

State Representative

Winter 2024

# RUSS DIAMOND



Proudly Serving the 102<sup>nd</sup> District



## Advocating for Limited Government

I was honored to be named a Champion of Limited Government by the Institute of Legislative Analysis.

## COVID Amnesty Bill Would Protect Business Owners

I introduced **House Bill 1969** to provide critical relief for Pennsylvanians who were disciplined by the Wolf Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic for keeping their businesses open and trying to make a living. The bill will require the licensing boards and commissions under the Department of State to reinstate any license, registration, certificate or permit that was suspended or revoked specifically for failure to comply with COVID-19 protocols set forth by the Governor and the Secretary of Health.

In December, I introduced this language as an amendment to House Bill 901. Every Democrat in the House voted to defeat it. I find their profound lack of support for our constituents, business owners and professionals deeply troubling, which is why I am offering this language again as a standalone bill.

## Prohibiting Explicit Content in Schools

I introduced **House Bill 431**, requiring school districts and the PA Department of Health to disclose the exemptions contained within the School Code when releasing information about vaccination requirements for school attendance. This has become an apparent problem over the last few years, causing parents who previously obtained religious or other exemptions to believe such exemptions no longer apply. This is commonsense legislation. Every parent should be provided with a full and complete disclosure of school attendance requirements. This bill currently sits in the House Education Committee.



## Can Minors Consent to Vaccines?

I am introducing legislation that will establish the age at which an individual may consent to receive a vaccine. Currently, there is no state law that provides a minimum age at which an individual may consent to receive a vaccine.

It recently came to my attention that under its General Minor Consent Regulation, the City of Philadelphia authorizes the practice of vaccinating children without parental or guardian consent for children as young as 11 years of age. Further, the regulation specifies on page 6 that

written consent by the minor is not required so long as they are provided a copy of the vaccine information statement.

Once an individual receives a vaccine, that procedure cannot be undone. Minor children are not competent to make such decisions for themselves. As such, Pennsylvania needs to establish a standard minimum age of consent for vaccines to keep parents and guardians in control of medical decisions for their children.

## Fort Indiantown Gap Cuts Ribbon for Main Access Control Point



In early November, Fort Indiantown Gap finalized construction of the main access control point. The Gap was the last defense installation in the country without a security gate.

Fort Indiantown Gap plays an important role for the National Guard as it was the busiest overall training center in the country in 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2023. This is a good thing, and what's good for the Gap is good for Lebanon County, good for Pennsylvania, good for the USA, and good for the world.



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# Legislative Happenings



## New Law Will Foster School Dual Enrollment Programs

Recognizing the educational and financial benefits of dual enrollment programs, I was pleased to support a new law that will remove a potential barrier to the programs that allow students to enroll in college-level classes while still in high school.

**Act 52 of 2023** eliminates the requirement that students in dual enrollment programs are removed from their school's average daily membership. A reduction in a school's average daily membership negatively impacts the amount of state funding it receives, thus serving as a disincentive for offering dual enrollment.

Allowing high school students to take college-level courses advances their educational opportunities and ultimately reduces the cost of their college education. The law takes effect immediately.

## Protecting Cash Transactions in PA

Many Pennsylvanians, including our Amish and Mennonite neighbors, have experienced frustrations because of retailers refusing to accept cash. This is unfair to consumers who do not possess a debit card, credit card or other electronic means of payment.

I introduced legislation, **House Bill 1710**, to amend the Unfair Trade Practices and Consumer Protection Law to include refusing to accept cash payment as a definition for "unfair methods of competition" and "unfair or deceptive acts or practices." This provision would apply to transactions under \$500 when the purchaser is physically present at the point of sale.

## Protecting Senior Citizens' Access to Medications

Recognizing the challenges many senior citizens face when it comes to affording their medications, I proudly support this initiative that will preserve your access to the state's PACE and PACENET prescription drug benefit plans. **Act 62 of 2023** prevents Social Security cost-of-living increases from making seniors ineligible for PACE and PACENET.

## Improving Reimbursement Rates for EMS

Ambulance services in our communities are underfunded and struggling to recruit and retain qualified and skilled staff to provide timely responses to medical emergencies. The arrival of the new year also brings a much-needed increase in funding for the state's ambulance companies via a boost in Medicaid reimbursement rates.

**Act 15 of 2023** ties the reimbursement rates to federal Medicare rates and pays whichever amount is higher. The new law also ensures EMS agencies are reimbursed by Medicaid for 100% of the miles they travel with a patient on board receiving care or transport, finally removing the previous exemption for the first 20 miles traveled.

## ELCO Awarded Ag and Youth Grant

Congratulations to the Eastern Lebanon County School District on being awarded a \$3,826 grant to purchase Widefield Zoom Stereo Microscopes as part of the PA Farm Bill Agriculture and Youth Grants. The PA Farm Bill Ag and Youth Grants provide direct funding of up to \$7,500 and matching grants of up to \$25,000 to support projects, programs and equipment purchases by youth-run organizations as well as those with programs that benefit youth or promote agriculture, community leadership, vocational training and peer networking.

## Farmland Preservation Recognized in Jackson Township

A 20-acre crop farm in Jackson Township was favorably awarded the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program in December. The Charles R. and Susan M. Zimmerman farm is now preserved and will forever remain a farm that will never be sold to developers.

Preservation is achieved by placing a conservation easement on a tract of prime farmland to restrict what activities can occur there in the future. Pennsylvania leads the nation in the number of farms and acres permanently preserved for agricultural production, ensuring the Commonwealth's leading industry will remain viable for generations to come.



