



State Representative **JORDAN HARRIS**

Summer 2019

Representing the 186th Legislative District

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REP. JORDAN HARRIS CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

**HELPING THOSE
WITH A CRIMINAL
RECORD ACCESS
EDUCATIONAL,
CAREER AND
HOUSING
OPPORTUNITIES**



Inside:

- OVER \$1 MILLION GRANT FOR SCHUYLKILL RIVER TRAIL
- HELPING LIFT PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY THROUGH THE PENNSYLVANIA PROMISE
- PENNSYLVANIANS DESERVE A RAISE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE
- \$2.5 MILLION COMING TO PHILADELPHIA TO FIGHT GUN VIOLENCE



IN OUR COMMUNITY



I had the honor of presenting a citation to Muriel Harper for her work tending to trees planted along her street to beautify our communities.



I love talking to students, and it was great to visit with students from the district's Universal Vire Charter School at the Capitol and introduce them to Gov. Tom Wolf.

Each year, my staff and I visit elementary schools in the district to make sure students have a card and rose to give their mother on Mother's Day. We visited with over 600 students this year!



My 7th annual Senior Sweetheart Dance was again a tremendous success, with hundreds of seniors coming out to dance, have a nice dinner and learn how to stay healthy, fit and active.



BUDGET WRAPPED UP, BUT PRIORITIES REMAIN

I'm proud to help bring \$2.5 million to Philadelphia to address gun violence

As of June 30, Gov. Tom Wolf had signed all the necessary budget legislation and our state has its spending plan laid out for the 2019/20 fiscal year. There are some valuable increases in funding, including in education, where we saw increases of \$160 million to basic education, \$50 million to special education and \$25 million to Pre-K, as well as an increase in funding to fight illegal firearms.

Last year, I brought Gov. Tom Wolf to Philadelphia to talk about the violence epidemic in our communities and the need for state help to combat this scourge. I'm proud to say that his visit led to the creation of Pennsylvania's Gun Violence Task Force. This collaborative effort between the state Attorney General's Office, the Philadelphia Police Department and the Philadelphia Field Division of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives works to keep illegal guns off our streets. This year, the Gun Violence Task Force received a \$2.5 million increase in funding to continue fighting to remove illegal guns and prosecute those who traffic them. I refuse to sit by and watch as our neighbors, friends and family members lose their lives to gun violence and I'll continue working with both city and state officials to do everything possible to tackle this public health crisis.

Though the budget contained many good items, unfortunately

it was lacking in other areas. Most notably, I'm upset that Pennsylvania continues to have the lowest minimum wage in the Northeast. Our state, along with New Hampshire, are the only states still paying the federal minimum wage of \$7.25. This poverty wage is lower than all neighboring states and puts Pennsylvania, as well as our citizens, at a severe disadvantage. I spoke about the need to raise the minimum wage during the budget negotiations and I promise to continue fighting to pay Pennsylvania's workers the fair wage they deserve.

This budget also eliminated General Assistance, a funding program that serves some of our neediest citizens. I spoke out vigorously against the removal of this program, as it helps Pennsylvania's veterans, victims of domestic abuse, homeless and disabled simply make ends meet with a \$200 per month stipend. Often, this funding is the difference between finding a room to rent or sleeping on the streets. I continue to be in conversations with the governor's office on how to bring back this assistance so we're not leaving struggling Pennsylvanians to fend for themselves.

I look forward to continuing to fight for what Pennsylvanians need when we return for our fall session in September.

PENNSYLVANIA PROMISE PROVIDES ELEVATOR OUT OF POVERTY

There's no doubt in my mind that providing Pennsylvanians with a proper education is a surefire way to help lift families out of poverty and enact generational change. The cost of a college education has risen exponentially over the past 20 years, with average tuition costs tripling across the country. This is unacceptable and considering that wages have not kept up anywhere close to the rising cost of tuition, we must do something to ensure a college degree is attainable for Pennsylvanians.



That's why I was proud to stand with fellow legislators in the House and Senate at a news conference reintroducing the Pennsylvania Promise. The PA Promise would take several steps to increase the affordability and attainability of higher education in Pennsylvania, including:

- Cover up to four years of tuition and fees at one of the commonwealth's 14 public community colleges.
- Cover four years of tuition and fees for any recent high school graduate with a family income less than or equal to \$110,000 per year and accepted into one of the 14 universities in Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education.
- Provide four years of tuition and fees not to exceed the state system tuition rate, depending on family income, for students accepted into a state-related university.
- Finance the expansion of grant assistance to adults seeking in-demand skills and industry-recognized credentials, as well as college credit.

Our state currently ranks 47th in the nation in higher education funding per capita and dead last in U.S. News' Best States 2018 report regarding higher education. State system students' real tuition and fees increased 51 percent since 2000, while the median student debt for state system students increased 132 percent from 2000 to 2015.

This is simply unacceptable. Pennsylvanians deserve easier access to education, not more walls and barriers preventing them from improving their life. Student debt is crippling college graduates and preventing them from buying a home, starting a family and many other major milestones that young adults normally achieve.

Education is the elevator out of poverty for so many families, but for too long, it's had an out of order sign on it. The PA Promise will help families get the education they deserve and open the door to success.

\$1.49 MILLION GRANT FOR SCHUYLKILL RIVER TRAIL

In March, I received news that a \$1.49 million grant had been awarded to construct the Christian to Crescent trail segment of the Schuylkill River Trail. This is great news for our district, as that particular segment of the trail is one of the more difficult portions to complete due to the terrain and industrial activity. However, once this portion is completed, we'll finally have connected Center City and Grays Ferry to provide an entirely off-road route for pedestrians and bicyclists.



