

State Representative Sean Patrick Brennan

Ohio House District 14

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September 2024

*Proudly serving Parma, Parma Heights,
and Cleveland's West Park Neighborhood!*

Dear District 14 Resident:

Let me begin this month by thanking **Parma Mayor Timothy DeGeeter, Parma Heights Mayor Marie Gallo, Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb**, and each of the cities' councilmembers for working tirelessly for their residents. Our efforts of working together helped get our communities back on their feet with no loss of life following the recent storms and we should all be very proud of that.

Soon after the storms, **Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives Jason Stephens** (Kitts Hill) called me to ask if we could meet in Parma. I immediately responded "yes" and agreed to clear my calendar for his visit. He asked who I would like to invite. I responded that I would like him to meet and talk to the command staff of the Parma and Parma Heights Police and Fire Departments. After we hung up the phone, I called Igor Djurin, owner of Schnitz Ale Brewery, to ask if he could accommodate us and that he did.

During the course of our two-hour meeting, we enjoyed the great food offered by our host, and discussed a multitude of issues, including the efforts of all to get our communities up and running following the recent storms, state funding for local governments, training and equipment needs, challenges facing our first responders, etc. At the Statehouse I have and will continue to advocate for more resources for our local safety forces.

I want to thank the following for attending our meeting: **Parma Heights Fire Chief Matt Bernard, Parma Heights Fire Chief Assistant Sonya Short, Parma Heights Police Chief Tanya Czack, Parma Heights Safety Director Steve Scharschmidt, Parma Police Chief James Blair, Parma Deputy Police Chief Kevin Riley, Parma Assistant Fire Chief David Higginbotham, Parma Fire Chief Mike Lasky, Igor Djurin, and Parma Safety Director Bob Courey**. A tip of the District 14 hat to all of you and all of your first responder colleagues for your fine service to our communities.

As always, if my office may be of service, please contact us. I also invite you to visit my website to learn more about how I am serving you and to sign up for this monthly newsletter. You can also read all of my past newsletters going back to January, 2023. I am continually honored to serve you!

Sincerely,

Sean Patrick Brennan
State Representative, District 14
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State Representative Sean Patrick Brennan Joins Colleagues to Advocate for Property Tax Relief

Recently, I joined my Statehouse colleagues, **Representatives Bride Rose Sweeney (Westlake) and Phillip Robinson (Solon)**, and **Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne** to co-host a press conference regarding our efforts to provide property tax relief to the residents of Cuyahoga and Ohio's other 88 counties. As a homeowner in Parma for nearly three decades, a public school teacher for 30 years, a member of Parma City Council for 19 years, and, now, state representative for about 21 months, I can attest that property taxes are a hot button issue for homeowners, including my wife and I.

It breaks my heart when a resident calls my office to tell me that they don't know how they are going to be able to stay in their home or apartment with all of the rising costs. I recall when I was a little boy and my dad left us and my mom losing our house because she could not afford it on her department store wages. It is my experience watching my single mom struggle to keep food on the table and a roof over our heads that informs why I went to Columbus to serve you.



Unfortunately, over the years the state has cut its commitment to help fund local services – to the tune of tens of millions of dollars to the cities I serve alone. The state has also passed numerous unfunded mandates onto our local governments. These flawed policies have forced communities to go to the local taxpayers in the form of levies to continue to fund services, including police, fire and EMS services, libraries, schools, parks, and senior centers, not to mention addressing our streets, sewers, and other infrastructure needs.

I call this the “Man Behind the Curtain Phenomenon.” You see Columbus can collect our taxes, cut local government funds, and tell our local governments to do more without giving them the money to do it with the flourish of a pen, giving the public the impression that our school districts and cities are not using their funds wisely because they have to go to the taxpayers to fund the services that you need, expect, and deserve.

For instance, for too long our state government has required our local schools to rely too heavily on local property taxes for funding. I have always said that this scheme unfairly pits homeowners and senior citizens against our kids, which is not a naturally adversarial relationship. Folks I speak to want to do their part to pay their fair share to help the next generation, but with rising costs, it is becoming very difficult for many.

In my short 21 months serving in the Ohio Statehouse, I have been very vocal about the state providing more funding to local communities and property tax relief to Ohio's residents, as well as speaking out against unfunded mandates. I have worked hard to forge effective relationships with colleagues on both sides of the aisle and we have made some strides, but clearly more needs to be done.

In fact, Representatives Sweeney, Robinson, and I stand ready to work across the aisle to pass legislation to support multiple proposals that would provide property tax relief to those we serve. Below is a sampling of the bills we support.

H.B. 57 - This bill passed with our votes and adjust the Homestead Exemption for seniors to inflation.

H.B. 60 - The Homestead Exemption Expansion Act would raise the tax exemption of a property's value from \$25,000 to \$40,000, providing nearly \$250 million in targeted relief to an additional 75,000 seniors.

H.B. 187 - The Ohio Homeowners' Relief Act would modify the way counties calculate property values by weighing property values for the past three years rather than just one. This averaging would help protect homeowners from large tax increases as a result of the property valuation adjustments occurring in one year.

H.B. 263 - The 70/70 Plan would freeze property taxes for residents aged 70 and older whose incomes are less than \$70,000.

H.B. 645 – The Circuit Breaker Act would provide a rebate of up to \$1,000 to homeowners and renters whose property taxes or rent exceeds 5% of their income. This would provide nearly \$1 billion in relief for over 1.3 million middle-class homeowners and renters.

