



# CRAIG WILLIAMS



SERVING THE PEOPLE OF THE 160<sup>th</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



## Future of Big Elk Creek Park

I am a huge, vocal proponent for preserving open space in our two counties. Recently, Rep. John Lawrence, who serves the southwestern portion of Chester County, brought to light a concerning situation. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) has decided to recharacterize land deeded to the state as open space in perpetuity to allow the parks division to build a new state park. The local community is very much against it.

I attended a recent House Policy Committee hearing in Chester County on this issue and examined the director of State Parks for quite some time. He finally admitted that the decision to turn part of our county into a state park was made by him, the secretary of DCNR and Gov. Tom Wolf — without consulting the county or local residents. He also admitted that in an application to the federal government to declare the Big Elk Creek area as replacement property for other developed state lands that there was a promise not to develop the land. That application was only five years ago.

Such development would compromise the park's natural state, which contradicts the purpose of using it as replacement land. As your representative, I will continue to advocate for keeping Big Elk Creek Park undeveloped, preserving its natural beauty and ecological value for future generations. That is my commitment to both counties in our region, as development threatens to deforest the areas that we love.

## Williams and Shapiro Highlight Bipartisan Efforts in Education Funding

During a recent visit by Gov. Josh Shapiro to our district, I spoke about the significant achievements we made for education funding in this year's budget and the importance of bipartisan cooperation in achieving these goals. As the representative for Cheyney University, I am particularly proud of our efforts to fund higher state education and our Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

I made clear to the group attending our event at Cheyney that it was the investment in education that garnered my supportive vote for the budget. Cheyney University specifically received \$500,000 in additional funds, and students in targeted fields such as nursing and education can receive scholarships of up to \$5,000 per academic year, provided they stay and work in Pennsylvania for at least 12 months after graduation.



We have also initiated programs to combat the brain drain in Pennsylvania by creating education pathways that align with local business needs.

Education is the foundation for building our economy, ensuring safer streets, and creating opportunities in Pennsylvania. While we have made significant progress, our work is not done. We will continue to fight for education funding and support, knowing it is the cornerstone of our state's future prosperity.

Thank you, Gov. Shapiro, for visiting our district and supporting our shared commitment to education.

## Project Safe Neighborhoods Funding Receives \$3 Million

Once again, I have secured \$3 million in this year's budget for the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) program. This funding continues the initiative I started in 2021 for Philadelphia and Delaware counties, which now totals over \$10 million. PSN, a federal program established by the U.S. Department of Justice, focuses on prosecuting gun crimes, specifically targeting prior-convicted felons in possession of firearms. It is both a federal and state crime for prior-convicted felons to possess guns, and an overwhelming portion of violent crime is committed by prior felons.

As a former Assistant United States Attorney myself who prosecuted under PSN, I understand the program's impact on community safety. The funding will allow additional prosecutors in the two counties to work as Special Assistant United States Attorneys, bringing federal sentences with no eligibility for parole to gun-related offenses. This commitment to addressing gun violence is crucial, especially given the ongoing crisis in Philadelphia, where there were 1,660 shooting victims in 2023. The PSN program is a vital tool in our efforts to make our communities safer.



# Voting for Historic Education Funding in the State Budget

The General Assembly passed a bipartisan 2024-25 state budget for which I cast my YES vote. The House passed it in wide bipartisan fashion (122-80). There were a few tensions with the budget (which was two weeks late), some of which remains: (1) the negotiation was only between the Democrat House, the Republican Senate and the governor, which means only the Senate was able to voice our concerns about budget bloat; (2) the courts required that the education formula be reconfigured to send more money to under-funded schools; and (3) the budget grossly exceeds revenues and will drain the surplus account in two years. While far from perfect, I believe this was the best compromise we could achieve in this climate. Mostly, however, I believe strongly in the education wins in this budget and the accompanying education bills.

The budget includes over \$1 billion in increased funding for K-12

education, one of the largest education boosts in Pennsylvania's history. The increase includes an additional \$285 million for the Basic Education subsidy, \$526 million for the Ready to Learn Block Grant program and \$100 million for school facility improvements. These investments ensure that schools across the Commonwealth can provide a thorough and efficient system of education, benefiting students throughout our state.

