

NJ THIRD DISTRICT

Newsletter

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ADAM TALIAFERRO
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Legislators Protect South Jersey from “Middle Class Tax Hike”

Due to the efforts of leaders across South Jersey, the reciprocal tax agreement with Pennsylvania, under which residents who live in one state and work in the other only pay state taxes in their home state, will remain in place. The Governor’s plan to withdraw from the agreement would have had a dramatic impact, not just on South Jersey residents, but on several major employers in the area.

Senate President Steve Sweeney, Deputy Speaker John Burzichelli, and Assemblyman Adam Taliaferro worked hard to ensure that the reciprocal tax agreement continued.

“I’m proud that we were able to work this out,” said Senator Sweeney. “It would have been an enormous hardship, the dollars coming out of the economy. I feel that at the end of the day this was a good outcome.”

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On November 22, Senate President Sweeney, Deputy Speaker John Burzichelli, and Assemblyman Adam Taliaferro announced the NJ-PA Reciprocal Tax Agreement would remain intact.

Legislation Requiring Quarterly Pension Payments Now Law

On December 15, the governor signed into law a measure authored by Senate President Sweeney, that requires the state to make payments to the public employees pension fund on a quarterly basis by September 30, December 31, March 31, and June 30 of each year, beginning July 1, 2017.

“Making regular pension payments every quarter will generate additional investment earnings throughout the year, reducing the amount taxpayers will need to contribute going forward,” said Senator Sweeney. “Requiring quarterly payments also helps to ensure that those payments actually get made, protecting the retirement security of the dedicated public workers who give so much to our state and have paid into it throughout their careers.”

Making pension payments on a quarterly basis, instead of at the end of the fiscal year, generates months of additional investment earnings for the pension funds throughout the

year, which then reduces the amount of money that needs to be contributed in the future. It is expected that, by 2023, quarterly payments will generate \$200 million a year in additional investment income. With compounding growth, those additional investment earnings will save taxpayers \$12 billion over the next 30 years.

“It is significant that this passed both houses of the Legislature unanimously,” said Deputy Speaker Burzichelli. “Pension funding is a critical issue to the economic health of this state, and we recognize the urgency in ensuring the fund has greater stability.”

“This was an important step in addressing the challenges facing our pension system,” added Assemblyman Taliaferro. “We have work to do, for sure, but it proved that we are all ultimately working toward the same goal for the good of the taxpayers and public employees.”

Senate Committee Begins Statewide Hearings on Improving School Funding

Senate President Sweeney is continuing his efforts to address disparities in school funding across New Jersey.

“A large number of school districts are being shortchanged in state school aid, forcing local taxpayers to make up the difference,” Senator Sweeney said. “This disparity is undermining equal educational opportunities and adding a financial burden with higher taxes, and it is causing the educational system to become unequal and unfair. In many examples throughout the state, underfunded districts are forced to raise more money in local taxes to make up the difference, which means they are essentially subsidizing the overfunded districts.”

In response, the Senate passed a resolution (SR100) on January 10 to create the Select Committee on School Funding Fairness. The eight-member Select Committee, to be chaired by the Senator, will build upon the school funding policy analysis that is already underway to propose school funding amounts for each district, with the goal of providing 100% funding for every school district in the state. The plans would include the addition of \$100 million in state school formula aid to increase funding for underfunded districts. The Committee will also include Senators Joseph Pennacchio, M. Teresa Ruiz, Sandra Cunningham, Paul Sarlo, Steven Oroho, Michael Doherty, and Samuel Thompson.

At the same time, Senate President Steve Sweeney continues to hold forums across New Jersey to discuss his plan for bringing all districts to 100% funding. Each forum includes local officials, educators, and residents in a roundtable discussion.

“We know that a quality education is the most powerful tool we can give to our children to put them on a path to

success,” said Senator Sweeney at the recent discussion in Paulsboro. “The plan we have created to fully fund all of our school districts eliminates the greatest hurdle to equality – it removes politics from the process and sticks to what should have been our top educational priority all along: running the formula and funding it.”

Deputy Speaker Burzichelli, who joined the Senate President for the Paulsboro roundtable on December 9, added, “We need to bring full funding to all our schools so that each student has the opportunity for a quality education, and the plan we’re discussing here will get that done. Fair funding is full funding, and equal opportunity should be our priority.”

“An opportunity to learn is the greatest gift we can give our children,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro who sits on the Assembly Education Committee. “Thanks to the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 we have a formula that distributes state funding to our school districts fairly so that each child can take advantage of that gift. It is incumbent on us as lawmakers to make sure it happens.”



In December, Senate President Sweeney and Deputy Speaker Burzichelli participated in a discussion on school funding in Paulsboro.

