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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** All Republican House Members

**From:** Representative Don Snyder  
House Majority Whip

**Re:** Legislative Accomplishments - 1999-2000 Session (to date)

**Date:** July 2, 1999

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In order to assist you in communicating our legislative accomplishments to your constituents throughout the summer months, I have compiled the attached listing of "highlights" from the 1999-2000 session to date. **This is not a complete listing of all the bills we have approved so far this session.**

As in the past, the bills are arranged in categories for easy reference. The booklet was updated on July 1 to reflect the legislation most recently signed by Governor Ridge.

I hope this information will be useful in your preparation of summer mailings and public relations. **If you would like to make changes to any of the information in the booklet, please contact my office and we will be happy to GroupWise the document to you.**



## 1999 Legislative Accomplishments

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
House of Representatives



### *Tax Reductions and Economic Development*

Throughout the 1999 spring session, the General Assembly took strident measures to reduce tax burdens on working families and business taxpayers. Although in the past four years the General Assembly cut taxes by more than \$2.6 billion (cumulative) and created more than 250,000 new jobs, the 1999 session produced the largest tax reduction package in modern Pennsylvania history with nearly \$400 million in tax cuts. Signed into law on May 12, 1999, this omnibus tax package contained an assortment of tax breaks, including cuts in the state personal income tax (which exempts families making \$26,000 or less from paying state income tax), property taxes, corporate taxes, natural gas taxes, capital stock and franchise taxes. This bill, which capitalizes on our nation's current economic prosperity, is expected to stimulate business growth throughout the Commonwealth while allowing PA families a chance to save for the future.

Another bill considered and passed by the House during the 1999 session was Senate Bill 390, the Local Tax Enabling Act. Targeting the amusement tax rate as a hindrance to tourism for the Commonwealth, this act lowers the current maximum amusement tax rate from ten to four percent for municipalities. These reductions would be eased in over the course of four years, beginning in 2001.

In addition to this tax reduction legislation, several programs addressing Pennsylvania's economic development were signed into law as a part of the 1999-2000 General Fund Budget. These economic initiatives, coupled with the \$400 million in tax reductions, are projected not only to aid in the development of individual businesses, but will play an integral role in stimulating the Commonwealth's overall economic growth. Budget highlights included:

- \$25 million provided to the Small Business First Program through both an appropriation and securitization of the fund. This securitization will ensure that the strong demand for financing Pennsylvania's job creating small businesses will be fully met in the next fiscal year.
- \$29 million in continued funding for the Customized Job Training Program for business led training consortia, guaranteed training, and traditional projects.
- \$20 million in continued funding for the Job Creation Tax Credit Program.
- \$35 million in continued funding for the Opportunity Grant Program.
- \$1.5 million will be available to the newly established Keystone Opportunity Zones to accommodate support grants for selected Zones.

- An additional \$31 million distributed to workforce development programs, which would strengthen the Commonwealth's job climate.
- \$69 million for programs to develop infrastructure and provide incentive grants to businesses wishing to expand or relocate in the Commonwealth.
- \$1.5 million increase in funding for the expansion of PA's international trade offices.

**Agriculture.** The agricultural industry also received the full attention of the General Assembly during the 1999 session. Under the budget, agriculture-related projects received over \$50 million in funding, with nearly \$43 million earmarked to maintain and preserve farmland in the Commonwealth. In addition, the House passed the Pennsylvania Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact (SB 365), which allows the Commonwealth to join a cooperative venture with our neighboring dairy-producing states. Signed into law on June 25 (Act 26), this measure will give dairy farmers in the Commonwealth a collective say in milk pricing.

An important agricultural provision passed by the House this session was contained in Senate Bill 390, which will provide tax relief for farmers. Under this legislation, farmers could exclude any interest that they gain (i.e. from their assets, from a sale of livestock, etc.) from their net profits tax form.

During the past four years, Pennsylvania has climbed from 47<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> in job growth, was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation in new job creation, and received a top ten ranking in an economic development report card from *Business Week's Magazine*. A recent article in *Site Selection Magazine* ranked the Governor's Action Team and Team Pennsylvania in the top ten on the national list of state government development programs.



### **Educating our Youth**

The General Assembly believes that education is Pennsylvania's key to success. Not only do our children benefit from a good educational system, but the Commonwealth as a whole is strengthened structurally, economically, and culturally. Therefore, education was one of the key issues discussed during the 1999 spring session.

