

State Representative **JOHN LAWRENCE**

Serving Chester County

Fall 2026
NEWSLETTER

BIG WIN AT THE PA SUPREME COURT IN THE FIGHT FOR CHESTER WATER AUTHORITY

For over five years, I have been leading efforts at the state Capitol to halt any proposed sale of Chester Water Authority (CWA). In addition to introducing legislation and filing floor amendments on the issue, I pointedly questioned top officials from both the Wolf and Shapiro administrations during public hearings to keep the issue in the spotlight. I also battled and ultimately prevailed against the City of Chester to force the release of documents subject to Pennsylvania's open records law.

While I continue to urge all stakeholders to take any possibility of a sale of CWA off the table, and I continue to try to move legislation in the House to block any sale, the truth is most of the recent action regarding CWA has been in seemingly endless litigation in both state and federal courts.

By way of background, nearly 10 years ago, CWA received an unsolicited \$320 million buyout offer from Aqua, a publicly traded utility company. Aqua later raised the offer to \$410 million.

The board of Chester Water Authority immediately and unanimously rejected the buyout offer. But the City of Chester saw the buyout as a huge financial windfall to pay off debts from the city's decades-long financial mismanagement. This mismanagement was so severe that the governor appointed a receiver to oversee the city's finances in 2020.

The question became – who has the authority to approve a sale of CWA? Is it the City of Chester? Or the board of CWA?

I strongly believe that state law provides the board of CWA with decision-making powers, a position shared by CWA itself and the Chester County Commissioners. The governor-appointed receiver and Chester City officials argued that the city can proceed with a sale on its own.

The dispute ended up in court, where a Delaware County judge sided with CWA. On appeal, Commonwealth Court reversed the lower court decision, ruling the City of Chester could order a sale. That decision was then appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. I filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court in support of CWA, laying out the statutory authority for the board's independence. Former Pennsylvania Speaker of the House Bryan Cutler joined me in this filing.

Hours before the court was to hear the case, the receiver for the City of Chester filed for bankruptcy protection in federal court. Under the federal bankruptcy code, the bankruptcy filing put an immediate halt to all pending litigation involving the City of Chester, including the CWA case before the state Supreme Court. Eventually, the bankruptcy judge granted a petition to allow the case to proceed.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court finally heard the case in May 2025. I was in courtroom for the hearing along with several local CWA advocates and employees. CWA's attorneys made their case, with support from Chester County, while the attorneys for Aqua, the City of Chester, and Delaware County argued positions against CWA. The Justices interrogated the attorneys representing both sides, and at one point during the oral argument my amicus brief was cited and became a point of discussion. After the hearing, I was cautiously optimistic but recognized it is hard to glean how the justices are going to rule by listening to the arguments made in court.

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court finally released its decision, ruling 5-1 in favor of CWA. The court dedicated nearly four pages of its opinion to a discussion of my amicus brief and held that the City of Chester has no unilateral authority to order a sale of CWA. The ruling further outlined the CWA Board's clear authority to determine the future of the water authority. The ruling was a substantial victory for both the ratepayers of CWA and all residents of Chester and Delaware counties.

Shortly thereafter, CWA awarded me and Rep. Cutler with its 2026 Public Water Warrior Award in recognition of our continued efforts in support of CWA's independence.

CWA story continued on page 2...



Earlier this year, Chester Water Authority honored me with its 2026 Public Water Warrior Award for my continued efforts in support of CWA's independence. I am pictured at the Octorara Reservoir Spillway with Jim Turner, CWA Director of Business and Community Relations.

Route 896 Reconstruction to Start Next Year

Growing up in Kemblesville in an old farmhouse about 20 feet off the road, Route 896 has always been a part of my life. Route 896, or New London Road as it is known locally, is a very old road whose present alignment dates to the colonial era. Other than the reconstruction of the Gypsy Hill Road intersection in the early 1980s, and the realignment of the Peacedale Road intersection in 2008, the section of Route 896 from New London to the Maryland state line has been largely ignored by state officials, except for occasional repaving.

That is set to change starting next year, when construction is expected to begin on the Route 896 safety improvement corridor project. This initiative has been in the planning and design stage for nearly 20 years. Bids for the project will go out this fall.

The project does not include drastic changes to the alignment of the roadway. Route 896 is not going to become a four-lane highway. Instead, the idea is to work with the existing alignment and make smaller improvements that lead to a safer traveling experience.

The stretch of Route 896 in Franklin and London Britain townships will see the bulk of the work. Specific improvements include:

- Reconstructing and regrading the area surrounding the intersection of Route 896 and Good Hope Road.
- Reconfiguring the Kemblesville Curve intersection at Appleton Road.
- Addressing the hill/curve on Route 896 between Scotts Glen Road and Casa Italia (formerly Happy Acres).
- Realigning the curve at the Franklin/New London Township line.
- Constructing a left turn lane for southbound Route 896 traffic turning onto Chambers Rock Road.
- Repaving, replacing signs, and widening the entire stretch of road. Much of this stretch of Route 896 currently has limited or non-existent shoulders. The improved road will have at least a small shoulder throughout the area.