Taliaferro Measure to Support Students with Traumatic Brain Injury Advances



Legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Taliaferro that would support students who have sustained concussions and other types of traumatic brain injury, was advanced by the Assembly Education committee in November of 2016.

Assembly bill 1024 would direct the commissioner of the Department of Education to appoint a coordinator and regional consultants to coordinate the education of students with a traumatic brain injury. The Traumatic Brain Injury Education Coordinator would be responsible for evaluating, coordinating and developing local, county, regional and state educational programs and services for students with a traumatic brain injury.

“When I was injured in college, I was fortunate to have an excellent support system that enabled my recovery and helped me to finish my education,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro. “I want to make sure all of our students, who suffer any type of

injury, have the support they need to learn and develop, and this bill will help with that.”

The statewide coordinator would be tasked with establishing a network of consultants to aid school districts in meeting the needs of students with traumatic brain injuries. The coordinator would also develop a process for the identification, assessment and intervention of students with a traumatic brain injury, including: training plans for school districts, hospital-to-school transition protocols, and a mechanism to collect data on the frequency of these types of injuries.

The network of consultants would be comprised of four regional traumatic brain injury consultants. Each regional consultant would provide training and assistance to school districts in the region, aid school districts in developing a brain injury resource team, and conduct regional outreach to identify and address issues.

“Successfully meeting the needs of students with traumatic brain injuries must be a team effort,” added Assemblyman Taliaferro. “The coordinator and consultants established by this legislation will serve as guides for students, parents, school faculty and staff and all other parties who simply want the best for children in New Jersey.”

Legislators Work to Expand Enrollment in New Jersey’s School Breakfast Program

In November, Senate President Sweeney and Assemblyman Taliaferro launched an initiative to help alleviate childhood hunger by expanding a successful program that provides free and reduced-price breakfasts in New Jersey’s schools.

“Hunger in America is a quiet crisis that forces a growing number of children to go without food,” said Senator Sweeney. “This is a solvable problem that can be alleviated by extending the already successful ‘Breakfast After the Bell’ program to reach more children.”

The federally-supported program provided 240,577 children from low-income families with meals in 2016, up from 135,813 in 2010, but there are still an estimated 302,000 young students who qualify but are not participating.

To qualify, the family must earn below 130 percent of the poverty level, and to qualify for reduced price meals, the family must be between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level. The poverty level in New Jersey is \$24,300 for a family of four.

More than 1 million people in New Jersey, including 340,000 children, are classified as “food insecure,” meaning they do not know where their next meal is coming from. In order to assist more of these students, breakfast meals are provided after the start of school.

“This program has proven to be successful in putting food on the table for children who are underfed and undernourished,” said Assemblyman Taliaferro. “We need to build on that success by expanding the reach to more students in more schools. They

should not be forced to go hungry when the resources are available to help feed them.”

The legislation would establish a non-lapsing, revolving fund in the Department of Agriculture to be known as the “Nourishing Young Minds Initiative Fund.” It requires that all money appropriated for the breakfast program by the Legislature, federal government, and other grants received by the state, be deposited into the new fund. The fund can be used by both the department and by advocates for outreach and support to increase the number of those who qualify to participate. This would include assisting schools in developing plans for the programs, helping schools with applying for grants, assisting parents fill out required paperwork, and other similar needs.

The Legislature would appropriate \$400,000 through the budget process for the fund, which would be used to help schools with the costs of facilitating the program. The breakfast program itself is paid for by the federal government.



Assemblyman Adam Taliaferro announced the launching of the Anti-Hunger Initiative with Senate President Steve Sweeney in November.

Bill is Approved to Halt Excessive Price Increases during a State of Emergency



Deputy Speaker John Burzichelli’s legislation concerning excessive price increases during a state of emergency has made its way through the Assembly and the Senate. Bill A3774 amends the existing statutory language regarding price-gouging during a state of emergency.

This measure allows for greater flexibility because it permits the Governor to tailor the price control period to specifically fit each emergency. These protections will deter businesses from taking advantage of consumers during a natural disaster by raising

prices for necessities, such as gasoline and groceries, but also brings a balance between protecting consumers during a natural disaster and supporting businesses once the emergency is over.

“It is paramount that residents are not subjected to unscrupulous vendors who look to gain an unfair profit by spiking prices on consumer necessities during a state of emergency,” stated Burzichelli. “Additionally, this measure allows the Governor the ability to lift price controls based on the emergent circumstances.”

The bill would be effective immediately, and now awaits further action by the Governor.

Constituent Corner: Code Blue Programs Assist Residents in Need of Shelter

The Code Blue Initiative is designed to provide shelter for homeless individuals and residents without sufficient accommodations when temperatures drop below freezing. The Code Blue Season runs from November 1st through April 15th, with designated “warming centers” operating between 6:00 pm and 6:00 am.

