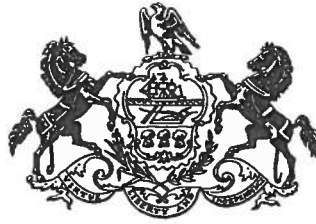


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MEMO



Senate of Pennsylvania

December 8, 2010

**TO:** ALL SENATORS

**FROM:** Stewart J. Greenleaf *Stewart*

**SUBJECT:** Cosponsorship – **Pennsylvania Office of Faith-Based and Non-profit Community Organizations**

I am reintroducing **Senate Bill 1118**, legislation that would establish the Pennsylvania Office of Faith-Based and Non-profit Community Organizations within the Office of the Governor.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania benefits from a rich diversity of faith-based and non-profit community organizations that provide crucial aid to many Pennsylvania residents, including assistance for the needy, children, families, and neighborhoods. Committed volunteers in faith-based and non-profit community organizations bring unique skills, services, and resources to bear in assisting Pennsylvania residents. There are many opportunities for these groups to partner with governmental entities to help deliver vital services in our communities, such as giving ex-offenders a second chance at work. However, many community groups, both secular and faith-based, lack the organizational resources to effectively engage government agencies in collaborative projects to help meet the needs of Pennsylvania residents.

Through the establishment of an Office of Faith-Based and Non-profit Community Organizations, Pennsylvania residents can benefit from a comprehensive and coordinated effort to improve and strengthen grassroots and faith-based groups in our state, thus building on the many partnerships that already exist. It can also help to identify any barriers that may exist to fair competition for government funding and propose any changes that would level the playing field for faith-based and non-profit community organizations. This will enable government to choose the most effective partner to provide the public services, maximizing taxpayer dollars.

Under the bill, the Office will provide a point of contact for organizations to receive information, assistance, and referrals related to faith-based and non-profit community organization programs within state government, including the development of a website. It will also assist all Commonwealth agencies in developing relationships, as appropriate, with grassroots and faith-based groups. Other powers and duties of the Office include assisting organizations in identifying and applying for federal grants, facilitating or providing grant writing training, organizational development and other technical assistance and training to help organizations develop increased capacity to provide services. The Office will be managed by an executive director appointed by the Governor.

The measure also establishes a 25 member Advisory Commission within the Office consisting of twelve public officials (i.e., Secretaries of Welfare, Corrections, Agriculture) and 15 non-governmental members. Eleven of the members shall be appointed by the Governor. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Minority Leader of the Senate shall each appoint one member. Non-governmental members include representatives from the faith-based community, neighborhood organizations, business community, not-for-profit providers of health and social services and other community leaders throughout the state.

The Advisory Commission shall: 1) Identify innovative and model faith-based and non-profit community organization programs, initiatives, and best practices which the office may promote and share with organizations; 2) Advise and assist the Governor and the Office in identifying obstacles that may prevent greater utilization of faith-based and non-profit community organizations by state government and help all Commonwealth agencies in ensuring that their operations help to promote utilization of faith-based and neighborhood partnerships; 3) Advise the Office and Governor in the establishment of policy regarding matters affecting faith-based and non-profit community organizations; and 4) Assist the Office in periodically convening conferences for technical assistance and training to help organizations develop increased capacity to provide services.

The creation of an office aimed at promoting partnerships between government and faith-based/community groups is not new. President Obama has charged his White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships with strengthening and expanding federal collaborations with community and faith-based groups. This continues the federal initiative begun under President Bush, which built on momentum during President Clinton's administration, with the enactment of Charitable Choice legislation and creation of a HUD Center for Interfaith and Community Partnerships. To date, 36 states and some cities have formally established faith-community liaisons. Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare has since 1996 worked to expand its collaboration with community-based and faith-based groups. The proposed office would build on that important work, helping other state agencies better connect with and support faith-based and secular community groups that do so much to help their neighbors in need.

*If you are interested in cosponsoring this legislation, please contact Pat Snively of my office by e-mailing her at [psnively@pasen.gov](mailto:psnively@pasen.gov).*