This project is adding about 2,065 feet of trail along the Schuylkill River and will feature 700 feet of a signature cable-supported bridge structure. Grants like these are important to ensuring that members of our community can easily access other sections of the city and enjoy the beauty around us. I'll continue to support these grant programs and do everything I can to help improve our district.



I took part in a Tele-Town Hall with two fellow legislators, where we called into each of our districts and talked directly with constituents.



We often have foreign dignitaries visit the Capitol, and I had the honor of meeting with leaders from Ghana earlier this year.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE TOWN HALL A SUCCESS

In April, I invited the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office and the Philadelphia Public Defender's Office for a town hall meeting on criminal justice reform. We outlined many of the recent changes to help seal criminal records, as well as the next steps to be taken to continue to help formally incarcerated individuals stay on the right track and take advantage of housing, educational and economic opportunities.

If you have questions about qualifying to have your record sealed, please don't hesitate to contact my office. People may petition for their records to be sealed if they have been free from conviction for 10 years for an offense that resulted in a year or more in prison and have paid all court-ordered financial debts.

Additionally, it allows automatic sealing of records for second- or third-degree misdemeanor offenses that included a less-than-two-year prison sentence if the person has been free from convictions for 10 years, as well as sealing of criminal



history records related to charges that resulted in non-convictions. Helping to provide these educational, economic and housing opportunities helps to keep people out of the criminal justice system and save Pennsylvania tax dollars. Currently, the Department of Corrections receives around \$2.4 billion per year in our state budget. Tax dollars that can be saved by not being spent on criminal justice reform can be spent on education, infrastructure, the environment and other areas that we know give a proven return on their investment.

WORKERS DESERVE A LIVING WAGE

In March, I was joined by Rep. Joanna McClinton to spend time working in the Capitol cafeteria to highlight the need for all Pennsylvanians to be paid a sustainable, living wage. Though the Capitol cafeteria does pay a living wage to its workers, many restaurants in the service industry don't. We wanted to highlight that the work is hard and tiring and anyone who works a full-time job deserves to be paid a living wage.

I haven't worked a service job since I was younger, but I was instantly reminded of the difficult conditions under which so many people work. It was hot, the cafeteria was busy and we were standing on our feet the entire time. This isn't an easy job and the current minimum wage in Pennsylvania, \$7.25, simply isn't enough. A family of three with a parent working a full-time job at minimum wage will still fall under the federal poverty level.

That's why I'm supporting legislation that would raise Pennsylvania's minimum wage to \$12 per hour and then incrementally increase each year until it reaches \$15 per hour. It would also tie the minimum wage to the consumer price index, meaning that as the price of goods and services increases, the minimum

wage would increase also. I'm hopeful that during this budget season we can have a serious discussion on increasing the minimum wage and help lift Pennsylvanians out of poverty and pay them the wage they deserve.



PENNSYLVANIA'S PROBATION AND PAROLE SYSTEM NEEDS DESPERATE REFORM

In early April, I held a news conference outside city hall in Philadelphia to outline bipartisan legislation to reform Pennsylvania's parole and probation system. In addition to both Democratic and Republican legislators, we were joined by REFORM Alliance CEO and CNN host Van Jones, REFORM co-chair and award-winning recording artist Meek Mill, and REFORM co-chair and co-owner of the Philadelphia 76ers Michael Rubin.

To put it simply, the probation and parole system in our state is broken. Of all 50 states, Pennsylvania has the second-highest percentage of citizens on probation and parole and the highest incarceration rate in not only our region, but nearly the entire western world. Does this mean Pennsylvanians are more likely to break the law? Absolutely not. Our probation and parole system is built in a way to make it far too easy to violate parole for minor, technical infractions and have a sentence extended. This must stop.

This session, I've teamed up with my partner in reform, Rep. Sheryl Delozier, a Republican from Cumberland County, to work on probation and parole reform legislation. Rep. Delozier and I successfully worked together to pass clean slate legislation last session, and I'm excited to be working with her again. It's also encouraging to have vocal advocates, such as Meek Mill, Van Jones and Michael Rubin, in our corner supporting the need for reform.

Our bill looks to remove the pitfalls that plague the parole and probation system and cause people who make nonviolent mistakes to be pulled back into the criminal justice system. The changes include preventing the court from sentencing a person to consecutive sentences of probation, preventing the court from extending probation or parole due solely to nonpayment of fines and costs, and creating a system of incentives that rewards good behavior.

Did you know?

- As of 2016, Pennsylvania has 112,000 people on probation or parole. Illinois, a similar state in geography and population, has under 30,000.
- One out of every 22 Philadelphians is under some form of probation or parole supervision.
- As of May 2018, 54 percent of people in Philadelphia's jails are incarcerated due to an accusation, but not conviction, of a probation/parole violation.

The bill would also remove testing positive for marijuana, as well as leaving the jurisdiction of the court without the intent to permanently avoid supervision as parole and probation violations. These commonsense changes are meant to bring Pennsylvania's parole and probation system into the modern age by acknowledging that currently the system is geared to return people to prison for minor violations, and that's unacceptable.

Pennsylvanians deserve the opportunity to right their life and pursue education, economic and housing opportunities, and this bipartisan legislation will help them succeed. I'll keep you updated on the progress of the bill as it moves through the General Assembly.

The current system is like quicksand – the harder you try to get out, the more you get pulled back in.





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DON'T MISS THE 2019 SOUL SCHOOL SUMMER STREET FESTIVAL

This summer's can't-miss event will be in our district on August 10, 2019 in the 1900 block of Washington Avenue. Don't miss out on helpful information, food, games, and of course, entertainment, including:

Doug E Fresh • Slick Rick • Brand Nubian • DAS EFX • Tony Terry • Jean Carne • And more!