I stand with my colleagues in remaining committed to working with our Democratic and Republican colleagues at the Statehouse to provide relief to our current and retired hard working Ohioans.



To watch the press conference visit:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU2T6_OVAUk



State Rep. Brennan Introduces Bipartisan Bill to Address Hunger on Ohio's College and University Campuses

When a bill is introduced into the Ohio House of Representatives it is assigned to a committee and the sponsors of the bill are given the opportunity to provide testimony for the bill to the committee members and answer their questions. Recently, I introduced H.B. 590 with my colleague **Rep. David Dobos (Columbus)** to address the growing problem of food insecurity on Ohio college campuses. Below is an excerpt from my sponsor testimony for our bill.

Members of House Standing Committee on Finance, thank you for allowing us to present sponsor testimony on H.B. 590 to enact the Hunger Free Campus Act.

This legislation comes to you today after much work with a lot of key supporters, including a great cross section of anti-poverty, nutrition, workforce and higher education advocates working in conjunction with Ohio's colleges and universities to craft a program that will effectively assist them in addressing an urgent and often overlooked issue that affects many of today's college students - food insecurity.

When I was a poor college student attending the University of Dayton on a Pell Grant, the Student Choice Grant, and other scholarships in the late 80s and early 90s, food accessibility was typically not a problem. Tuition and housing costs were more affordable and you could grab 3 tacos at Taco Bell or 3 Kraft Mac 'n Cheese packages at Kroger for a buck, for instance. Further, I was a traditional college student – a single guy with no dependents living on campus.

However, today all of these costs are making it tougher for students to find sustainable and affordable food options, especially for the growing number of non-traditional students with children. In fact, I recently learned that the average age of a student at Cleveland State University – my Master's degree alma mater - is 27, so students are now coming from all walks of life. Food insecurity among college students is more common than many realize. In fact, studies show that up to 48% of college students experience food insecurity at some point during their academic journey.

This issue goes beyond mere hunger; it affects students' academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. When students are unsure where their next meal will come from, they struggle to focus in class, perform poorly on exams, and are more likely to drop out. Not having all their basic needs met directly not only leads to lower education attainment, but all the other harmful outcomes that students experience when they are food insecure and living in poverty, like poor mental and physical health outcomes, chronic stress, and making tradeoffs between basic needs. Such initiatives ensure that no student has to choose between paying the electric bill or buying textbooks or groceries, allowing them to concentrate fully on their education.

Many institutions in our state have some sort of basic needs program, but the college student basic needs landscape in Ohio is hodge-podged. There is not consistency on where the pantries live, the size, what is offered, what department they are under, and what you have to prove in order to utilize. On a lot of campuses, especially public and community college campuses, the campus pantries and the quality of them depends on a dedicated staff member to carry the torch and support the funding and grant writing out of the kindness of their heart. Sometimes it's a single staff member going to the local grocer on their day off to buy things for the pantry.

H.B. 590 asks the Chancellor of Higher Education to establish the hunger-free campus grant and designation program. It sets aside \$2.5 million in 2025 that the Chancellor is to award in the form of grants to qualifying institutions, prioritizing institutions with higher percentages of Pell grant-eligible students enrolled. Institutions must use grants to support or leverage existing basic needs infrastructure, maximize federal programs, build strategic partnerships at the local, state, and national levels to address food insecurity among students, and raise awareness on resources available to address basic food needs.

In conclusion, establishing a Hunger Free Campus program is not just about providing meals; it is about supporting the holistic development of our students. It is about ensuring that every student, regardless of their financial background, has the opportunity to thrive academically and personally. By addressing food insecurity, we can build stronger, more resilient campus communities and empower students to achieve their full potential.

I want to thank **Sarah Kuhns and Hope Lane-Gavin at Ohio Foodbanks**, as well as the folks from Swipe Out Hunger and Ohio Campus Compact for their instrument role in this legislation. I also want to thank everyone in Ohio who helps feed our fellow residents, from generous donors, to volunteers, to those who work for our foodbanks and food pantries - you are all doing God's work. It is an honor to carry this legislation and I pray that the members of this committee will support it and, thereby, invest in so many hard working Ohioans seeking to further their educations so that they can improve their lives, the lives of their families, and contribute even more to Ohio's economy. I also want to thank my joint sponsor Representative Dobos for joining me on this important piece of legislation. Finally, I wish to thank the members of the committee - students throughout our great state and we would be honored by your support.



State Representative Brennan Out and About In the District



1 - I was honored to procure nearly \$30,000 in the state capital budget bill for the Lake Erie Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1974 to repair their roof. Thank you veterans for your service to our nation and now for your service to our communities.

2 - Parma Ward 8 Councilwoman Amanda Boyd worked with residents to put on a movie night for the neighborhood. A happy crowd of about 70 enjoyed a beautiful evening together.

3 - Growing up on my grandparents' farms, I have always enjoyed everything agriculture. Here I am with some of the members of Parma's Stearns Farm Homestead Hoofers 4-H contingent at the Cuyahoga County Fair. Great job to all of our young ag experts!

4 - Saying hello to Parma Safety Fair attendee Michelle Eck and her beautiful grandkids.

5 - I make a point of visiting my constituents who turn 99+ each month. Here I am with newly minted 100 year old Nicholas Varju who resides in Parma. What an honor to know this World War II Iwo Jima Marine veteran. His advice for longevity: "Go with the flow."

6 - Anyone who knows me knows that I love parades! Thanks to Cleveland Ward 14 Councilwoman Jasmin Santana for her hospitality during the 2024 Cleveland Puerto Rican festival and parade!