When a Code Blue alert is issued, volunteers collaborate with police, emergency medical services, the County Health Department and Human Services, and the state Office of Emergency Management to prepare warming centers and identify individuals who may be in need of shelter.

Code Blue alerts are issued within 24 hours of a severe weather event. In Salem and Cumberland counties, Code Blue is activated when temperatures fall below 25 degrees, or below 32 degrees with precipitation.

For more information on Code Blue and updates on Code Blue Alerts, please contact the Cumberland County Code Blue Coalition at www.codeblueccnj.org, or call 1-888-410-3973. The Salem County Code Blue Initiative can be reached at www.cohmbc76.com/code-blue.

Spotlight: Bridgeton Welcomes New Homes

On December 7, Senator Sweeney joined the Gateway Community Action Partnership in celebrating the American Dream of home ownership with a ribbon cutting event for the first of 10 new single-family homes in Bridgeton's Southeast Gateway Neighborhood. The Mill Creek Crossings homes provide affordable, quality houses with three bedrooms, 1.5 baths, living room, dining room, kitchen, appliances, and central air. First-time homebuyers with an income up to \$31,620 are eligible.

"Providing people with new and safe housing is a great way to provide them with freedom," said Senator Sweeney. "These homes, with living rooms, dining rooms, central air and appliances, allow for a quality of life that is beyond what some people have ever experienced. The neighborhoods that grow from developments like this provide the

character and culture that make New Jersey such a great place to live."

The project is funded by the NJ Department of Community Affairs through the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit, HUD, the City of Bridgeton, and the Cumberland Empowerment Zone as well as Wells Fargo and TD Bank. Construction will commence in the fall.

"I want to congratulate the City of Bridgeton whose community is going to benefit so much from this development, the people at Gateway Community Action Partnership for making this happen and all of the new homeowners who know that they've truly found the satisfaction that comes with a new home."

For the Gateway Community Action Partnership, the event marks 25 years of community service.

NJ/PA Tax Agreement Continues

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"Our residents who commute to work in Philadelphia would have also lost their credit for paying the city's wage tax," added Deputy Speaker Burzichelli. He noted that without the pact, they would no longer be able to claim a credit for paying the city's wage tax, which is 3.47% for nonresidents. "That is a significant amount of money to people who simply want to go to work and do their jobs."

"I am glad that we were able to address this successfully," said Assemblyman Taliaferro.

"It is important that we continue to make New Jersey a healthy place to do business for companies like Campbell's, Subaru, and many others. They not only provide good jobs, but they are an important part of the engine for growth that drives our state and communities forward economically."

"This was a fight for the residents and businesses of South Jersey and the end result was a win for our region," said Senator Sweeney.

New Tax Savings Measures Will Improve Affordability for New Jersey Residents

In October, several tax saving measures included in the agreement to replenish the Transportation Trust Fund were approved. The following is an at-a-glance look at tax savings under the new law:

Tax Savings for the Working Poor

- The Earned Income Tax Credit increases from 30% to 35% of the federal tax credit.
- Eligibility is determined by taxpayer income, filing status, and the number of qualifying children.

Tax Savings for Veterans

- The plan provides an exemption under the New Jersey gross income tax of \$3,000 of personal income for any individual New Jersey veteran honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances from active duty in the Armed Forces, a reserve component, or the National Guard of New Jersey in a federal active duty status.
- The exemption will apply each year, beginning in the 2017 tax year.

Savings on the State Estate Tax

- For 2017, the Estate Tax exclusion amount has been increased to \$2 million.
- On January 1, 2018 the state Estate Tax will be eliminated.

Savings on Retirement Income

- Filers making \$100,000 or less in gross income, whether filing as an individual or jointly, will be eligible.
- For tax year 2017, the retirement income exclusion will be doubled from \$20,000 for a married couple filing jointly, \$10,000 for a married person filing separately, and \$15,000 for an individual to \$40,000 for a married couple filing jointly, \$20,000 for a married person filing separately, and \$30,000 for an individual.
- The retirement income exclusion will continue to increase until 2020, when it will be \$100,000 for a married couple filing jointly, \$50,000 for a married person filing separately, and \$75,000 for an individual.

Sales Tax Savings

- The New Jersey sales tax was reduced to 6.875% on January 1, 2017.
- On January 1, 2018 the New Jersey sales tax will be reduced to 6.625%.

Please note: no special applications or forms are necessary for eligible filers to receive these savings, and filers should prepare their taxes normally. For questions on filing your New Jersey taxes, please contact the New Jersey Division of Taxation, or your accountant or tax preparer.