



Legislative Update from

State Representative

Marc J. Gergely

35th Legislative District

WORKING FOR YOU

FALL 2016

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State budget passes with increased education funding

Citing an increase in education funding that will help students in the 35th Legislative District, Rep. Gergely voted in favor of the 2016-17 state budget that was fully finalized by mid-July.

The budget signed by the governor represents a true compromise between Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate, along with the governor's office. It provides a solid investment in our education system – including basic, special and higher education – without a broad-based tax increase that hits our working families hardest.

The investment in our education system includes a \$200 million increase for basic education, a \$20 million increase in special education and a \$40 million increase in higher education. The higher education funding will benefit state-related universities, the 14 members of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and the state's 14 community colleges, by providing a 2.5-percent increase in funding. Additionally, 2.5-percent increases will go to institutional grants benefiting private colleges and universities, and to the Pennsylvania Higher Education

Assistance Agency that benefits students attending public and private institutions.

Early childhood education funding received a \$30 million increase, while \$15 million of new funding was included to fight Pennsylvania's growing opioid epidemic, which you can read more about later in this newsletter.

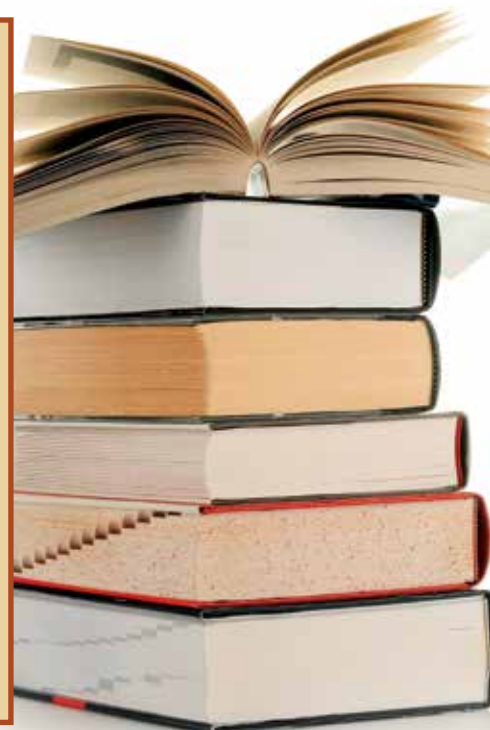
The increased education funding will be distributed based on a new funding formula put together by the Basic Education Funding Commission, which held multiple meetings across the state with parents, teachers and administrators to put together a new funding formula that Gov. Tom Wolf signed into law earlier this year.

The new formula includes student-weighted factors to account for the additional cost to educate students who live in deep and moderate poverty, as well as extra costs for districts with a high concentration of poverty.

The formula also includes district-weighted factors, like a sparsity adjustment to account for the lack of economics of scale in rural areas, and recommends the state consider the local tax base of districts so those lacking capacity to help themselves receive additional state support.

In the 35th Legislative District, the new formula resulted in the following education increases for local school districts:

	<u>Basic Education</u>	<u>Special Education</u>
Clairton City School District	\$226,717 (3.2%)	\$21,695 (2.1%)
Duquesne City School District	\$393,162 (3.5%)	\$12,530 (1.9%)
McKeesport Area School District	\$756,312 (3.2%)	\$63,714 (2.1%)
South Allegheny School District	\$183,598 (1.9%)	\$35,392 (3.1%)
Steel Valley School District	\$213,382 (2.4%)	\$36,100 (2.7%)
West Mifflin School District	\$360,424 (5.3%)	\$45,494 (2.3%)



Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program accepting applications through Dec. 31

The deadline to apply for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended through Dec. 31.

This program provides a state rebate on paid 2015 property taxes or rent to income-eligible residents 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older.

To be eligible, your household income must be \$35,000 or less if you are a homeowner, or \$15,000 or less if you are a renter.

When applying, you only have to count half of your Social Security or federal railroad retirement Tier I benefits toward your total income.

You can obtain information about the program, an application and free help applying through Rep. Gergely's district office or on the state Department of Revenue's website at www.revenue.pa.gov.

There is no charge to apply. If you receive an offer to apply for a fee, please disregard it.

Expanded wine sales through modernization

The House this spring passed and the governor signed into law legislation that would allow the sale of wine-to-go in restaurants and grocery stores, and make the sale of wine more convenient for Pennsylvania consumers.

Rep. Gergely voted for the legislation because it modernized the state-store system, which annually delivers millions of dollars to help balance the state budget and provides nearly 5,000 good-paying jobs to Pennsylvania residents with the potential to create more jobs.

Act 39 of 2016 gives the Liquor Control Board more flexibility to set competitive prices, offer discounts and set state liquor store hours in ways that are better and more convenient for consumers. It also permits the direct shipment of wine by licensed producers to consumers at their homes.

The measure is projected to increase state revenues by almost \$150 million in the fiscal year that began July 1. Pennsylvanians could see wine in grocery stores, select restaurants and hotels by Thanksgiving.



Medical marijuana update

Pennsylvania has passed a law that allows for the medically appropriate use of marijuana. This new law is long overdue and Rep. Gergely hopes it will help many seriously ill children and adults.

Many of the new law's parts will take effect over the next year and a half, but one important note is that as of May 16, a parent of a child who suffers from one of the qualifying illnesses will be immune from prosecution for possessing medical marijuana that was legally purchased in another state. Caregivers must apply for a Safe Harbor letter and carry it with them whenever medical marijuana is being transported outside the home.

All patients will be required to receive a Department of Health Medical Marijuana ID card.