In addition to providing more than \$5 billion in support for public schools, the General Assembly began last year to lay the groundwork for revitalizing Pennsylvania's educational system. During the 1999 session, representatives considered legislation which would give every child in every community and neighborhood an opportunity to succeed.

The General Budget for 1999-2000 allocated well over \$5.8 billion to fund a variety of projects and initiatives, such as:

- \$3.68 billion for the Basic Education Subsidy program, which distributes funds to school districts in Pennsylvania in order to help equalize the amount of money spent per student across the state.
- \$107.1 million increase in Basic Education Funding.
- \$41.9 million increase, or 6.2 percent, for Special Education Funding.

- \$35 million to begin the new "Read to Succeed" initiative that will ensure that Pennsylvania's school children learn to read by third grade.
- \$16.8 million, a 25 percent increase, in funding for the School Performance Incentive Program begun two years ago that rewards schools that significantly improve their academic achievement and effort.
- \$3.4 million in funding associated with Charter Schools to continue to provide communities with opportunities to create new, innovative alternatives to public education.
- \$1.6 million increase for Vocational Education.
- \$600,000 increase in support of adult literacy programs.
- \$34.2 million to extend for one year the "Link to Learn" initiative, which includes funding for local school districts to connect to the Pennsylvania Education Network and higher education grants focused on curriculum development for information science and technology programs.

Making higher education more affordable in Pennsylvania continued to be a concern of the General Assembly. House Bill 848, which was passed by the House on June 9, called for a raise in the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency's scholarship awards to \$3,000 per student. Act 13 of 1999 (SB 442) took these PHEAA grants one step further, by removing the \$3,000 statutory cap on the maximum state grant which can be awarded to a recipient and permitting the PHEAA Board of Directors to set the cap each year. In addition, Act 22 of 1999 (SB 900) was passed by the House in June, enabling the Department of Education to distribute \$17.2 million in scholarships for students studying science and technology. By emphasizing these fields, the General Assembly expects to generate a workforce that is primed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



### ***Protecting Pennsylvanians from Crime***

Currently, national crime figures reveal a downward trend in the rate of criminal activity. The General Assembly took several opportunities during the 1999-2000 session, however, to further ensure the demise of crime in the Commonwealth and protect our children and their teachers from violence in our schools. Several measures approved by the House this session included:

#### **School Violence**

- **State Grants for Safe and Secure Schools** - Due to recent outbreaks of school violence, the General Assembly has reaffirmed their commitment to protect teachers and students from intimidation and violence. In order to make our schools a safe haven, House Bill 456, which provides funding for schools for the development of programs to enhance school safety, was recently approved by the Governor (Act 36 of 1999).

- **School Violence Prevention Plans** - House Bill 172, which would require schools to develop “school violence prevention plans.” The focal point of each school’s strategy would be the “comprehensive school crisis plan” that would outline policies and procedures for handling critical situations.
- **Juvenile Gun Possession** - In the wake of the Columbine High School incident, House Bill 1417 creates stiffer penalties for juveniles bringing firearms or explosives to school. This legislation calls for any student, age 15 or older, to be tried in adult court if they are charged with bringing a handgun onto school property or have a prior conviction for a violent offense.
- **Immunity for School Personnel** - House Bill 1416 would grant civil immunity to school personnel who provide emergency medical care to students. This bill extends what is known as “good Samaritan immunity” to teachers and school employees.

### **Community Crime Prevention**

- **Escape from Detention** (HB 77) - This bill enacts tougher measures against persons who escape from detention centers, prisons, etc. The crime of escape from detention is currently rated an felony of the third degree, which levies a jail sentence up to seven years. This legislation would make escape a felony of the second degree, a more serious offense, and would provide a punishment of up to ten years in prison.
- **Prohibition of Methadone Facilities** (HB 1335) - Signed into law in June, this bill, known as Act 10, holds that methadone clinics cannot operate within 100 feet of a school. Since methadone is administered daily to help heroin abusers withdraw from their addiction, concerned parents and legislators have advocated that these clinics be situated outside school zones.
- **Heroin Trafficking** (HB 28) - This bill cuts in half the amount of heroin sold needed to trigger mandatory minimum sentences and fines. Under this legislation, one to five grams of heroin will bring a mandatory minimum sentence of two years, with a \$5,000 fine.
- **False Identification** (HB 308) - Current PA law states it is illegal to own and present a false ID to a public servant of the Commonwealth. In order to close any loopholes in this definition, this law *specifies* that the presentation of false ID to *law enforcement officers* is a misdemeanor of the second degree. The maximum penalty for a violation of this kind is a two year sentence, with a \$5,000 fine.
- **Criminal Mischief** (HB 362) - This legislation makes it a felony when criminal mischief results in more than \$5,000 in losses or when telephone, electric, gas, water or other utility services are interrupted or impaired.

