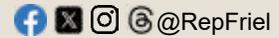




State Representative  
**Paul Friel**  
 26th Legislative District

**CAPITOL OFFICE:**  
 123A East Wing • P.O. Box 202026  
 Harrisburg, PA 17120-2026  
 (717) 772-1411 • Fax: (717) 780-6021

**DISTRICT OFFICE:**  
 68 Glocker Way • Pottstown, PA 19465  
 (610) 427-8782 • Toll-Free: (833) 821-1766  
 www.RepFriel.com • RepFriel@pahouse.net



**FALL 2023**

## DEAR NEIGHBOR,

I'm your State Representative, Paul Friel – welcome to my Fall 2023 Newsletter!

When I was sworn in to represent the 26th Legislative District, I promised to not only protect the state Constitution, but fight for policy change to benefit every Pennsylvanian. Since the start of this session in January, the PA House has passed many important bills (more on those later in this newsletter), and I have spent lots of time with constituents to learn more about the problems they face. It has been a rewarding, eye-opening experience so far, and I look forward to continuing fighting for you --both in Harrisburg and here at home.

In this newsletter you'll find those legislative updates, as well as a recap of events I have attended and hosted over the last year, and information on how I can serve you.

I'd love to hear from you at any time. You may contact me at repfriel@pahouse.net or 610-427-8782.

In addition, I want to ensure my office's state-related services are easily accessible to all constituents.

My district office hours are 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. We're located in Pottstown at 68 Glocker Way, in the Suburbia Shopping Center.

I also encourage you to stop in any of these locations during our Mobile Office hours for help:

- **Spring City Library:** every first Monday from 10 a.m. – Noon
- **Phoenixville Area Senior Center:** every second Monday from 10 a.m. – Noon
- **Phoenixville Recreation Center:** every Tuesday from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.
- **Historic Elverson Train Station:** every Thursday from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

In service,



## Grant Funding for Local Projects

I was happy to help bring this funding back home and will continue to fight for grant money to make communities in the 26th Legislative District even stronger. So far this year, our district has been awarded nearly \$2 million in state grants. These investments in our community are a benefit to all! Recipients in our district are...

### *Phoenixville Borough:*

- **\$600,000** for roadway construction at the intersection of Bridge and Starr streets.
- **\$750,000** for the construction of a recreational gathering area located in Phoenixville near the French Creek Trail.

### *East Coventry Township:*

- **\$545,327** for improvements to Tow Path Park.
- **\$58,305** to Ridge Fire Co. to purchase a Utility Terrain Vehicle and trailer.

### *East Pikeland Township:*

- **\$767,600** to develop the Hidden River Park & Preserve.

### *Chester County:*

- **\$2,023,117** for regional workforce development through Project RECONNECT.

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

## 2023-24 State Budget

There's a good chance you caught wind of the issues that held up this year's state budget process, either from local news or my social media and email updates. But the state budget is now officially implemented – for the most part.

There's plenty I would change about H.B. 611, but I was happy to see most of the budget finalized so we could keep the wheels of government moving.

The budget process is not 100% complete, however, as the Senate still must sign off on several code bills associated with the budget, including funding for the Level-Up supplement for under-resourced school districts. The Senate also has yet to vote on the landmark bills we sent them in the spring and summer – including child and dependent care tax credits, teacher and police recruitment tax credits, and a minimum wage increase.



## Noteworthy Legislation

The PA House has been hard at work passing legislation to benefit all Pennsylvanians. While I don't have the room here to describe all the notable legislation we've been working on, here are some updates I feel are important to share.

### **Fixing Our Unconstitutional Public School System**

As we know, the Pennsylvania public school system has major funding inequities. The way commonwealth schools are funded is deeply flawed, inadequate, and unfair. Our caucus has been aware of this for decades, and finally received back-up from the Commonwealth Court with its February ruling that students in low-wealth districts are not afforded the opportunities they need to thrive. Despite very high local tax rates, the commonwealth's funding structure denies them a thorough and efficient education. The legislature, in partnership with the governor, has a clear mandate to address these disparities and ensure a quality public education for every student.

Our futures are all tied together, across the commonwealth. We know this. Let's do the right and the smart thing – let's fully and fairly fund every child's education.

---

### **The Property Tax Fairness Act: Addressing Disparities by Regionalizing School Tax Revenue from Commercial Properties**

I am preparing to introduce a bill that will help to address the funding disparities cited in the court ruling. One of the issues our current school tax system has is that districts with a larger residential tax base are disadvantaged compared to neighboring communities that happen to enjoy a large commercial tax base. This structural inequity unfairly burdens homeowners with higher local taxes, as school districts attempt to sustain educational opportunities for their students.

