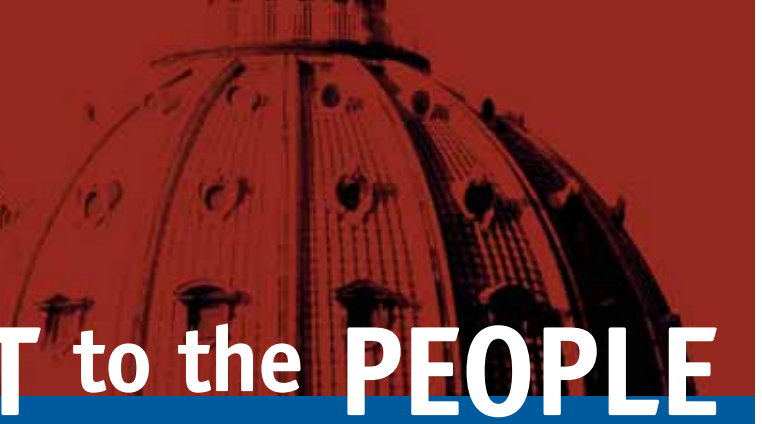




# Senator Pat Browne



## REPORT to the PEOPLE

16TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT • FALL 2007

Dear Friends,

As you may know, the General Assembly recently passed the 2007-08 state budget. This newsletter recaps those actions and other events and issues that I thought would be of interest to you as a resident of the 16th Senatorial District.

As always, if you have questions about any state issue, call my Allentown District Office at (610) 821-8468, my Western Lehigh County office at (610) 366-2327, my East Allentown Office at (610) 821-6813, my Northampton County Office at (610) 502-1567 or my Monroe County District Office at (570) 402-1499. Or, visit my website at [senatorbrowne.com](http://senatorbrowne.com).

Regards,

*Pat Browne*

Pat Browne

*Senator Pat Browne chairs a meeting of the Senate Finance Committee. He is joined by Senate President Pro-Tempore Joe Scarnati and Committee Executive Director Stacey Connors.*

### Finance Committee Pursuing Aggressive Agenda

**D**uring the six months that Senator Pat Browne has served as Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the Committee has already considered and approved 26 bills and held four public hearings. In each of the prior five legislative (two-year) sessions, the average number of bills reported out was 53.

If the Committee maintains that pace through the remaining 18 months of the 2006-07 Session, it will have considered and approved twice as many bills as during the previous five sessions.

“The Finance Committee considers bills that affect Pennsylvania’s various tax codes, so the issues that come before us

have many long-term implications for the state’s economy and for taxpayers,” Senator Browne said. “It is our job to review those measures and send the bills we believe deserve consideration to the full Senate.”

In June alone, The Finance Committee considered and approved:

- The Taxpayer Protection Act bill and Constitutional Amendment which limit increases in state spending to the cost of living;
- Bills that would provide tax code changes benefiting Pennsylvanians serving in the military and to employers who hire members of the National Guard and Reserves;

- Legislation that would provide income tax reductions for volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel;
- Legislation increasing prize limits for small games of chance and another bill that would make several changes to Pennsylvania’s Bingo Law;
- Bills that would provide reduction in income and estate taxes to Pennsylvania citizens with disabilities; and
- Legislation which will encourage private investment through tax credit in water quality best management practices by Pennsylvania farmers.



### Governor Signs EMS Tax Reform Bill

**G**overnor Ed Rendell recently signed Senate Bill 218 – a measure introduced by Senator Pat Browne which makes significant reforms to the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax – into law as Act 7 of 2007.

“I am pleased that the General Assembly and the Governor were able to work together to provide

important tax relief for Pennsylvania workers,” Senator Browne said. “Act 7 makes essential changes to make this assessment more taxpayer-friendly, especially for low-income workers.”

Act 7 ends the lump-sum maximum payment of \$52 and sets specific restrictions on how taxing entities may use revenues raised by the levy. It also re-

quires that the tax be withheld on a payroll-period basis with a maximum deduction of \$1 per week. Those earning \$12,000 or less per year are exempted from paying the tax.

