

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Julie Harhart

Serving the 183rd Legislative District

WORKING FOR A BETTER PENNSYLVANIA



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Right to Self-Defense Enacted into Law

Legislation signed into law on June 28 will further protect law-abiding citizens who use self-defense when faced with an imminent threat.

Act 10 of 2011, known as the Castle Doctrine, clarifies state law so legal protection is afforded to law-abiding citizens who use lethal force in protecting themselves, their families and their properties.

If an attacker or intruder intends to inflict bodily harm, this measure creates the presumption deadly force may be used to protect oneself, family and others while in their home, an occupied vehicle or anywhere they have a right to be, without first having to retreat.

The presumption would not apply if the person entering a home was another resident of the home; a law enforcement officer; or a parent, grandparent or other guardian removing a child from the home or vehicle. In addition, the new law would not apply if a person was using his or her home or vehicle to engage in criminal activity.

It is important to emphasize this new law does not endorse unlawful aggression. It merely provides individuals with the necessary legal protection to respond to such aggression.



Rep. Harhart (third from left) joined many of her colleagues in the Governor's Reception Room for the signing into law of the Castle Doctrine.

Job-Friendly Bill Signed by Governor



Rep. Harhart was present for the bill signing of the state's Fair Share Act, which restores fairness when assessing damages in liability lawsuits. Pictured (left to right) are Harhart, Gov. Tom Corbett and Rep. Joe Emrick (R-Northampton).

Legislation reforming the way in which liability lawsuits are handled in Pennsylvania was also signed into law by Gov. Tom Corbett on June 28.

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania has one of the most hostile-to-business tax and regulatory environments in the country. Two-thirds of small business owners say they make business decisions to avoid lawsuits, 23 percent say those decisions have forced them to cut employee benefits, and 11 percent say those decisions have forced them to lay off employees.

Up until the new law, Pennsylvania still retained what lawyers call full "joint liability," which meant if a lawsuit named multiple defendants, the one with the deepest pockets can then be held liable for all of the plaintiff's damages, even if this solvent defendant's actions had little to do with the injuries alleged.

A state's civil liability laws are almost always considered by business executives who make expansion and relocation decisions. It's simple: Legal liability costs scare jobs away.

With this new law, we are seeking to prevent abuse of the legal system, thereby encouraging employers and businesses to keep jobs, create jobs and attract more jobs. Under the Fair Share Act, a defendant will be held responsible only for his or her proportionate share of the total damages awarded to compensate a plaintiff.

We must stress our goal with these reforms is not to deny anyone with a legitimate claim the right to seek compensation. Rather, we are attempting to rid our legal system of the frivolous lawsuits delaying justice for those who truly deserve it.

Designer Drugs Known as 'Bath Salts' Placed on State's Controlled Substance List



I am pleased to report the sale of street drugs commonly referred to as "bath salts" has now been banned in Pennsylvania.

The new law adds the chemical compounds which make up bath salts to the state's controlled substance list.

Criminal activity and violent behavior are on the rise in connection with the use of bath salts, which can cause higher blood pressure, increased heart rate, psychosis and a tendency to engage in aggressive behavior.

Compounds found in these new bath salts have already been banned in Europe, as well as several states throughout the country.

I am hopeful the ban will help reduce access to these dangerously addictive drugs and provide law enforcement with the backing it needs to do its job.

Website Allows Residents to Take Part in the Redistricting Process

Following the results of the U.S. Census every decade, the boundaries for legislative districts are redrawn to ensure equal representation throughout Pennsylvania. For the first time ever, a new website has been created with news and information related to the redistricting process. Users will be able to see a list of scheduled meetings of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission, find reports from past meetings and more. Visit www.Redistricting.state.pa.us for more information on the 2011 redistricting.

Welfare Reforms Address Cases of Waste, Fraud and Abuse

For years, my colleagues and I have called for reforms within the state's Department of Public Welfare (DPW), particularly following documented instances of waste, fraud and abuse.

As part of this year's budget and our effort to control government spending, an array of welfare reforms were implemented with the state's Welfare Code.

With these reforms, we are seeking to ensure only those who are eligible receive assistance and to restore integrity to the system.

