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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

COMMITTEES

AGING AND OLDER ADULT SERVICES
ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY
HUMAN SERVICES

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Governor Tom Wolf
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf,

As you prepare your final budget address for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I write to convey my district's budget priorities for the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 budget.

Nearly every conversation I have and every concern I hear from constituents in the 155th Legislative District, in central Chester County, points to the urgent need for Pennsylvania to make meaningful investments in our neighbors, our families, and our local workforce.

Last June, we had the opportunity to use federal funds to invest in the long-term success of Pennsylvania. We had a moral obligation to prioritize the needs of Pennsylvania's children, workers, families, and seniors, and to use American Rescue Plan money as it was intended: to *rescue*. Instead, the General Assembly opted for austerity.

The new budget gives us a chance to rectify last year's missed opportunities. As we continue to contend with the ravages of COVID-19, we must take action now to put the Commonwealth on a path to economic and social recovery.

Many of our Commonwealth's needs predate COVID-19, but the pandemic has stripped away the bandages and exposed the structural shortfalls in how Pennsylvania approaches its budget. Federal assistance available through the American Recovery Plan has given us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a bold, fundamental transformation.

In your 2022-2023 budget proposal, I urge you to prioritize:

- **Access to high quality health care, including mental and behavioral health care**
Pennsylvania continues to experience a mental health crisis for both children and adults. We need investments in community crisis services, residential mental health programs, and access to primary and emergency care in underserved areas. We need investments in our hospital, long-term-care, and home care workforce, including fair living wages and an increase in the staffing standard to 4.1 hours of direct care per resident per day. We need

accountability to ensure that our dollars stay in Pennsylvania and are used to improve the quality of life in our communities and quality of care at the bedside, not to enrich out-of-state corporations and private equity firms.

- **Investments in Education**

The ongoing PA School Funding Trial has illuminated the systemic flaws in our current method and level of funding public schools in Pennsylvania. We must increase the state's share of school funding, allowing us to move away from overreliance on property taxes, and increase the portion of funding allocated through the Fair Funding Formula to help close the gap between wealthy and poor districts in our state. At the same time, we must implement fiscally responsible charter school funding reforms, particularly with regard to cyber charter tuitions and special education tuition calculations, to prevent profiteering at the expense of both taxpayers and students.

- **Investments in Human Services**

Pennsylvania's home and community-based services (HCBS) waiver system has been in a chronic state of underfunding and crisis for years. As of 2021, more than 12,000 people remained on the HCBS waitlist, with more than 5,000 of those in the "emergency" category, meaning they need services immediately, or in no later than six months. The 2022-2023 budget should allocate enough funds to cure the waitlist. It is unconscionable for us to sit on billions of dollars in unallocated funds that would be lifechanging for families while creating jobs that stay in Pennsylvania, building our communities and our local economy.

- **Investments in our care workforce**

Pennsylvania continues to face both an extreme shortage of and a growing need for care workers and direct support professionals (DSPs) to care for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities. There is only one home care worker for every eight Pennsylvanians in need of at-home care, and with our growing senior population comes an increased need for both home care and nursing home workers.

Raising wages and reimbursement rates for care workers is an investment that goes directly back into our economy, as workers who make a living wage stay in the workforce, spend their incomes with Pennsylvania businesses, and are able to end their reliance on state and federally funded programs such as SNAP benefits or LIHEAP. With demand for care workers growing, we must also invest in programs that incentivize workers to join this workforce, such as tuition reimbursement, career and technical school funding, tax credits, sign-on bonuses, and affordable housing assistance.

- **Investments in tourism, hospitality, and local business**

We know that every \$1 invested in tourism in Pennsylvania drives business to our local restaurants, hotels, and small main street businesses and returns [\\$3.43 in tax revenues](#).

Imagine what could happen for our local business communities if we carried out our duty to use the American Rescue Plan COVID-relief funds to actually stimulate the economy and revive one of our most important—and most impacted—industries? Imagine the benefit to our local businesses if we both invested in relief and closed the tax loopholes that allow

multi-state corporations to pay *zero* taxes to Pennsylvania while our local business owners shoulder one of the highest tax rates in the nation?

- **Investments in neighborhoods and the built environment**

The pandemic has laid bare the crucial role that schools, homes, and public parks have played in ensuring our mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Investing in these facilities and spaces is an investment into the survival and long-term health of the people in this Commonwealth as we fight through a third year of a global pandemic and a rapidly changing climate.

I urge you to make bold investments in the built environment—schools; safe, affordable housing; and public parks and recreational centers—as part of your 2022-2023 budget proposal. These investments would bring economic development opportunity for local businesses and enhance the health and resiliency of the people of the Commonwealth as we continue to live through the challenges wrought by a global pandemic, economic inequality, and climate change.

Thank you for your consideration and your ongoing support for many of the priorities outlined above. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss these priorities further in the coming months as Pennsylvania finalizes its 2022-23 budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danielle Friel Otten". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Danielle Friel Otten
State Representative
155th Legislative District