

NJ THIRD DISTRICT

Newsletter

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DEPUTY SPEAKER
ADAM TALIAFERRO
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Third District Satellite Office at the Bridgeton Library

Takes place the first
Tuesday of the month,
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Sweeney Delivers Significant Tax Cuts, Improves Affordability



Legislation providing a series of tax cuts designed to create jobs, strengthen the economy, and provide tax savings for the working poor, veterans, retirees, and middle class families was passed by the Legislature on October 7 and was signed by Governor Christie on October 14.

“Thanks to this bill, taxes will now be lower for thousands of working and retired New Jerseyans, making it easier to make ends meet and put food on the table,” said Senate President Steve Sweeney.

As part of the tax cut package, one of the most

comprehensive and far-reaching in New Jersey history, the Earned Income Tax Credit, termed “one of the most effective anti-poverty policies in the country,” will be increased from 30 percent to 35 percent. Veterans will also gain a \$3,000 personal tax exemption, retirees will pay less in taxes on their retirement income, and the estate tax will be phased out over two years, eliminating a duplicative tax that can fall on middle class families.

“The Earned Income Tax Credit is such an important factor in helping our low-income workers and families who contribute so much to New Jersey,” said Assemblyman Adam Taliaferro. “By increasing the credit, we put more money where it can do the most good, back with our residents.”

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Passage of Open Space Bill Ensures Preservation Funding

The legislature recently made progress on ensuring a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2014 fulfills the intent of reliable funding for open space preservation.

Senate bill 2456 and Assembly bill 4017 were approved by the Legislature in June and signed into law by the Governor. The legislation provides a framework for spending a percentage of New Jersey’s corporate business tax on the preservation of open space and historic structures, protection of farmland and support of public parks.

“This measure was important to ensuring a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2014 dedicated the proper amount of funds to open space preservation,” said Senate President Sweeney. “This is a victory for generations of residents to come, who will all benefit from enjoying our parks and natural open spaces.”

The bill also ensures transparency, additional funds for the state’s Blue Acres program to buy

out flood-prone property and the guarantee that funds will not be spent on administrative costs, like salaries. The legislation helps ensure New Jersey maintains its open space, clean drinking water, and fertile farmland for all to enjoy and use.

“This law is not only important to promoting open space but will protect New Jersey’s historic sites and treasures,” said Deputy Speaker John Burzichelli. “In addition, the needed funds for the state’s Blue Acres program will be a lifeline to residents struggling to live in flood-prone areas.”

“We must protect New Jersey’s clean drinking water and our fertile farmland, and the transparency of these dedicated funds will ensure money is going where it is supposed to,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro. “As the Garden State, we have an obligation to make sure our farming communities are preserved and well protected.”

Legislature Continues Discussion of End of Life Options for the Terminally Ill



Death can be a very uncomfortable subject to discuss, especially when faced with our own mortality and end-of-life care issues. I introduced the “Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill Act” so that the discussion on end-of-life care could be brought forward.

Currently, statutes in New Jersey deny terminally ill individuals the choice on how they want to conclude their life and how they wish to spend their remaining days.

The scope of this legislation (A2451) is very narrow and precise. This measure includes strict guidelines included in order to protect the rights of terminally ill patients as well as their final wishes. It is important to note that this bill does not target chronic illness, disability, or any one of advanced age, nor does it allow a terminally ill patient to move through the process quickly.

There must be a verbal request from the terminally ill patient for a prescription, which is then followed by a second request in writing witnessed by two people. The doctor would make the patient aware that he or she could rescind the request

at any time. A second doctor must certify the original diagnosis and affirm that the patient can make the decision to move forward. Patients must self-administer the lethal medication, per their own decision.

The intent of this legislation places the choice of how a dying patient, under very specific circumstances, will conclude his or her life in one’s own hands. Furthermore, the Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill Act does not compel anyone in the process to go against any religious or moral beliefs, as it is solely the individual’s personal decision of what he or she believes is best. The legislation seeks to support the notion of free will and encourages a well thought-out decision. This is indeed an emotional, passionate, and faith-based issue, and certainly the conversation must continue.

John Burzichelli, Assembly Deputy Speaker

Sweeney Lays Plan to Improve College Affordability and Accessibility for Students



The College Affordability Commission, which was established by legislation sponsored by Senate President Sweeney, released its final report on September 27. The Commission held nine public meetings in several locations across the state, and heard testimony from dozens of invited speakers and received extensive public testimony.