- **Citizens Advisory Committee** (HB 403) - Deciding that the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency needed more input from citizens, House legislators wished to create a ten-member Citizens Advisory Committee to discuss the Commonwealth's various crime issues. This Advisory Committee, which should empower the local crime prevention process, will be in charge of developing statewide crime prevention strategies.
- **Stricter Penalties for Prostitution** (HB 609) - Under this legislation, persons arrested for prostitution will receive stricter sentences as the number of their offenses increases. For first and second offenders, the penalty will be a misdemeanor of the third degree, punishable up to one year in jail and a \$2,500 fine. Third-time offenders can receive up to two years and a \$5,000 fine, while fourth-time and beyond offenders can expect a maximum of five years in prison with a \$10,000 fine.
- **Harassment and Stalking** (HB 132) - Over the past decade, the crimes of harassment and stalking have become an increasingly prevalent problem. Seeking to aid the victim as much as possible, this legislation would require an expedited preliminary hearing and higher bail requirements for people charged with stalking or harassment. It also requires defendants who plead guilty or no contest to stalking to undergo a mental health and drug and alcohol evaluation.
- **Drug Trafficking Near Schools** (HB 284) - Designed to support the General Assembly's attempts to make schools "drug-free zones", this legislation increases the mandatory jail sentence penalty from one year to three years for people found guilty of selling drugs within 1,000 feet of schools, playgrounds or community recreation centers.

In addition to these pieces of crime-related legislation, the General Assembly also chose to tackle the Commonwealth's problems in the courts' administration and procedures. In June of 1999, the Governor officially signed Senate Bill 3 (Act 12), the "Unified Judicial System" Act, which would assimilate certain county court administrators and officers into the state personnel system. By assuming fiscal responsibility for key county court personnel, the Commonwealth will take an important initial step toward a total "unification" of the courts, which will be completed in incremental phases beyond the year 2000. Through this legislation, the General Assembly will foster a better working relationship between the local and state-level court systems.



### ***Environmental Reforms***

Although considerable environmental regulations have been enacted throughout Governor Tom Ridge's tenure, the General Assembly continued to make environmental legislation a priority in 1999. Several programs, ranging from land use regulation to watershed protection, were allocated millions of funds signed with the passage of the 1999-2000 General Budget. Some of these provisions were:

- \$38.7 million from the Environmental Stewardship Fund to expand Commonwealth effort for programs such as acid mine drainage abatement, nonpoint source pollution reduction, new sewer and water infrastructure, repair and rehabilitate infrastructure in State Parks and Forests, and support for community conservation efforts.
- \$2 million to coordinate and cooperate with local governments to identify sound land use and community planning practices.
- \$43 million for additional purchase of easements on agricultural land to ensure its continued use for agricultural purposes.



### **Healthy Kids, Families and Seniors**

Providing Pennsylvanians with access to quality health care and human services has been a priority on the House's agenda throughout the 1999-2000 session. With the passage of the 1999-2000 General Budget, several health and public welfare programs received extensive funding support:

- **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** - Enacted last session, the Governor's CHIP initiative was provided with a total of \$32.6 million in funds for FY 1999. This funding is expected to increase enrollment in this program to 134,000 children in 1999-2000, which will bring Pennsylvania closer to recognizing the health care needs of all children in the Commonwealth.
- **Helping People Help Themselves** - Due to an additional \$41 million in federal funding, several public welfare programs in the Commonwealth received an added boost for the next fiscal year. Programs that benefited included job readiness training for 16,000 welfare recipients, subsidized child care services for low-income working families, and fatherhood initiatives (which include parenting and life skills training, job search and pre-employment skills development and supervised visitations).
- **Medical Assistance** - For FY 1999-2000, the General Assembly has earmarked \$3 billion in state funds to maintain comprehensive medical coverage for nearly 1.5 million children, pregnant women, older Pennsylvanians and people with disabilities meeting current income eligibility guidelines (*PA State Budget*). Funds have also been generated to aid managed care organizations, expand pharmaceutical development, and to support additional expanded medical services for women.
- **Human Services** - Several programs under human services received tremendous increases in funding for the next fiscal year. The County Child Welfare needs-based program, for example, received a \$40.4 million increase in funding. A \$16.4 million increase was given to expand county child protective services, while \$18.4 million was additionally contributed to a program that would expedite procedures for permanently locating children in either foster or institutional care. Funds were also increased for rape crisis services and adoption procedures.