The reforms include:

- **Drug testing.** Drug felons applying for public assistance will be subjected to random drug testing before receiving benefits. Tests will also be applied to drug felons currently in the welfare system to ensure welfare benefits are not being used to subsidize drug abuse.

- **Anti-Benefit Shopping.** Residents receiving public assistance are now only eligible for benefits based on the levels allowed in their county of legal residence, regardless of where benefit applications are submitted in the Commonwealth. Cash benefit levels differ from county to county. Previously, welfare recipients were able to apply for benefits in counties other than their home county as "temporary" residents and receive that county's benefit level. This change ensures residents only receive the benefits they are eligible for and helps prevent those who aim to defraud the system by "shopping around" for the highest benefit.

- **Income Eligibility Verification System.** DPW will now be required to use an electronic cross-reference system to provide a 19-point check on applicants' eligibility and create a standard fraud detection system.

- **Special Allowance Program Changes.** For years, the Special Allowance program has been the target of reforms following audit reports showing the program was extensively abused, wasting millions of dollars. DPW must now look at ways to scale back this program. This measure requires reductions of up to 25 percent and provides leeway to eliminate allowances within the program.

The final budget included about \$400 million in welfare savings and, in light of a recent report about fraud and abuse taking place within the LIHEAP program, even further savings should not be hard to achieve. I am hopeful the reforms we already enacted, coupled with new leadership of DPW, will help steer the department back on course.

New Law Seeks to Make Public Information More Accessible

One of the new laws passed at the end of the spring legislative session will help make it easier to find out information about state spending and revenue.

Act 18 of 2011 establishes an online, searchable database of all state government expenditures, known as the Pennsylvania Web Accountability, Transparency and Contract Hub or PennWATCH. This will help show the taxpayers of Pennsylvania we are committed to openness, transparency and accountability in state government.

By the end of 2012, PennWATCH must provide the following information regarding each funding action or expenditure paid to a Commonwealth agency or other entity from federal or state funds:

- The name and address of the agency or other entity receiving funding.
- The amount of the funding action or expenditure.
- The agency initiating the funding action or expenditure.
- The appropriation from which the funding action or expenditure is paid.
- The funding source.
- A counter to show the number of visitors to the site.

In addition, the website must show at the end of each month all federal and state revenue received and deposited in the State Treasury during the previous month. PennWATCH must also include a link to each agency's website, where available.

In years 2013 and 2014, additional detailed information about state expenditures will be available on the site.

Once fully operational, the PennWATCH website will list all state government expenditures within the Commonwealth and the public can search the site at no cost.

This legislation was supported unanimously by both the House and Senate earlier this year and signed by Gov. Tom Corbett in late June.

Out and About in the 183rd...



Rep. Harhart (back row, right) spoke to a group of seniors at Hope Lutheran Church in Cherryville on Sept. 12, as part of her Senior Mobile Office outreach program. She updated attendees on legislation and state services of interest to the senior population.



Rep. Harhart hosted an informational meeting for area business owners on July 12. Topics discussed included unemployment compensation, tort reform, business taxes, Marcellus Shale and state programs available to assist businesses. Pictured with Harhart (from left to right) are Kevin Shivers, director of the National Federation of Independent Business, Pennsylvania chapter; Anthony Pugliese, legislative liaison for the Department of Community and Economic Development; David Taylor, executive director of the Pennsylvania Manufacturer's Association; and Gene Barr, vice president of government and public affairs for the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry.



Rep. Harhart (center) was one of several local elected officials who participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new 350 foot-long dam on Stillwater Lake in Pocono Summit. The decade-long project was helmed by the Minsi Trails Council which serves Boy Scouts in Lehigh, Northampton, Monroe, Carbon, Luzerne and Warren counties.



Pictured above are members of Brownie Troop 8614 and their leader Christine Reber with Rep. Harhart on June 8. Harhart presented each of the girls with a certificate of achievement upon the completion of their community service projects, which included landscaping the property in front of the Northampton Food Bank for their Brownie Quest Award and the Journey project "It's Your World, Change It."



