposals to address ethnic intimidation.

The first would increase the penalties for individuals who file a false police report with malicious intent toward another person’s race, color, national origin or religion.

The other would hold employers civilly liable for damages resulting from employees’ violations of an individual’s civil rights.



# Combating COVID: Relief, Resources and Reminders

## Providing COVID-19 Resources Safely



As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, so do my efforts to provide you and your family with information about essential programs and services.

My office and I have done this safely through our virtual town hall series, where we connected with nearly 2,500 viewers online through Facebook Live to help prepare voters for the 2020 Election.

We also hosted a Zooming with Seniors Telephone Town Hall to connect participants with experts and resources aimed at helping older Pennsylvanians as we navigate this ongoing health crisis.



## Mask Up, Social Distance, Wash Your Hands

It's infuriating to hear anyone say COVID-19 is not real and shouldn't be taken seriously.

The fact is the virus is spreading rapidly and the proof is in the record rise in cases and an increased number of hospitalizations reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

I know wearing a mask and social distancing, especially during the holidays, is frustrating. However, these precautions are scientifically proven to help protect one another and save lives, while giving us the best chance to lift current restrictions, prevent future ones and get us back to the way life was before this health crisis.

Now is the time for all of us to remain vigilant, continue following CDC guidelines and keep listening to medical experts.

## Join me at these upcoming events to stay engaged:

**Jan. 16:** MLK Day of Service

**Feb. 2:** Zooming with Seniors Pt. 2

Contact my office for virtual access details.

**Feb. 9:** State of the 192nd Town Hall

**Feb. 16:** Tele-Town Hall

## Stay Up to Date!

For the latest on COVID-19, please check out the following resources:

**Health Department:** [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov)

**Philadelphia:** [www.phila.gov](http://www.phila.gov)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**My website:** [www.RepCephas.com](http://www.RepCephas.com)

**Greater Philadelphia Coronavirus Helpline:** 1-800-722-7112

## Unemployment and Small Business Assistance

**The Office of Unemployment Compensation:** [www.uc.pa.gov](http://www.uc.pa.gov)

Provides updated information about the compensation opportunities and unemployment programs that are available.

**PA CareerLink:** [www.pacareerlink.pa.gov](http://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov)

Allows you to search job opportunities and workforce training.

**Department of Community and Economic Development:** [dced.pa.gov](http://dced.pa.gov)

Find resources, including detailed guidance for businesses, information on funding and state and federal programs, and more.

**U.S. Small Business Administration:** [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)

Find information on federal funding and resources.

## Free Food Sites Are Still Available

Find food distribution sites nearest you online at:

**Philadelphia:** [www.phila.gov/food](http://www.phila.gov/food)

You can also call the WhyHunger hotline to find food pantries in your area: **1-800-5HUNGRY**.



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## Inside:

- Upcoming events
- COVID-19 updates & resources
- How to help design a new playground for a local school
- Update in fight for criminal justice & police reforms

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## 2020 By the Numbers

**7,968**

**Issues Resolved**

**Services Provided**

**15,501**

**1,831**

**Unemployment Cases Settled**

**\$306,000**

**in Rent Rebates Secured**



**\$906,900**

**Brought Back to the District**

**311 Requests Answered**

**1,813**

## Get Free Assistance with Your Property Tax/Rent Rebate

The deadline to apply for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for the 2019 tax year is Dec. 31, 2020. My office staff is ready to help you file yours for free!

The rebate program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and people with disabilities 18 or older.

The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters. Half of Social Security income is excluded, and the maximum standard rebate is \$650.

Spouses, personal representatives or estates may file rebate claims on behalf of deceased claimants who lived at least one day in 2019 and meet all other eligibility criteria.



**SORRY WE'RE CLOSED**

## UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE:

We are still accessible by phone or email:

**(215) 879-6625**

**RepCephas@pahouse.net**