Locally, all our school districts will see a basic education funding increase from last year.

↑ West Chester Area School District state funding up **8.3%**

↑ Garnet Valley School District state funding up **5.8%**

↑ Unionville Chadds Ford School District state funding up **4.1%**

## Supporting Special Education and School Safety

My YES vote on the budget was also driven by a \$100 million increase for special education and an additional \$50 million for school safety, security and mental health initiatives. These funds are essential for creating a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, particularly those with special learning needs.

Additionally, career and technical education (CTE) programs will see a \$25 million increase, along with \$5 million more for CTE equipment grants, ensuring our students are well-prepared for the workforce of their choosing. I am a very big proponent of our state funds following the school programming that is most attractive to students and their families, especially in the career and technical fields.



## Empowering Students and Families

I am an advocate for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) Program, which has received an additional \$75 million in this year's budget, bringing total funding to \$630 million. This tax credit helps families access scholarships to choose the best educational setting for their children. Additionally, the budget includes a new initiative for Grow PA scholarships, offering \$5,000 to students in high-demand education programs who commit to living and working in Pennsylvania after graduation. This effort, along with \$36 million in new funding for the Ready to Succeed Scholarship Program, will help to retain talent in the state and reduce student debt.

Community colleges also received a 6% increase, adding \$15.7 million to their annual budgets, enhancing their ability to serve students. The budget also reinstates a \$100 million reimbursement for school districts with students in cyber charter schools, addressing funding concerns related to school choice. This reimbursement helps balance the financial impact on public schools while supporting families' educational choices.



## Veterans Property Tax Exemption Update

On Aug. 1, new veterans property tax legislation went into effect. The legislation brings significant changes to the tax exemption criteria for 100% disabled veterans in Pennsylvania. Previously, veterans whose annual income exceeded \$108,000 did not qualify for the exemption, with VA disability payments included in this income calculation. The new legislation removes VA disability payments from the income calculation, allowing more 100% disabled veterans to qualify for the property tax exemption. This change is expected to provide substantial financial relief to many veterans who were previously ineligible due to their income levels.



## Fighting Junk Credit Card Fees

I am fighting against junk fees, and the signing of House Bill 1664 into law recently is one significant step. Junk fees are unexpected, hidden or excessive fees which companies charge consumers for services or products. These fees are often disproportionate to the cost to companies to provide such a service. In other words, junk fees are used to artificially inflate costs on consumers unrelated to the service provided.

This law requires dental insurance companies to allow more forms of reimbursement to health care providers instead of only credit card transactions. Reimbursements via credit cards can result in up to 5% transaction fees, which must be absorbed by the dentist, leading to higher prices for consumers.

This law will allow other forms of reimbursement, including direct deposit and checks. This change helps dental practices keep their costs down so consumers do not have to absorb them as a result of unnecessary reimbursement practices.



# Around the District



**Bethel Corn Boil**



**Cheyney University Tour**



**Grist Mill - Race for the Watershed**



**PennDOT Ride Along**



**Meeting with Concord Township Regarding Traffic Concerns**



**Telephone Town Hall**



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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## STAY TUNED FOR OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

### SHREDDING & DRUG TAKE BACK EVENT

**Saturday, Sept. 21, 9 a.m. to Noon**

Garnet Valley Middle School, 601 Smithbridge Road, Glen Mills, PA 19342

### SENIOR SCAM PRESENTATIONS Call to schedule in your community!

### ANNUAL VETERAN RECOGNITION BREAKFAST Friday, Nov. 1

**RSVP REQUIRED.** Please call 610-358-5925 by Thursday, Oct. 17, to secure your spot.

### SERVICES AVAILABLE

Property Tax Rent Rebate Assistance | **\*Deadline extended! 12/31/24** | Call to schedule an appointment

Notary Services

Apply for your Septa Senior Key Card

On the spot Registration and Driver License Renewals

New driver? Pick up your PennDOT Driver License Manual

**Veteran Service Officer 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month**

Attn Scout Leaders! Schedule your troop to meet Rep. Williams to earn their government badge

Victim of a scam? My office can help with reporting

**For all the latest visit me online!**

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