I very much look forward to the improved road, recognizing that the construction process will not be without inconvenience. This project has been a long time coming, and certainly part of my effort to bring resources to our seemingly oft-forgotten corner of the state.

If you have questions regarding this or other local PennDOT projects, you can check out PennDOT's District 6 webpage at <https://bit.ly/4fzXJZs> or feel free to call me at the Jennersville office.

SENTENCING GUIDELINES FOR SECOND-DEGREE MURDER IN LIMBO AFTER PA SUPREME COURT RULING

Legislation that moved through the state House in late July regarding felony murder sentencing standards and medical release of incarcerated individuals has received a lot of attention in the last few weeks. Several folks have asked me about it at the grocery store and around town. This legislation has proven controversial and deals with important issues. Therefore, it is worth taking a detailed look at the proposal.

Earlier this year, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court struck down a longstanding Pennsylvania law requiring mandatory life sentences without parole for those convicted of certain second-degree felony murder offenses. Felony murder includes criminal homicide committed during another serious crime – arson, burglary, kidnapping, rape, or robbery. The Supreme Court held that an individual convicted of a second-degree felony murder offense **may** be sentenced to life in prison, but the law **requiring** such a sentence is, in the view of the court, unconstitutional.

The state Supreme Court stayed the decision until July 24, 2026, to give the General Assembly time to appropriately amend the law. If the Legislature failed to do so, the existing law would be of no effect after July 24 – resulting in a situation where there are no statutory sentencing guidelines in place for these crimes.

In response to the court's ruling, the State Senate moved Senate Bill 1400 in late June. The Senate proposal sets a 35-year mandatory minimum sentence for most second-degree felony murder convictions, while reserving life without parole for the most serious offenders – including those convicted of killing a police officer or a child under 13. The Senate passed this bill by a bipartisan 30-20 vote. In my view, Senate Bill 1400 would resolve the issue identified by the Supreme Court and I believe it would easily pass the House if brought up for a vote.

Legislators from across Pennsylvania have very different views on how state law should prescribe sentencing guidelines, especially when it comes to mandatory minimums. For those unfamiliar with the term, a “mandatory minimum” sets minimum jail sentences in statute for serious crimes. Some legislators believe that the law should never require a mandatory minimum jail sentence for any crime. I do not share that view. If an individual is involved in a serious felony offense that results in murder, I believe the punishment for that crime should be hard time in state prison.

The House Majority Leader declined to bring Senate Bill 1400 up for a vote in the House. Instead, the leader waited until the day before the court-ordered deadline to put forward a different proposal, House Bill 1042. That bill was amended a mere three hours before it came up for a final vote in the House and it contained several provisions that I could not support.

First, House Bill 1042, as amended, does not prescribe any sentencing guidelines for second-degree felony murder, instead delegating the development of new guidelines to the Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission. The Commission is currently chaired by Rick Krajewski, whose bio on the commission's website notes he previously served as the “Lead Mass Liberation Organizer” for Reclaim Philadelphia – an organization whose mission includes “work[ing] to end mass incarceration and police and state violence, to abolish punitive systems, and to create lasting alternatives to surveillance and imprisonment.”

While I certainly do not support such views on these matters, more importantly I do not support delegating the development of new sentencing guidelines for felony murder convictions to this commission. The Sentencing Commission plays a role in setting standards for lower-level offenses, but it's the place of Legislature to establish sentencing guidelines for serious felonies, with votes taken by legislators accountable to their constituents.

Second, House Bill 1042 included an additional provision creating a new medical release program for prisoners. The language of this proposal is very broad and not limited to prisoners who are close to death or suffering from a very severe medical condition. The medical release provision applies to any inmate in the state correctional system, even those on death row.

In my time in the State House, I have seen plenty of questionable bills proposed by Legislators on both sides of the aisle. But I have never seen a proposal that was so poorly written and with drastic repercussions on such an important issue, put together a mere three hours before being brought up for final passage in the House.

When the bill came up for a vote, I was the first to raise objections. During a speech in the House chamber, I outlined my opposition to the bill, noting that the medical release provision would apply very broadly. Opposition to the bill also came from the attorney general, the Fraternal Order of Police, and district attorneys across the state on both sides of the aisle.

House Bill 1042 passed the House by a vote of 102-100. I voted “no.” Many believe the bill will be dead-on-arrival in the state Senate.

With the July 24 deadline set by the Supreme Court now in the past, and no new law in place, Pennsylvania currently has no constitutional sentencing framework to address cases of Second-Degree Felony Murder. This is a significant issue. In my view, the House should be in session every day until this is resolved. The governor could call for a Special Session to address this issue, but as of this writing, there has been no indication of such action.

To be clear, I believe those convicted of serious felony crimes that result in the murder of an innocent person should serve hard time in prison, and the minimum prison time for such a crime should be set in law. I do not support delegating the development of felony murder sentencing guidelines to any other bureau, commission, or appointed entity. Nor do I support vague and loose “medical release” provisions that allow those convicted of serious crimes to be released from prison years or even decades before their sentenced release date. That is why I voted no on House Bill 1042. I am very much in support of serious proposals, such as Senate Bill 1400, which garnered bipartisan support in the Senate, conforms with the Supreme Court's recent ruling and ensures those convicted of heinous crimes are appropriately punished.