Act 7 requires that a minimum of 25 percent of the total revenue collected must go to support emergency services including police, fire and emer-

gency medical services operations. The bill permits the remaining revenues to be used for the following specific purposes:

- Road construction and maintenance;
- Property tax reduction; and/or,
- Property tax relief through the use of homestead/farmstead exemption.

## Senate Says “No” to Taxes, Approves Final 2007-08 Budget

It took extra days and extra effort, but the Senate approved a state budget for Fiscal Year 2007-08 on July 16 that did not include the seven tax increases proposed by the Governor, according to Senator Pat Browne.

The \$27.162 billion spending plan represents a 4.4 percent increase over the final 2006-07 budget.

“It is essential that Pennsylvania state government live within its means without increasing the tax burden on its citizens,” Senator Browne said. “I was not about to compromise in any way on my position solidly against any tax increases and unrestrained state spending. The budget this year is a significant improvement over the past few years which increased spending by eight or nine percent. There is still room for improvement next year, but this budget was a good start to reigning-in spending.”

Under the new budget, Pennsylvania taxpayers will be

spared more than \$2.5 billion in tax increases aggressively sought by the Rendell Administration, which would have cost each Pennsylvania family of four nearly \$800 each year.

Some of the highlights of the 2007-2008 spending plan include:

Administrative spending in 2007-2008 is 2.3 percent below 2002-2003 levels; State’s Rainy Day Fund balance (the reserve fund against tax increases) is now \$750 million – the highest

since 2001-2002; \$75 million in new pre-kindergarten, Head Start and private child-care funding so that 11,000 more children can get a vital early start to learning; \$9.4 billion in total funding for basic education, a \$558 million or a 6.3-percent increase; \$114 million investment in school technology, science instruction, and college dual enrollment programs; \$310 million to provide access to affordable, comprehensive health care coverage for



175,000 Pennsylvania children, a 10-percent increase in enrollment from 2006-2007; \$277 million for the PACE Plus Medicare program to provide comprehensive drug coverage to more than 357,000 seniors by June 2008; \$6.3 million more for our state parks; and \$25 million for the Volunteer Fire Company Grant Program.

## Property Tax/Rent Rebate Deadline Extended

A recent deadline extension gives eligible local residents until the end of the year to file for up to \$650 from the state’s newly expanded Property Tax and Rent Rebate program.

The program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians age 65 and older; widows and widowers age 50 and older; and people

with permanent disabilities age 18 and older who meet the Social Security disability requirements. The deadline to apply for a rebate was recently extended to Dec. 31, 2007.

“Providing Pennsylvania’s senior citizens with property tax relief has been one of my top priorities. And with the cost of living on the rise, a new sense of urgency prompted the legislature to double the size of the program last year,” said Senator Pat Browne. “Property taxes and rent are among the biggest expenses for most families. This important program is one way that qualifying senior citizens can recoup some of their money.”

The new law increases the eligible income limit from \$15,000 to \$35,000 for homeowners (excluding one-half of Social Security Income and Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits) and boosts the maximum rebate from \$500 to \$650.

The expanded household income limits and rebate amounts for homeowners are:

- \$0 to \$8,000 – \$650 rebate
- \$8,001 to \$15,000 – \$500 rebate
- \$15,001 to \$18,000 – \$300 rebate
- \$18,001 to \$35,000 – \$250 rebate

Applications and information can be obtained by contacting any of Senator Browne’s offices or the state Department of Revenue’s website, [www.revenue.state.pa.us](http://www.revenue.state.pa.us). Claimants are reminded to provide all the necessary income, property tax or rental information for their claims to be processed accurately and quickly.

To check on the receipt and status of a claim, call the department’s automated FACT and Information Line at 1-888-PATAxes (1-888-728-2937). Touch-tone telephone service is required. Callers will need their Social Security Number and the amount of their rebate.



### FAMILY FUN TIME IN ALLENTOWN

*Senator Pat Browne enjoyed visiting with participants and visitors at his annual Family Expo held in Bucky Boyle Park in August.*

## Time to Renew “No Call” Registration



Senator Pat Browne (R-16) is reminding local residents that their registration under Pennsylvania’s “Do-Not-Call” program could be close to expiration.

Consumers were able to register for the popular program as of Sept. 15, 2002. Since registrations are for a five-year period, the earliest registrants must now renew their registrations, according to Senator Browne.