In recognition of the 50th anniversary of Bechtel's Pharmacy, Rep. Harhart presented Izza and Joseph Bechtel of Slatington a citation from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The pharmacy has two locations in Lehigh and Northampton counties.



Rep. Harhart (front row, second from left) recently hosted a John Q. Citizen breakfast at Morgan's Restaurant with Sen. Pat Browne (front row, left). The breakfast provided a great opportunity for local residents to have questions answered pertaining to state government and what issues the Legislature plans to work on during the fall and winter months.



In August, Rep. Harhart (center) attended the dedication of 6.2 miles along the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor called the Asher Boyer Trail. The trail is dedicated in memory of Asher, who was working on the trail as his Eagle Scout project at the time of his death in 2004. Harhart is pictured with Allan and Debra Boyer, Asher's parents.



Marcellus Shale Commission Issues Recommendations

A commission created by Gov. Tom Corbett to examine the growing natural gas drilling industry in Pennsylvania and to assess its impacts on the environment and local communities issued its report in late July.

Compiled after nearly two dozen public meetings, the report offers 96 recommendations for consideration by the Legislature. The recommendations address stronger regulations for drilling, tougher penalties for violators, boosting job creation and training Pennsylvanians for natural gas jobs, protecting public health and natural resources, and enhancing the state's energy independence. We will carefully review these suggestions in the coming months.

The 30-member commission also recommended the adoption of an impact fee to address the effects of drilling in our communities. The House Finance Committee conducted hearings on the impact fee issue this summer, and this is a major topic of discussion planned for the fall session.

Other key recommendations from the commission include:

- Increasing the distance between gas well sites and streams, private wells and public water systems.
- Posting more information online about drilling companies and activities for the public.
- Doubling penalties and enhancing the Department of Environmental Protection's ability to suspend, revoke or deny drilling permits.
- Monitoring and documenting the industry's effect on plants, forests, wildlife, habitat, water and soil.
- Assisting Pennsylvania companies to do business with the natural gas industry.
- Developing "Green Corridors" for vehicles powered by natural gas.

New Law Designates Cancer as Occupational Disease for Pennsylvania Firefighters

A new law designates cancer as an occupational disease for professional and volunteer firefighters who have served four or more consecutive years in Pennsylvania. Act 46 of 2011 allows firefighters to receive workers' compensation if they develop cancer and can establish direct exposure to certain carcinogens while responding to an incident. This is a huge win for those of us who have long been supporting legislation over the years to provide cancer protection for firefighters.

Want to Receive This Newsletter Electronically?

In an effort to cut costs, I am offering the opportunity for people to sign up to receive my newsletter electronically instead of by mail. Simply go to JulieHarhart.com and click on the "e-newsletter" icon on the upper right corner of the page to sign up.

Even if you already receive regular email updates, you must complete this form and include your full mailing address so you can begin receiving electronic mailings. You will be notified via email when a new edition of the e-newsletter is available.

Volunteer Fire and Ambulance Grant Applications Now Available

Area volunteer fire companies and ambulance services throughout Pennsylvania are encouraged to submit an application for the 2011 Volunteer Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program (VFCVASGP).

The grants may be used for construction or renovation of a unit's station, the purchase or repair of equipment, or for training or debt reduction. The maximum grant amount is \$15,000 for volunteer fire companies and \$10,000 for volunteer ambulance services. A total of \$25 million will be awarded through the program.

The online application period will remain open until Oct. 21.

For more information, visit my website at JulieHarhart.com and click on "Fire and Ambulance Grants."



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183rd Legislative District

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DISTRICT OFFICE SERVICES

My district offices are here to help you.

Services my staff and I provide include:

- ◆ Driver's license and vehicle registration applications and renewals
- ◆ PACE and PACENET applications for seniors
- ◆ Property Tax and Rent Rebate applications
- ◆ State tax forms
- ◆ Student aid applications
- ◆ Free state maps, state park information, and PA Vacation Guides
- ◆ Copies of legislation
- ◆ Tours of the State Capitol
- ◆ Referrals to agencies to resolve state-related matters

If you need help with any of the above or with any other state-related matter, please do not hesitate to call one of my district offices.