Large commercial property developments are often regional employers with a strong economic impact, and are funded with the assistance of county, state, and federal grant dollars or economic development loans. The Property Tax Fairness Act aims to regionally pool commercial property taxes and distribute those taxes based on the student population of each school district in the region.

This legislation does not change the current tax rates, nor does it change the local taxing authority – it simply provides a more equitable distribution of the existing commercial tax base, helping to close the educational opportunity gap for our students.

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

## Legislation Introduced in Session 2023-24

HB78

### Medical Debt Relief

Would direct the Dept. of Health to enter a contract with an organization that purchases medical debt from commercial debt collectors and health care entities, and use state money to relieve a large amount of Pennsylvanians' medical debt cheaply.

HB106

### Patient Safety Act

Would establish safe patient limits (varied by hospital unit) under the direct care of an individual nurse in PA hospitals. The limits vary according to the type of care given in various hospital units.

HB300

### The Fairness Act

Would amend the state Human Relations Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, disability, and age, to extend this protection to LGBTQ+ Pennsylvanians.

HB338

### Reporting Lost/Stolen Firearms

Would require firearm owners to report lost or stolen firearms within 72 hours of discovery.

HB484

### Gift Restrictions for Public Officers & Employees

Would amend Title 65 (Public Officers) to expand restrictions on gifts to public officers, public employees and candidates for public office.

## Commonsense Charter School Reform

I voted in favor of legislation passed by the House in July to reform how Pennsylvania funds cyber charter schools. While serving as president of the Owen J. Roberts School Board I witnessed increase after increase, year after year to our property taxes – the result of cyber charter schools taking advantage of flawed legislation from 20 years ago to siphon taxpayer dollars away from traditional public schools and into their own coffers.

### Cyber Charter Reform =

Improved Transparency & Accountability

This inequity is made even worse by the fact that cyber charter schools remain unaccountable to the public, and their leaders unelected. I believe we can reform the cyber charter system in a way that improves accountability, transparency, and outcomes, while also preserving parent choice.

Pennsylvania is home to  
**1.1 million small businesses**

 **2.6 million**  
small business employees in PA

 **46.2%**  
of all Pennsylvania employees

### Small Business Ownership

**39.5%** Women-Owned    **16.6%** Minority-Owned    **6.1%** Veteran-Owned    **4.5%** Hispanic-Owned

**Pennsylvania**  
WORK SMART. LIVE HAPPY. 

## The Freedom to Read Act: Protecting Students' First Amendment Rights

In June I introduced the Freedom to Read Act (H.B. 1506). This legislation aims to make sure our school libraries offer the widest possible range of age appropriate, educationally relevant resources while also honoring parents' rights to determine what their children are allowed to read. The bill clarifies the constitutionally allowable reasons books may or may not be removed from school libraries and provides a clear appeals process for students or parents who believe a book was inappropriately removed or kept as the result of a book challenge.

## Food Processing Residue Legislation: Safeguarding Our Local Natural Resources

I've been working with the Pennsylvania departments of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, as well as local and industry stakeholders, to navigate an issue of local relevance: food processing residue being used on local farmlands. On one hand, it seems resourceful to use food waste as fertilizer; on the other hand, there has been a good deal of legitimate concern about safety issues. This practice clearly needs to be done in a way that protects our land and local water supply. We are working with all relevant parties to achieve the necessary clarity, guidance, and enforcement so that we can know we are using our natural resources wisely and that our community is protected.

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

HB714

## Background Checks for Firearms

Would subject all firearm sales to a background check, except for direct transfers between family members.

HB976

## Open Primaries

Would allow all voters to participate in primary elections regardless of party registration.

HB1018

## Extreme Risk Protection Orders

Would allow law enforcement to prohibit (temporarily) people who are at risk for suicide or causing death or other bodily injury to others from possessing firearms.

HB1100

## Expanding the PTRR Program

Updates income limits for the program for the first time in 16 years, increasing it to \$45,000 for both owners and renters, and raises the maximum rebate amount from \$650 to \$1000.

HB 1216

## Municipal Grant Assistance Program

Would establish a program to help municipalities obtain grant writing services and to develop a training program to instruct municipal employees/officials how to find and apply for grants.

HB1311

## Level Up for Equitable School Funding

Would increase the program's funding to \$400 million for FY 2023-2024, to further reduce inequity in education and ensure all students have the opportunities to succeed, regardless of ZIP code.