Based on the findings and recommendations of the report, Senator Steve Sweeney and Senator Sandra Cunningham recently introduced nine bills with the goal of giving all students the opportunity to succeed, especially those who come to an institution of higher learning without many of the advantages enjoyed by their peers. Key parts of the plan include proposals to create Three-Year Degree programs, to extend Tuition Assistance Grants, and to expand the Equal Opportunity Fund.

“There is clear and undisputable evidence that a college degree makes a real and lasting difference in the lives of graduates, but affordability can be a formidable barrier, especially for students from middle class or low-income families, said Senator Sweeney. “For too many qualified students, rising costs put college out of reach.”

The proposals would expand on a number of programs already underway at institutions like Rowan University and Rowan College at Gloucester County, which serve as a statewide model for success. Under the current “3-Plus-1” degree programs, students complete three years at a county

college and one year at a four-year college or university. The estimated cost to students is about half of what commuters pay at four-year state institutions and one quarter of what commuters pay at private institutions.

The affordability plan also includes measures to support dual enrollment, to improve college financial literacy for high school students and their parents, expanding scholarships for top students, state income tax deductions for student loans and the extension of TAG grants to summer programs. It also includes measures to better facilitate the transfer of credits between schools, caps on credit requirements, strategies to encourage students to keep pace with credit requirements and ways to encourage “open resource textbooks” to make digital textbooks available.

Today’s students are taking on enormous levels of debt as the burden to finance college has shifted to students and their families. In 2004, total student loan debt was \$350 billion. It currently stands at a staggering \$1.2 trillion.

“Programs like those in use at Rowan and RCGC show us that affordable education is not only possible, but very achievable,” said Deputy Speaker Burzichelli. “We owe it to those who seek to better themselves and their communities through education to make sure they have the chance to do so.”

“We must take what we have learned through experience and through the efforts of the Commission and use that knowledge to make higher education in our state even more accessible,” added Assemblyman Taliaferro. “When students have the opportunity to succeed without taking on crushing debt, New Jersey succeeds with them.”

Legal Services Night Provided Opportunity for Free Legal Advice to Residents

The Third Legislative District hosted a “Legal Services Night” on September 22 at Penns Grove High School to provide an opportunity for residents to learn more about legal services in the area.

“We are proud to have hosted this event in collaboration with the New Jersey State Bar Association and our county bar associations in an effort to direct residents to resources and services,” said Senate President Sweeney. “This free event was a unique opportunity for residents to hear more from area attorneys on important legal questions and concerns.”

Legal Services Night was sponsored by the Third Legislative District, the New Jersey State Bar Association, the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey, the Salem County Bar Association, the Gloucester County Bar Association, and the Cumberland County Bar Association.

“This event recognized that many low-income individuals

and families often lack access to legal resources and advocacy that may have a profound impact in their lives,” added Deputy Speaker Burzichelli. “Legal Services Night enabled residents to learn more about topics that may affect them now or possibly in the future.”

Area attorneys were available to give free legal advice and address popular legal concerns. Residents had the opportunity to speak individually with an attorney on various topics including divorce, immigration matters, military and veterans affairs, livings wills, and tenant and landlord rights.

“There are numerous legal issues that people struggle with every day,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro. “Those in attendance have expressed that the night was beneficial and that the attorneys were outstanding in sharing their time and expertise.”

Taliaferro Visits Penns Grove High School to Discuss the Importance of Voting

On October 14, Assemblyman Taliaferro visited Penns Grove High School to speak with the Junior and Senior class about New Jersey’s legislative process and the importance of voting.

“Throughout my high school years and into college I was like many of you,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro. “Politics, government, and voting were the farthest things from my mind. I wanted to be a professional football player, but as a result of my injury my whole life changed and took a new direction.”

“Instead of relying on athletics, I had to turn to my education and realized just how important it is to study and to know what is going on in the world around us,” added Taliaferro. “I encourage you all to register yourselves to vote and remember

to use this important right. The act of voting is how you make your voice heard; the decisions your representatives and lawmakers make on your behalf can have an enormous impact on your life and you want to be a part of that process.”

The Assemblyman’s visit was a part of the “Back to School” initiative sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislators and the New Jersey State Legislature. The initiative is a national bipartisan effort to teach students about representative democracy. In addition, Assemblyman Taliaferro also made visits to Kingsway Regional High School and Pennsville Memorial High School.



In October, Assemblyman Taliaferro visited students and faculty at Penns Grove High School to discuss the importance of voting and civic engagement.

Constituent Corner: Energy Programs Offer Financial Relief in Paying Utilities



The Third District legislators recently discussed an important program that provides financial assistance to New Jersey residents who are behind in paying utility bills. The TRUE and PAGE programs, administered by the Affordable Housing Alliance, can provide up to \$1,500 in utility assistance.

