



Public Policy Forum
The Road to Recovery: Business Leading the Way
Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Senate President Steve Sweeney

Senate President Steve Sweeney represents the Third Legislative District, which includes portions of Gloucester and Cumberland counties and all of Salem County.

Steve Sweeney entered public service after his daughter was born with Down syndrome. Horrified at the manner in which individuals with disabilities were treated, he vowed to make a difference not just in his daughter's life, but in the lives of those in his community.

He served on the Gloucester County Board of Chosen Freeholders from 1997 to 2010 and was Freeholder Director from 1998 until 2010. During that time, he helped county taxpayers save \$30 million through innovative programs that promoted shared services. As a result, Senator Sweeney was named a "Politician Who's Ahead of the Curve" by Philadelphia Magazine for his cost saving initiative.

Senator Sweeney was selected by his colleagues in the Democratic Majority to lead the Senate a record of six terms, starting in the 214th Legislature in 2009 after he took the oath as Senate President on January 12, 2010. He was selected by his fellow Senate Democrats to maintain his leadership position again in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

An ironworker by trade, Senator Sweeney has taken the lessons he has learned to advocate on behalf of organized labor, the rights of workers and the needs of working families. He repeatedly sponsored laws to raise New Jersey's minimum wage, including a constitutional amendment requiring regular cost-of-living increases, and he advocated for legislation to protect unemployment funds from being diverted so they are there for those who need them. Senator Sweeney also wrote the legislation creating New Jersey's Paid Family Leave program, learning from his experience with his newborn daughter when he spent nearly two months in the hospital after she was born.

Senator Sweeney also sponsored legislation to establish marriage equality for all New Jersey residents. He has also sponsored bills to provide equal pay for women, for a "Sexual Assault Bill of Rights" for victims of assault and to require earned sick leave.

As Senate President, he has taken a leading role in promoting property tax relief, replenishing the Transportation Trust Fund and refocusing the state's fiscal priorities. In 2011, Senator Sweeney proposed sweeping reforms to the public employee pension and health benefits



systems that will save taxpayers over \$120 billion over a 30 year period and will save the pensions of hundreds of thousands of public employees. The reforms have been hailed as a national model for other states. He also authored laws to increase funding for the state's pension systems and require quarterly payments, bringing savings and greater fiscal stability to state finances. Senator Sweeney was also instrumental in crafting the state's two-percent cap law to help hold down property taxes.

In 2018, Senate President Sweeney established a bipartisan panel of legislators and economic experts to develop reforms that address the state's most challenging fiscal problems. The Economic and Fiscal Policy Workgroup issued a series of far-reaching recommendations, the "Path to Progress" report, which will help to avert crisis conditions, maintain fiscal stability, reduce the costs of government and allow the state to support vital needs and services.

Senator Sweeney has also fought for full and fair funding for all of New Jersey's schools, sponsoring "The School Funding Reform Act" to advance educational opportunities and hold down property taxes, and authoring the "Vocational Education Bond Act" to provide vocational job training and increase school security and he fought for additional state support for Extraordinary Special Education for special needs students.

Senator Sweeney also has sponsored numerous laws to strengthen the ability of law enforcement to protect children from sex offenders and protect the families of police officers, firefighters and emergency services personnel killed in the line of duty. He also sponsored a plan to create a statewide network of Child Advocacy Centers that provide safe places for abused children.

The Senate President has held a strong environmental record sponsoring a law that expands the development of offshore wind energy, paving the way for the state to become the nation's wind-energy manufacturing hub, and he led the fight to ban the hazardous gasoline additive MTBE. Senator Sweeney is a lifelong supporter of farmland and open space preservation, and has worked to deliver funding to protect pristine land from development. He also authored the bill to ban smoking on New Jersey's beaches.

Senator Sweeney was born on June 11, 1959 in Camden.