Under Act 24 of 2002, a measure strongly supported by Senator Browne, telemarketers are prohibited from calling any residential telephone subscriber whose name, address and telephone number are on the “Do-Not-Call” list.

“The Do-Not-Call list program has worked out very well for those people who signed up. I want to make sure that those folks now know that it is time

to renew their registrations. If they don’t renew, their registration will lapse and they will again be receiving telemarketing calls,” Senator Browne said.

New registrations and renewals of existing registrations for the “Do-Not-Call” list may be made by calling a toll-free number 1-888-777-3406 or logging onto a website

[www.nocallsplease.com](http://www.nocallsplease.com).

## Altagracia Mercado Joins Browne Staff

In August, Altagracia Mercado became the newest member of Senator Pat Browne's staff. Originally from the Dominican Republic, Altagracia Mercado has been a resident of the Lehigh Valley for 18 years and recently became a Naturalized Citizen.

August was a busy month for Mercado who, besides starting to work for Sen. Browne, was married to Hector. Mercado has

three children: Karina, Luisa and Arturo Morla and lives in Allentown.

Mercado is active in her church, the First Spanish Free Methodist Church of Allentown, serving as a Sunday School Teacher, Kid's Pastor and church Treasurer. Mercado has served on the Board of Directors of various community organizations including: Aspires, Latino Leadership Alliance of

the Lehigh Valley, Volunteer Center of the Lehigh Valley, Weed and Seed in Allentown, as a member of TALL (Target Area Local Leaders), Drop Out Prevention Committee for Weed and Seed and Lehigh Corporate Extension Association.

Mercado works in Senator Browne's Allentown Office.



## Senate Approves School Crime Reporting Bill

The Senate recently approved legislation that sets penalties for school districts that do not immediately report criminal activities to law enforcement officials, according to Senator Pat Browne.

Senate Bill 112 is now before the House of Representatives for consideration. Senator Browne offered an amendment to the bill adding the disciplinary actions and fines when the legislation was considered on March 20 by the Senate Education Committee, on which Senator Browne serves.

"I am pleased that this important bill is moving forward,"

Senator Browne said. "We need to make it perfectly clear to school districts that they have a responsibility to inform law enforcement officials of crimes in schools. And, we should have penalties in place for those that do not comply."

Under Senator Browne's amendment, schools would be required to immediately report violent offenses and those involving weapons possession to law enforcement officials or face fines ranging from \$2,500 on first offense to \$5,000 for a third or subsequent offense.

Senator Browne drafted the amendment in response to

public concerns about reporting lapses and lack of disciplinary action following alleged sexual assault incidents at Central Elementary School in Allentown.

"What happened in Allentown was totally unacceptable," Senator Browne said. "School districts that don't immediately report criminal incidents must be held accountable. This legis-

lation provides a penalty provision for districts that fail to comply with the reporting requirements."

Under Senator Browne's measure, the state Office of State Schools would receive any money collected from the fines.

"This is an issue of trust," Senator Browne said. "Parents should not have to worry about the safety and welfare of their children when they send them to school. They expect schools to take every possible step and every necessary measure to ensure the safety of their children."



## Costing-Out Study for Education Update

*How much does it cost to educate a student in the state of Pennsylvania?*



That is the question that is asked every year around the time of the State Budget. It is vitally important that the state Legislature provide adequate funding for public education. Shaping the minds and developing leaders of tomorrow are critical to the future of this great country.

But how do we know what is the right level of funding to educate a student. Depending on whom you ask, some will say the state contributes too much per student, while others feel the per-student cost is much higher than the amount given by the State.

Differing opinions on this matter result from the current methodology used by Pennsylvania state government to distribute educational resources which does not correlate the amount of

money a district receives with the educational performance of the student. Determining the right amount is necessary to ensuring our kids are getting the best possible education.

That is why, in the budget passed last year (Fiscal Year 2006-07), Senator Browne included a costing-out study. This study is designed to do just that: Determine the overall cost of educating a Pennsylvania primary and secondary student according to today's academic performance standards.

