



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

January 27, 2021

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation:

I want to thank you all for your continued cooperation throughout this past year. Together, we have faced the biggest public health crisis in modern history, while also dealing with a turbulent election cycle. Your advocacy and assistance at the federal level has been critical to helping Pennsylvania navigate these unprecedented situations. Now, as we begin a new legislative session in Congress and discussions around both a new stimulus package and an infrastructure package are starting, I want to share with you some of Pennsylvania's priorities for these two critical bills.

As we shift focus from combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, we must address Pennsylvania's critical infrastructure needs. Pennsylvania has been hit with industrial decline as part of the Rust Belt. On top of this, record job losses continue to impact Pennsylvania even as the COVID-19 pandemic winds down. It is vital to the future success of our Commonwealth that additional funding be allocated through a comprehensive and robust infrastructure package, as well as stimulus funding, to address the immediate and long-term needs of those left behind by the changing dynamics of our industries, as well as provide additional job opportunities across many sectors.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the need for high speed internet to bridge the digital divide. Without broadband access, Pennsylvanians lack the ability to find job opportunities, school-aged children cannot engage in remote learning, and emergency service communications are drastically reduced. According to the Federal Communications Commission, more than 800,000 Pennsylvanians lack access to robust, reliable, high-speed internet, with more than 520,000 of those residents living in rural areas. It is absolutely critical that additional funding for broadband access be included in federal legislation, so that our Commonwealth can meet the challenges of the 21st century and embrace new opportunities for growth and competitiveness.

Funding to remediate blighted properties must be included in any infrastructure package, as it is one of the main challenges to revitalizing communities and neighborhoods. Blight hurts communities in many ways; it poses serious health and safety threats, reduces property values and tax revenue, increases the risk of crime, and makes communities less attractive for investment. Pennsylvanians are burdened in the form of higher local taxes to make up for the lost revenue, but also are directly harmed by the loss of value in their own properties. In communities like Johnstown, Erie, Bethlehem, Pottsville, Reading, and Scranton, the work that propelled the Industrial Revolution left behind thousands of properties as populations of these cities and towns shifted, creating an estimated 300,000 blighted structures. Our Commonwealth needs additional funding to combat blight and secure property values for our citizens, while making Pennsylvania an attractive place for future growth.

Pennsylvania has also been impacted by toxic contaminants, such as lead and “forever chemicals” like PFAS. Studies continue to find elevated lead levels in blood tests of Pennsylvania’s youngest residents, potentially causing life-long health problems. PFAS contaminants have been found in drinking water in communities across the Commonwealth, putting our citizens at risk. The cleanup and remediation costs associated with addressing these toxins can be significant, which is why additional funding must be granted for lead and chemical remediation in federal funding packages. Additionally, across our Commonwealth, underutilized and abandoned former industrial and commercial sites sit waiting for cleanup to unlock their potential as a catalyst for new manufacturing and economic development. Revitalizing these locations improves the health and quality of life of our citizens, while also injecting much-needed revenue into our local communities by returning once lifeless properties to the tax rolls.

Pennsylvania has emerged as a leader in the production of clean-burning natural gas, outproducing every state but Texas. We need to capture the benefits of this prolific resource in Pennsylvania to spur manufacturing and drive job creation in downstream industries. Additional funding must be provided by the federal government to build new and revitalize old manufacturing facilities, so businesses and individuals can use our natural gas, creating jobs, lowering costs, and improving energy efficiency. Pennsylvania is also a desirable location for businesses looking to relocate, given our network of roadways and prosperous industry. We can make it easier for businesses to move by providing move-in ready sites, ensuring these facilities can become more energy efficient and competitive by tapping into Pennsylvania’s natural gas resources.

A safe and reliable transportation network is essential for Pennsylvania residents, businesses, and visitors. Providing reliable modes of transportation bolsters opportunities for employment, secures access and quality of life for people of all ages and abilities, and expands options to explore Pennsylvania’s tourism destinations, which bolsters economic growth. With more than 120,000 miles of state and local highways, Pennsylvania has one of the largest transportation networks in the country, but it is in desperate need of assistance. Many of our “four-digit” state-maintained, low-volume routes, have been neglected for too long. Additionally, our transit systems have not kept pace with growing populations and are struggling to upgrade to meet the shifting needs of residents, commuters, and visitors. The American Society of Engineers’ 2018 “infrastructure report card” gives Pennsylvania a D+ rating for the quality of its roads and bridges, and a D for its transit. This is unacceptable, but can easily be remedied with additional funding from the federal government to improve our highways, bridges, and secondary roads as well upgrade our strained transit systems.

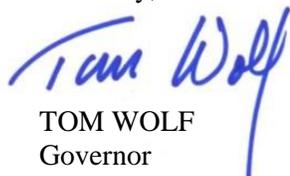
Pennsylvania’s stormwater infrastructure was designed for the precipitation events of decades ago and has been inadequately maintained. Our infrastructure must be updated to handle the changing weather patterns and new development. A substantial investment is needed to develop proper stormwater management, including the diversion of rain from overflowing sewers to prevent the flooding of streets and homes, improvement of local water quality, and the lessening of runoff and pollution. As we continue to see record high precipitation levels, it is critical that additional funding be provided to update our stormwater systems to not only protect Pennsylvanians, but our environment as well.

Pennsylvania’s network of parks, trails, greenways, riverfronts and other open spaces are increasingly cited as an important factor for residents when deciding where to live and work, creating a major incentive to invest in creating these opportunities as a strategy to attract and retain the workforce that will power Pennsylvania’s economy. New environmental conservation projects and new recreational opportunities across the state will provide more opportunities for people to experience and preserve the beauty of our Commonwealth. Our state parks and forests have a significant backlog of needed infrastructure work to fix deteriorating buildings, trails, and roads. Additionally, more than 6,000 municipal and county parks, which act as cornerstones of community recreation, are also in need of upgrades and repairs. The federal government must provide additional funding to protect and maximize our green spaces and preserve them for generations to come.

The potential for Pennsylvania is endless, but additional funding is needed to achieve the goals of vibrant towns and cities, with new development and opportunities in rural and disadvantaged areas, creating a modern, interconnected Commonwealth. These priorities of reinvesting in our communities, if given robust funding through stimulus money and a comprehensive infrastructure package, will ensure Pennsylvania is ready and able to compete in our post-pandemic economy.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Wolf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Wolf" clearly legible.

TOM WOLF  
Governor