The Temporary Relief of Utility Expense (TRUE) and Payment Assistance for Gas and Electric (PAGE) programs are annually funded by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities and provide grants to assist low to moderate income families with their energy bills. Eligibility is determined by gross annual income for the household with requirements that include holding an active account with a past due balance, with their service presently turned on, and residents must not currently receive LIHEAP or USF assistance.

“The TRUE and PAGE programs assist low to moderate income households who are experiencing a temporary financial hardship and who do not currently receive other types of assistance,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro. “I encourage qualifying residents to learn more about these helpful programs.”

The Third Legislative District is a qualified intake location for applications. Residents may contact the West Deptford office at 856-251-9801 or the Salem office at 856-339-0808. In addition, residents may also visit an upcoming mobile office for assistance.

Residents may visit the Third Legislative District’s website at www.njlegdistrict3.com for more information.

District Spotlight: Bancroft Lakeside Opens New Health and Wellness Center



In September, Assemblyman Taliaferro spoke at the Bancroft Lakeside Ribbon Cutting in Upper Pittsgrove.

Bancroft Lakeside recently celebrated the opening of its new Health and Wellness Center at a ribbon cutting cere-

mony at its facility in Upper Pittsgrove.

Bancroft is the largest nonprofit organization in New Jersey that assists individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities in living independent and fulfilling lives. Programs include special education, structured day programs, community living, and specialized residential programs. Bancroft is headquartered in Cherry Hill and has 16 locations throughout New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

“Bancroft has a long history of serving our region’s most vulnerable residents,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro. “Their support services are a critical lifeline to families and individuals struggling with a disability.”

The new wellness center at Bancroft Lakeside specializes in medical services for adults with autism and intellectual disabilities. The center was funded through a

grant by the Salem County Health and Wellness Foundation. It will provide a variety of healthcare specialists to serve residents of Bancroft Lakeside, making it easier for residents to seek treatment on site at the facility and avoid the cost and difficulty of care in an unfamiliar environment.

“I would like to thank Bancroft and the Salem County Health and Wellness Foundation for their commitment to serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities,” added Assemblyman Taliaferro. “These new medical services will be beneficial in providing care to our residents close to home.”

For more information on Bancroft and its programs and services, please visit www.bancroft.org.

Tax Cuts Package Provide Savings for Retirees, Veterans, and Working Families

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The tax savings for retirees who live on fixed incomes will increase as the tax exclusion on retirement income quintuples to \$100,000 for joint filers, \$75,000 for individuals, and \$50,000 for married but filing separately. The bill phases in the exclusion increase over four years, and will allow seniors and retirees living on fixed incomes to stay in their homes and live comfortably in New Jersey.

In addition, phasing out the estate tax is a key factor in keeping residents in New Jersey, which is one of only two states

with both an estate and inheritance tax. That burden often compels parents and grandparents to move out of the state in order to protect their hard-earned assets. By keeping these people and resources in New Jersey, the economy and general revenues benefit.

“The affordability of New Jersey for our senior and retired residents is a major concern,” noted Deputy Speaker Burzichelli. “By assuring they can live comfortably here, we can keep and grow a valuable consumer base, and improve our economic growth and recovery.”

Updates of District Legislation in the 2016-2017 Legislative Session

- School Funding Resolution Passes Senate**
 SCR119 (Sweeney) – Senate Concurrent Resolution 119, which would establish a State School Aid Funding Fairness Commission, was passed by the Senate on September 15. The Commission is a key part of the fair funding plan put forth by Senator Sweeney and Senator M. Teresa Ruiz to bring all school districts to 100% of the funding levels laid out in the School Funding Reform Act of 2008.
- Bill Would Clarify Coverage for First Responders**
 A1772 (Burzichelli) – This bill would clarify that volunteer firefighters and other emergency responders may be included in the group of eligible employees in municipalities regarded as small employers, and thereby receive coverage under the same group plan, resulting in lower insurance rates for the municipality. The measure was referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on September 19.
- Bill Package Promotes Farm-to-Table Restaurants**
 This package of legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Taliaferro would promote New Jersey’s farm-to-table restaurants and the farm fresh products they use. The bills would direct the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism to publish on its website information on farm-to-table restaurants and create a “Farm to Restaurant” awards program to recognize farms and restaurants using locally sourced food. Both measures were unanimously approved by the Assembly in June and now await consideration by the Senate Economic Growth Committee. For more information and to watch Assemblyman Taliaferro speak on the importance of the bills for local farmers, please visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxCNWGrFQ1o>.