Gov. Wolf signed the historic medical marijuana bill in April.

Among the 17 approved medical conditions are:

- HIV/AIDS
- ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease)
- Cancer
- Epilepsy or intractable seizures
- Parkinson's disease.

For more information, including a complete list of approved medical conditions, please visit this website (follow capitalization in the link): <http://bit.ly/201Yq3J>.



Special session planned on opioid epidemic

In June, both Republican and Democratic members of the House of Representatives joined Gov. Wolf for a Capitol news conference to highlight the details of a joint effort to combat Pennsylvania's opioid and heroin crisis.

Far too often, people are becoming addicted to opioid painkillers and seeking a stronger, more easily accessible drug, thus turning to heroin. Make no mistake – opioid addiction can hit any family in any community. This is not a rural versus urban issue or a rich versus poor issue. Families from all walks of life have lost loved ones to this crisis and unless we act it's only going to get worse.

The situation has become so serious that the Pennsylvania Medical Society has called the growing opioid abuse crisis in Pennsylvania an epidemic that has hit our state particularly hard. Nearly 2,500 deaths were reported in Pennsylvania as a result of drug overdoses in 2014. That's more deaths than occur in car accidents.

To attack this problem, we must work on a multi-pronged solution with physicians, patients, health care groups, the community and each other. This problem can't be

legislated away, but the General Assembly can take steps to reduce the threat of opioid addiction and Rep. Gergely looks forward to working toward that in the fall.



Members from both sides of the aisle joined Gov. Tom Wolf in signaling a bipartisan effort to tackle Pennsylvania's opioid crisis.

Local fire companies receive state grants



In April, the latest round of grants made possible by the Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program were announced, and a total of 14 fire and ambulance companies in the 35th Legislative District received an award.

Local fire and ambulance companies are made up of volunteers who sacrifice their own time and safety for the safety of others. These men and women are a vital part of the community, and when the first sign of danger appears, they drop everything and run toward that danger. For that, they deserve unending thanks.

The grants may be used for repairing, building or renovating facilities; the money can also be applied toward the purchase of new equipment, training and certification of staff; or it can go to repay debt related to equipment purchases or facility building and maintenance. This grant program was set to expire on June 30 of this year, but Rep. Gergely is proud to have voted for legislation, since signed into law, that extends the program another four years.

Fire and EMS companies in the 35th Legislative District that received grants are:

Duquesne Annex Volunteer Fire Company	\$11,967.12
Duquesne Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,878.46
Clairton Volunteer Fire Department	\$13,789.79
Clairton Volunteer Fire Department EMS	\$6,481.70
City of McKeesport Fire Department	\$13,561.96
Fire Department of North Versailles	\$13,789.79
Fire Department of North Versailles EMS	\$7,201.70
Munhall Area Prehospital Services	\$7,201.70
Munhall Fire and Rescue Company 5	\$12,422.79
Munhall Volunteer Fire Company No. 1	\$13,561.96
Munhall Volunteer Fire Company No. 2	\$23,467.12
Skyview Volunteer Fire Company West Mifflin #4	\$13,106.29
West Mifflin Volunteer Fire Company No. 3	\$13,561.96
Lincoln Borough Vol. Fire & Rescue Company No. 1	\$13,334.12

Working to expand seniors' prescription coverage

Recently, the state House of Representatives unanimously passed legislation that would expand prescription drug coverage to over 32,000 older Pennsylvanians by increasing income eligibility guidelines for the PACENET program.

The program covers people with incomes exceeding the PACE maximum income limit, and it's been more than a dozen years since the PACENET income limits have been increased. By updating the income limits, we can ensure access to affordable prescription drugs and help thousands of senior citizens maintain their quality of life.

House Bill 2069 would increase the annual maximum income limits in the PACENET program to \$31,000 for a single person and to \$41,000 for a married couple.

Current maximum annual income limits for the PACENET program are \$23,500 for an individual and \$31,500 for a married couple.

The PACE and PACENET programs offer lower-cost prescription medications to qualified residents 65 or older, thanks to roughly \$200 million a year in funding from the Pennsylvania Lottery. Advancing this measure will bring even more life-saving medicines to older Pennsylvanians.

H.B. 2069 is now under consideration in the state Senate.

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Are you registered to vote?

If you weren't aware, Oct. 11 is the deadline to register to vote in the upcoming General Election on Nov. 8. In Pennsylvania, it's now easier than ever to register to vote. Simply go online to www.votespa.com and you can complete your voter registration quickly and easily.

Other important dates to remember:

Nov. 1: Last day to file an application for a civilian absentee ballot

Nov. 4: Last day to return a completed civilian absentee ballot.

For questions, you can contact Rep. Gergely's office or call the Allegheny County Elections Division office at (412) 350-4500.

Persian Gulf bonus deadline extended through August 2018

The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has extended the state's Persian Gulf Conflict Veterans' Bonus Program through Aug. 31, 2018.

Under the program, eligible veterans of the first Persian Gulf Conflict in 1990-91 can receive \$75 for each month of service in the Persian Gulf Theater of Operations. Prisoners of war and the families of troops who died as a result of the war can receive \$5,000.

Anyone who served in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserve component, or the Pennsylvania National Guard in the Persian Gulf Conflict between Aug. 2, 1990 and Aug. 31, 1991 may be eligible.

The deadline to apply for this benefit is now Aug. 31, 2018. More details about the program are available at www.dmva.pa.gov by clicking on the "Veterans Affairs" tab, or by calling the program's toll-free number at 1-866-458-9182.