An interim report for the costing-out study was recently released to members of the General Assembly in May 2007, per requirements of Act 114 of 2006. The purpose of the interim report was to update members of the General Assembly on the progress of the study at that

point, as well as give a description as to how the study was to be conducted. Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, who conducted the study, measured the overall level of funding for school districts to meet performance expectations in three ways: school district success, professional judgment and evidence-based information.

The final report on the costing-out study was issued on November 14, 2007. At this point, the General Assembly will need to respond to the study. Senator Browne introduced Senate Resolution 210 which would create a Joint Legislative Commission to study the results of the costing-out study.

# New State Law Aims to Reduce Healthcare-Associated Infections

Pennsylvania recently enacted a new law designed to reduce the number of healthcare-associated infections in the Commonwealth.

Nationwide, healthcare-associated infections affect an estimated two million patients a year, with more than 100,000 dying from bacteria that are in-

creasingly resistant to common antibiotics. It has been estimated that the average additional cost for a patient that develops a healthcare-associated infection, also known as an HAI, is \$8,832. Reducing infections will not only lower health care costs, but will spare patients unnecessary pain, discomfort and longer hospital stays, and will improve overall quality of care.

The new law does the following:

- Requires that hospitals, nursing homes and ambulatory surgical facilities, implement internal infection control plans to improve the health and safety of patients and healthcare workers.
- Ensures that hospitals conduct a strategic assessment of the utility and efficacy of an electronic surveillance system and implement such a system based on the assessment.
- Charges the state Patient Safety Authority with overseeing the reporting of infections and tracking HAIs in Pennsylvania.
- Requires insurers and the Medical Assistance Program to reimburse facilities for the cost of infection screenings performed in accordance with an infection control plan.
- Provides a quality improvement payment to a healthcare facility that reduces HAIs by 10 percent or more.

## Senator Browne Opens Western Lehigh County Office

Senator Browne announced that he recently opened a district office in Upper Macungie Township as a way to stay connected with and provide state services to constituents in the western part of Lehigh County.

“It is important that I stay abreast of the interests and concerns of all the citizens of the 16th Senatorial District. The western portion of Lehigh County is one of the fastest growing areas in the state. To better help and serve the constituents in that part of my district, I saw a need for a Western Lehigh County office,” Senator Browne said.

Senator Browne’s Western Lehigh County Office, located inside the Upper Macungie Township Building, 8330 Schantz Road, Breinigsville, is open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. The phone number for Senator Browne’s new office is 610-366-2327 and the fax is 610-366-2329.

“This office will help in my efforts to continue to provide the best constituent service possible,” Senator Browne said. “It also allows for constituents to receive help in a one-on-one, case-by-case manner.”



## Senator Pat Browne 16th District Legislative Offices

801 Hamilton Street, Allentown, PA 18101-2420  
(610) 821-8468 • FAX (610) 821-6798

East Allen Twp. Municipal Bldg.  
5330 Nor-Bath Boulevard, Northampton, PA 18067  
(610) 502-1567 • FAX (610) 502-1570

Monroe County Office  
Old Route 115 & Route 209, P.O. Box 16  
Saylorsburg, PA 18353-0016  
(570) 402-1499 • FAX (570) 402-0746

1601 Union Blvd. First Floor, Allentown, PA 18109  
(610) 821-6813 • FAX (610) 841-1137

Upper Macungie Twp. Bldg.  
8330 Schantz Road, Breinigsville, PA 18031  
(610) 366-2327 • FAX (610) 366-2329

Room 459, Main Capitol  
Senate Box 203016, Harrisburg, PA 17120-3016  
(717) 787-1349 • FAX (717) 772-3458

pbrowne@pasen.gov • senatorbrowne.com

## Kathy McQuilken Joins Senator Browne’s Staff

Kathy McQuilken joined Senator Browne’s staff this past spring and brings a wealth of experience to her new position. Her face might already be familiar to many residents in the Western part of Lehigh County since she previously worked for state Representative

Paul Semmel for 10 years. Kathy is married to Bill McQuilken and has two boys, Benjamin and Joshua.

Kathy works three days a week in Senator Browne’s Western Lehigh County office and two days in Senator Browne’s Main District office in Allentown.



STATE SENATOR  
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*Or Current Resident*

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