- **Helping Pennsylvanians with Disabilities** - For FY 1999-2000, the General Assembly elected to spend over \$83 million in state funding to aid disability programs ranging from mental retardation services to an increase for blind and paralyzed military veterans pensions. \$36 million of this total will go to support vocational rehabilitation services.
- **Older Pennsylvanians** - As home to the second fastest "graying" population in the nation, Pennsylvania recognizes the need to support its senior citizens. For FY 1999-2000, \$145.2 million from the General Fund and the Lottery Fund will go to provide for free senior transportation programs, \$2 million will go to finance improvements for community senior centers, and \$1.8 million will expand the availability of Medical Assistance home and community-based alternatives to nursing home care. In addition, seniors can expect an increase of \$5.4 million for the PENNCARE Attendant Care Program, which provides for the development, operation and purchase of community care services, model projects, protective and counseling services for senior citizens. Finally, the Property Tax and Rent Assistance for Older Pennsylvanians program will expand eligibility by not counting 50% of Social Security income in determining eligibility. This will result in an estimated \$96.8 million increase in payments in July 2000 for the tax year 1999.

Additional legislation considered by the House during the 1999 session included:

- **Visits with High Risk Children** (HB 518) - This legislation requires county child protection agencies to conduct weekly checks on children who are identified by the courts to be at a high-risk for abuse or neglect. By mandating these meetings, child services can better monitor the welfare of the child and their surroundings.
- **HMO Report Cards** (HB 174) - Under this act, the Health Care Cost Containment Council would be directed to develop HMO Report Cards, which would provide consumers, employers and health care providers with information about the numerous health maintenance organizations in PA. With this information, a comparative analysis of all HMOs in PA can be completed.
- **Senior Assistance** (HB 227) - This bill would permit the Department of Aging to obtain court permission to intervene in cases where an elderly person's granting of a power-of-attorney has been questioned, such as in abuse, exploitation and abandonment cases.
- **Shortening Long Term Care Waiting Lists** (HB 1099) - This act directs the Department of Aging and the Department of Public Welfare to develop a study and submit a proposed course of action to address the issue of waiting lists for persons in need of home and community-based long-term care services.





## ***Transportation Issues***

Committed to the preservation of our infrastructure, the House of Representatives directed over two billion in funding in the 1999-2000 General Budget for transportation projects. Highlights included:

- **State Highway and Bridge Maintenance/Construction** - \$1.219 billion, which includes \$173 million in Federal funds, was allocated for the maintenance of the Commonwealth's bridges and highways. \$1.266 billion, which includes \$727.8 million in Federal funds, was distributed for new construction and major repairs of highways and bridges.
- **Alternate Transit** - \$4.4 million in federal funds was allocated to improve access to jobs by creating and operating nontraditional mass transit routes and schedules.
- **Local Road Maintenance and Construction Payments** - \$270 million was directed to municipal governments for local road maintenance and construction.
- **Motor Vehicle License Plates** - Starting in September, 1999, PennDOT will distribute, at no additional cost, a new Pennsylvania license plate to all motor vehicle owners with older versions of the PA plate. \$10.1 million was appropriated for this project.
- **Teen Driver Reforms** - Related to transportation, the teen driving reform bill was officially signed into law by the Governor on June 25, 1999 (Act 23). Designed to significantly decrease the number of teen driving-related deaths in the Commonwealth, this law requires teens to undergo an extended period of supervised driving experience. Under this legislation, teens will have to wait six months before taking their driving test, and at the time of the test, parents or guardians must verify that the teen took at least fifty hours of driving instruction. In addition, this legislation contains an amendment which will designate an Interstate highway's left-hand lane as a passing lane only. By relegating slower drivers to the right line, this measure is expected to help cut down traffic problems and accidents.