



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**KERRY BENNINGHOFF**  
 171<sup>ST</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



 [KerryBenninghoff.com](http://KerryBenninghoff.com)

SUMMER 2024

## WE HAVE A STATE BUDGET, BUT...



We have a budget in place for the 2024-25 fiscal year, but it is a spending plan I just couldn't support when it was time to vote. The plan in place spends over \$3 billion more than last year at a time when Pennsylvanians are dealing with higher prices for energy, gasoline at the pump, and basic needs like food and medication.

This is not to say I oppose every item in this budget. We will be making a historic investment in all levels of Pennsylvania's education system, starting with a \$1.3 billion increase in PreK-12 and increases for community colleges, Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) schools and PHEAA grants. Significant reforms to our higher education system will better prepare students for the workforce of today and tomorrow. We need to make Pennsylvania more attractive to out-of-state businesses by having a well-trained and educated workforce.

That said, this budget still spends \$3.3 billion more than anticipated revenues to be received within the new fiscal year, adding to the structural deficit the Commonwealth already faces. When he took office, the governor inherited an \$8.1 billion General Fund surplus. Passage of the 2024-25 budget will require spending this down to \$3.5 billion. The focus of this budget is on requiring more government spending today without regard for the future. Frankly, I proposed giving Pennsylvania taxpayers a "refund" of several hundred dollars, depending on how much of the surplus (extra taxes paid) we had in the end. Keep in mind, while I was still our majority leader at the end of 2022, we had a healthy \$5 billion Rainy Day Fund, in addition to the billions of surplus money in the state checkbook. Each year, we are required to put a percentage of any surplus into the Rainy Day fund – the rest really should go back to you, the taxpayers.

## STATE-OWNED UNIVERSITIES FREEZE TUITION

As part of this year's budget negotiations, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) is freezing tuition rates for in-state undergraduate students for the 2024-25 academic year.

The decision came after the Legislature approved a \$35.1 million, or 6%, increase in state funding for the universities as part of the 2024-25 state budget.

We were successful at keeping costs down as this is the seventh consecutive year the tuition rate will remain the same at all 10 universities. According to PASSHE, the repeated freezes save students nearly 25% in tuition costs compared to the price if tuition had risen at the inflation rate for the last six years.



## WELCOME TO HARRISBURG!

It's hard to beat time spent with some of our future leaders, as I did on this day in May with students from the Marion Walker Elementary School in the Bellefonte Area School District.



# LICENSE PLATE Replacement EVENT

**THURSDAY  
SEPT. 26**

4:30 P.M. to 7 P.M.

**Brown Township Building**  
22 Brown Township Drive, Reedsville

**SATURDAY  
OCT. 12**

8:30 A.M. to 11 A.M.

**Centre Hall  
Elementary School**  
211 N. Hoffer Ave.,  
Centre Hall



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## DOES YOUR LICENSE PLATE NEED TO BE REPLACED?

A license plate is deemed illegible when one or more numbers or letters cannot be recognized from 50 feet or if the registration plate shows any blistering, peeling, discoloration or loss of reflectivity. My staff and I are hosting two opportunities to have those plates replaced.

Copies of forms MV-44 and MV-46 will be available for plate holders to fill out, and we'll take care of getting them to PennDOT for submission.

There is no fee for this service. Your replacement will arrive in a timely manner.

(Detachable)



## AMERICANA AT ITS BEST!

In July, I attended the Lewistown Community Band's summer concert series stop at McVeytown Presbyterian Church to honor the late Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock, who is memorialized on a boulder with a plaque that turns 100 years old this year.

I presented a House citation to lifelong resident and town historian Carrol "Sis" Norton, recognizing Dr. Rothrock, who is considered the "Father of Pennsylvania Forestry." It was a beautiful evening and occasion to honor a man after whom the Rothrock State Forest in Huntingdon County is named.



## THEY TOLD ME TO TAKE A HIKE, SO...

I stretched my legs (they didn't get any longer) along Kish Creek in Mifflin County. My goal was to check out some significant stream bank and sediment improvement projects initiated by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and Mifflin County Conservation District to enhance water flow, as well as man-made and natural stream bank stabilization logs to encourage natural water cleaning plant vegetation. The PFBC's actions will improve water quality and the fish population, as well as the existence of other important aquatic life and microorganisms.

Similar projects are happening in Centre County.



# NEWS FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK



**Rep. Kerry Benninghoff**  
House Transportation Committee Chairman

Pennsylvania has approximately 44,000 miles of roads and 24,000 bridge structures to be maintained. They are on a regular sand blasting, painting and replacement schedule. We try to do one of these procedures on at least 300 structures a year, barring disasters like the I-95 bridge fire and weather events.