I strongly encourage you to visit [Replawrence.com](https://www.replawrence.com) to learn more about House Bill 1042 and the latest on this situation. You can also watch my floor speech on the bill.

CWA continued.

CWA specifically thanked us for standing strong with the authority and noted that no other state-level official filed anything in the courts to support CWA.

What's next? While the Supreme Court victory is significant and important, there are still real concerns for the future of CWA's independence. Attention now turns to future appointments to the CWA board – a board that is made up of three appointees each from Chester County, Delaware County, and the City of Chester. One of Chester's longtime appointees who strongly opposed any sale of CWA recently passed away, and the remainder of the board's terms end in late 2027. As this date approaches, it will be critical for anyone interested in CWA's future to be in communication with county leadership. The Chester County Commissioners, the Delaware County Council, and the City Council of Chester City will ultimately decide on these new board appointments.

I will continue to advocate against any sale of CWA both locally and at the state Capitol. For a more detailed review of this issue, along with details on my years-long efforts to preserve CWA's independence, I encourage you to visit [Replawrence.com/CWA](https://www.replawrence.com/CWA).



I recently hosted a group of FFA students from Oxford and Octorara High Schools at the state Capitol for lunch and a discussion on current agricultural issues. FFA, also known as the Future Farmers of America, is a youth organization focused on developing leadership skills and career readiness for students entering agriculture-related fields.



I joined William Penn a.k.a. Bob Gleason at the annual Red Rose Rent day on Aug. 2 in Jennersville. In the early 1700s, the original Penn land grant to the property that now includes the Red Rose Inn specifically required the property's "heirs and assigns forever pay one Red Rose...if same be demanded" as a symbolic rent payment. Penn Township reinstituted the Red Rose Rent Ceremony several years ago as a community event to celebrate local history after beautifully restoring the Red Rose Inn, which was in danger of being demolished after years of inattention. By acquiring the Inn, Penn Township also played a key role in providing the necessary property to successfully realign the intersection at Old Baltimore Pike and Route 796.



For the past 15 years, I have hosted the Pennsylvania Academic Competition at the state Capitol. This annual event brings top students from around Pennsylvania to compete in a Jeopardy-style contest, with the winning team earning the right to compete at the national level. This year's winner was Henderson High School from West Chester. In addition to winning a scholarship for their school, Henderson went on to place 13th at the national competition in Atlanta, Georgia. Congratulations all!



On July 4, I drove my 1969 U.S. Mail Jeep in the West Grove Independence Day parade while my daughters tossed candy to kids in the crowd. Hundreds lined State Road and Prospect Avenue to celebrate America's 250th anniversary. Following the parade, participants gathered for a ceremony at the West Grove Veterans Memorial. I spoke about New London Academy and the impact its graduates had in Colonial America.

State Representative
JOHN LAWRENCE

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JENNERSVILLE OFFICE:

**1 Commerce Blvd.
Second Floor, Suite 200
West Grove, PA 19390
P: 610-869-1602**

CAPITOL OFFICE:

**Room 105, Ryan Office Building
P.O. Box 202013
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2013
P: 717-260-6117**

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One Year After Opening, ChristianaCare West Grove Hospital is Thriving in a Grateful Community

After Tower Health unexpectedly closed the old Jennersville Hospital, my number one priority was bringing quality emergency medical care back to southern Chester County. After a tremendous amount of hard work by many dedicated folks over several years, the results have been truly remarkable and certainly beyond what many anticipated could be possible.

The ChristianaCare West Grove Neighborhood Hospital opened with much celebration last August, and since then it has become an important access point for care in southern Chester County and the surrounding region. The hospital's well-trained and caring staff has been well-received by the community.

In the past year, the campus recorded more than 14,400 Emergency Department visits, including more than 2,000 ambulance arrivals. Nearly 600 patients were admitted for inpatient care as well.

The most common inpatient diagnoses have included pneumonia, respiratory failure, and sepsis, while the leading reasons for Emergency Department visits

have been chest pain, urinary tract infections, and head injuries. The primary service areas for patients have been Oxford, West Grove, and Lincoln University.

Certainly, no one wants to find themselves in need of a trip to the hospital, but it is incredibly reassuring to have high-quality emergency services right here in our community. The hospital is outfitted with brand-new MRI and x-ray machines, an on-site lab, and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to handle heart attacks, strokes, broken bones, and other emergencies.

I am very grateful to everyone at ChristianaCare, elected officials from the local, county, state, and federal levels, local business leaders and other stakeholders who worked together with me as a team to deliver this tremendous resource for our community.

For more information on the hospital, check out ChristianaCare's West Grove campus website at <https://christianacare.org/us/en/facilities/west-grove>.



Recently I met with ChristianaCare leadership at the reopened hospital in Jennersville, where I thanked them on behalf of a grateful community and provided lunch for the hospital staff from Earl's Sub Shop in Avondale.