## Updating PA's discrimination law

I co-sponsored the Fairness Act, which would amend the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity – just as it already does based on race, religion, disability, and age. The bill passed the House, but still needs to be voted on by the Senate. ALL people deserve fair treatment in education, housing, and public accommodations. It's long past time.

HB1422

## Modernizing Charter School Law

Would finally set accountability measures for cyber charter schools, such as reporting student body attendance to the state, and create a fairer funding structure, including a uniform statewide tuition rate.

HB1445

## Increasing PA Families' Access to Nutritious Foods

Would require the state Dept. of Human Services to conduct a study and issue a report regarding how to improve its outreach and application processes for the SNAP program.

HB1629

## Protecting Children from Accidental Firearm Injuries and Death

Would require gun owners to properly store firearms during instances when they have minors (under the age of 18) within any premises under their control.

## PRIME SPONSOR HB1745 TAP 529 Tax Credit

I introduced this bill to create a credit for employer contributions to 529 tuition savings accounts. Any employer that contributes to an account owned by an employee under the Tuition Account Program would be able to claim a tax credit against the employer's state tax liability.

HB1448

## Conflict Resolution in Schools

Would require public schools to provide age-appropriate instruction on conflict resolution to all students beginning in the 2024-25 school year, with topics including managing emotions and effective communication.

HB1394

## Crown Act

Would amend the state Human Relations Act to expand the definition of "race" to include traits associated with race, including hair texture and protective hairstyles such as locs, braids, afros and extensions.



# EVENTS RECAP

I've had the pleasure of hosting and attending numerous events in the past several months. Take a look!



I had the privilege to honor these local heroes at Liberty Steam Fire Co. and Royersford Fire Co.



Our "walking hearing" in Pheonixville was such an informative and engaging event.



We had a wonderful time at Reservoir Park for Earth Day -- it was a great turnout!



Thank you to the Western Chester County Chamber of Commerce for hosting a Legislative Roundtable with our local elected officials!



I'll always remember the joy and camaraderie at the Grand Opening of my district office. I was honored to see the faces of so many friends and neighbors, new and old!

It was privilege to visit Beaver Farm. I'm committed to working toward a better quality of living for our neighbors with these disabilities.



I appreciate all who came out to our grant writing workshop in March -- it was very well attended and earned rave reviews!



I was so impressed by the mosaic murals created by these Twin Valley School District students! The murals depict natural and historical landmarks from across the region.



In April I had an excellent discussion with the young women from The Fund for Women and Girls. We talked about a range of issues, including reproductive rights and the importance of personal autonomy and consent.



I had a lovely time visiting Warwick Child Care Center in May!



I spent quality time at the Spring City Public Library during our Mobile Office hours.



My first document shredding event was a wonderful opportunity to connect with and serve the community. At our first document shredding event, we shredded over 6,820 pounds of paper, working to prevent identity theft.



In October we held a Senior Fair -- it was a great opportunity to connect community members with organizations that can serve them.



# Paul Friel

68 Glocker Way  
Pottstown, PA 19465

lpo.ks.1123

## St. Peter's Road Announcement



*We recently held a press conference with PennDOT Secretary Mike Carroll and Sen. Katie Muth to announce the upcoming rebuild of St. Peter's Road. If you travel this road, you know the portion just south of St. Peter's Village is collapsing into the ravine and down to one lane. Fixing it is necessary for the economic well-being of the businesses there and it's critical in preserving the character of the community. The project will take several years and approximately \$5.5 million to design, engineer, and build, but it is now in motion and that is worth celebrating!*



## Visit My District Office

My team and I are excited to serve you at our district office, located at 68 Glocker Way, Pottstown, PA 19465. We are open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Stop in, say hello, and find out how we can help cut through the red tape for you!

State Representative Paul Friel

### District Office Services

*I'm ready to work for you!*

- Property Tax/Rent Rebate
- PennDOT Services
- Help with Unemployment Compensation Issues
- SEPTA Senior Key Cards
- LIHEAP

*I'm ready to make state government work harder for you!*

RepFriel@PAHouse.net | 68 Glocker Way, Pottstown, PA 19465  
 (610) 427-8762 | @RepFriel  
 RepFriel.com

In addition to the services listed above, other popular requests we help fulfill include birth/death certificate copies, disability placard applications, issues with state roads, PA income tax problems, and more.

## Report Potholes!

We're working with PennDOT to make sure the state roads in our community get the repairs they need. If you see a pothole that needs to be filled, you have two options for reporting it: 1) Through the form on my website: [www.RepFriel.com](http://www.RepFriel.com); 2) Directly to PennDOT at [www.customer.care.pennDOT.gov](http://www.customer.care.pennDOT.gov).