I have a great working relationship with my fellow chairman, Rep. Ed Neilson from Philadelphia, and the committee has been very productive this session. The committee reported out 61 bills, 17 of which have been signed into law. Here are the ones I consider most noteworthy:

- **House Bill 797/Act 37 of 2024** requires PennDOT to plant native vegetation along state highways.
- **House Bill 1284/Act 38 of 2023** makes the Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement Program permanent. Notable changes to the program:
  - First warning sign for active camera enforcement must be the largest size permitted by federal regulations and placed at a maximum feasible distance to warn motorists.
  - The first warning sign must be followed by a work zone speed limit sign.
  - Adds a new appealable defense for a violation. A vehicle owner who receives a violation may claim they were not driving the vehicle at the time of the violation and submit evidence.
- **House Bill 2182/Act 78 of 2024** permits PennDOT and PA Turnpike highway maintenance vehicles to be equipped with flashing green lights, in addition to their current yellow lights.
- **House Bill 2301/Act 60 of 2024** increases the annual income threshold for a retired person's vehicle registration rate from \$19,200 to \$29,906. The law also requires the maximum total annual income amount to be adjusted annually based on the prior year's Consumer Price Index.
  - Note - this takes effect in December.
  - Exempts a vehicle from titling and registration fees if the vehicle is registered to an individual who is:
    - A veteran who lost a limb, eye, or became partially paralyzed while serving in the armed forces.
    - A veteran who was captured by enemy forces in any armed conflict where campaign medals are authorized.
    - A veteran who has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor or Purple Heart.

- **Senate Bill 37/Act 18 of 2024** prohibits the use of interactive mobile devices (cell phones) while driving a motor vehicle. A cell phone may be used hands-free while driving. A violation is a \$50 fine, plus surcharges.
  - The bill is not effective until June 2025, at which time only warnings may be issued for the first year.
- **Senate Bill 298/Act 61 of 2024** allows a vehicle equipped with doors (such as Jeeps and Broncos) that allow for removal and reinstallation to be operated on roadways with the doors removed, tube doors, half doors or net doors.
- **Senate Bill 656/Act 85 of 2024** imposes an annual electric vehicle road user charge for electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles. Fees are as follows:
  - For **EVs**:
    - \$200 upon initial registration in 2025 or upon renewal of registration that expires in 2025.
    - \$250 upon initial registration in 2026 or upon renewal of registration that expires in 2026.
    - On Jan. 1, 2027, and each Jan. 1 thereafter, the user charge shall be fixed annually based on the prior year charge as adjusted to reflect the change in the Consumer Price Index.
  - For **plug-in hybrids**:
    - The road user charge will be set at 25% of the road user charge for an electric vehicle in the calendar year.
- **Senate Bill 851/Act 19 of 2023** reforms the automated school bus stop arm camera enforcement program as follows:
  - Use of the automated enforcement system under this program is for the purpose of imposing a financial penalty only (currently a civil penalty or a criminal penalty).
  - A hearing officer at PennDOT presides over appeals.
  - Appeals before a hearing officer may occur virtually or in person.
  - Prohibits a contract between a school and a system administrator from requiring a minimum or maximum number of violations to be issued.
  - Allows revenue in the School Bus Safety Grant Program to be used as grants to cover costs associated with assisting new drivers with obtaining CDL and a school bus endorsement.
- **Senate Bill 916/Act 51 of 2024** allows registered farm vehicles to transport agricultural products to a place of residence. Currently, they are limited to travelling to and from farms and places of business.
- Sometimes change can be effected without the need for a bill becoming law. For example, I introduced House Bill 1243, which requires PennDOT to accept additional documents to verify a person's Social Security number when applying for a REAL ID. In addition to a Social Security card, PennDOT is required to accept a W-2 form, Social Security 1099 form or a pay stub with a Social Security number.

PennDOT proactively implemented the changes in my bill and now accepts additional documents, instead of only a Social Security card.

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## IMAGINE IF YOU WILL...

Imagine a church with no electricity, water, air conditioning or musical instruments that can still make beautiful, majestic music. Such is the case in Potter Township, Centre County, with historic Egg Hill Church, which held its annual service on a Sunday night in June (regular services were last held in 1927).

The church was built in 1860, and I had the privilege of singing that June evening with the Penns Valley men's choir and the Weaver family.

Amidst the mega worship centers which seem to be springing up everywhere, Egg Hill is a simple country church, made of pine and measuring 35' x 42'. But don't let its size fool you. What a joy it was to worship with the congregation.



## A GEM IN OUR MIDST

I recently presented a House citation to Progress Grange Chapter No. 96 President Denny McCloskey to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the PA State Grange. Our state's Grange motto, "In essentials, unity; In non-essentials, liberty; In all things, charity," is supported by 246 chapters statewide, including the following in Centre and Mifflin counties: Baileyville, Bald Eagle, Halfmoon, Howard, Logan, Marion, Penns Valley, Port Matilda, Union, Valley, Victor and Walker.

The Progress Grange Hall, which can be found on South Pennsylvania Avenue in Centre Hall, features a lot of beautiful architecture and specifically designed craftsmanship. The building includes a hand-built stair railing and seven-panel raised doors (representing the number of degrees that govern the Grange organization).

Progress Grange hosted the first few years of what was known as the Farmers Picnic and what we presently know as the Centre County Grange Encampment and Fair. At this year's 150<sup>th</sup> fair, founder Leonard Rhone (far right, wearing a black hat and coat) "made an appearance" and discussed the history of this great event.