## Farm Show Foundation Scholarship Names Awardees

Congratulations to Madison Bomgardner of Annville and James Voight of Fredericksburg for being awarded scholarships at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Farm Show Foundation Breakfast held in January! Established in 1993, the foundation has awarded nearly \$1,064,750 in scholarships to 395 worthy 4-H and FFA youth.

# Around the 102<sup>nd</sup> District



## The Caring Cupboard Tour

I recently met with Shila Ulrich, executive director of The Caring Cupboard & JOY - Jonestown Outreach Pantry to tour the Palmyra facility. We discussed the difficulties they're facing as they continue to meet the exponentially growing need of our communities during these very trying times in America. I am thankful for the tireless efforts of the volunteers, Shila and other staff members.



## Honoring our Veterans in Lebanon County

On Saturday, Nov. 11, I hosted a Veterans Appreciation Drive-Thru event to say 'thank you for your service' to over 300 veterans in Lebanon County. The event would not have been possible without the collaboration of my fellow Lebanon County colleagues, local veteran organizations and other community partners.



## Participating in Wreaths Across America

I was honored to speak at the Wreaths Across America event in Richland Borough in December. We weren't decorating graves; we were celebrating the lives of those who fought for our freedom. May we Remember the fallen, Honor those who serve, and Teach our children the value of freedom.



## Visiting Local Boy Scout Troops

I was thrilled to join the Scouts of Troop 456 in Palmyra and Troop 432 in Jonestown. One of the best parts of being a representative is getting an opportunity to discuss good citizenship and the rights and corresponding responsibilities enumerated in our Constitutions with young people in the 102<sup>nd</sup> District.



In December, we said "goodbye" to Jill Weister (pictured right), who served as the 102<sup>nd</sup> District office manager for roughly 16 years. She was likely the voice on the other end of the phone when you called the office.

Jill has taken a new position with the Pennsylvania Department of Veterans & Military Affairs at Fort Indiantown Gap. I so appreciate her excellent service to our constituents.

Thankfully, we hired Rachel Miccarelli (pictured left), who came to the office with years of experience with another state representative's office. We have an excellent team to ensure you can receive expedient help with state-related matters.



## No Bull – Touring Shale Knoll Arena & Red Eye Rodeo Tour

I'm always thrilled to meet folks doing cool things in the 102<sup>nd</sup> District. I recently visited the Shale Knoll Arena & Redeye Rodeo in East Hanover Township to learn more about its bull riding practice facility. That's right - bull riding!

State Representative

# RUSS DIAMOND

**District Office:**  
175 South Lancaster St.  
Jonestown, PA 17038  
Phone: 717-277-2101  
Hours: 9a.m. to 4:30p.m.

**Harrisburg Office:**  
Room 155, East Wing  
PO Box 202102  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2102  
Phone: 717-787-2686



**CHAT WITH RUSS!**  
Call the district office to schedule  
a one-on-one phone call!

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## SAVE THE DATE! UPCOMING EVENTS

### TELEPHONE TOWNHALLS

**Legislative Update**

**Wednesday,**

**FEB. 21 | 5:30PM**

**Tuesday,**

**JUNE 18 | 6PM**

To dial in, call

**877-229-8493** and  
use **PIN 114082.**

To ask a question, press  
**STAR 3 (\*3).**

### SHREDDING EVENT

**Saturday,**

**APRIL 20**

**9 AM TO NOON**

**Northside Elementary  
School**

301 E. Spruce St., Palmyra

*This is a FREE event to shred  
documents with sensitive information  
like bank account numbers.*

**There is a four-box limit per  
resident. No businesses, please.**

## Lebanon County

### Conservation District Grant

I am happy to announce the Lebanon County Conservation District was awarded a \$146,099 Implementation Grant to assist with its 2024 Countywide Action Plan from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Counties across the Commonwealth that are part of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed received these funds to support their efforts in reducing nutrient and sediment pollution to restore the health of local streams, rivers, and lakes.

Pennsylvania has 85,000 miles of streams and rivers that support commerce as well as fishing, boating and many other recreational activities.

## EXPANDED Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program NOW OPEN

The application period for the state's 2023 Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is now open for eligible Pennsylvanians to begin claiming rebates on property taxes or rent paid last year.

Income limits increased this year to \$45,000 annually for both homeowners and renters, so if you were earning too much to qualify before, you may be eligible now. Remember to exclude 50% of Social Security when determining your income.

The law I supported to increase income limits also increased the maximum rebate to \$1,000. The program is open to residents ages 65 years and older; widows and widowers 50 years and older; and people with disabilities 18 years and older. You do not need to pay anyone for assistance to apply for the rebates. Apply online at [mypath.pa.gov](https://mypath.pa.gov) or contact my office for help.

## Heating Assistance Available to Low-Income Households

Residents who are struggling with their home heating bills can apply for assistance from the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

LIHEAP is a federally funded program that helps individuals and families pay their heating bills through home heating energy assistance grants. It also provides crisis grants to help in the event of an emergency or if a resident is in danger of losing his or her heat due to broken equipment, lack of fuel or termination of utility service.

The income eligibility guidelines for LIHEAP are set at 150% of the federal poverty income level. For example, the income limit for an individual is \$21,870 and for a family of four it is \$45,000.

Residents may apply for LIHEAP online at [compass.state.pa.us](https://compass.state.pa.us), by phone statewide at **1-866-550-4355** or by contacting the Lebanon County Assistance Office at **717-270-3600**. The program runs through April 5. You may also contact my office at **717-277-2101** with questions about the program.