



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Joseph A. PETRARCA

55TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



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HEALTH CARE REPORT

Legislation would continue access to health care for children

Earlier this year, I voted to extend the Children's Health Insurance Program through Dec. 31, 2017.

Since 1992, CHIP has been covering children of working, low-income families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but too little to buy private insurance. Since then, CHIP has helped hundreds of thousands of families afford health insurance coverage for their children, and this bill will ensure it continues to do so.

CHIP provides free and low-cost health insurance to children from birth through age 18. It covers immunizations, check-ups, diagnostic testing, prescriptions, dental, vision and hearing services, emergency care, mental health benefits, hospitalization and substance abuse rehabilitation, among other services. The cost of the insurance depends on a family's income.

When it was created, CHIP was a one-of-a-kind program, the first in the nation, and the federal government used Pennsylvania's program as the model for its State Children's Health Insurance Program.

Currently, statewide, 148,137 children are enrolled in CHIP. In Westmoreland County, 4,168 are enrolled, 903 in Armstrong County and 922 in Indiana County.

In 2006, I voted to expand CHIP and cover additional families, and since then, the legislature has periodically voted to reauthorize CHIP every few years. I also voted to end the requirement that children go without insurance for six months before being able to enroll in CHIP when the program was last reauthorized in 2013.

The bill (H.B. 857) awaits action by the state Senate.

To find out more or to see if your child is eligible, contact one of my constituent service offices or visit CHIP online at www.chipcoverspakids.com.

New law allows pharmacists to administer flu shots to children

This fall, parents will have more options to vaccinate their children from the flu, through a new state law that I supported.

The law will allow children as young as 9 to be immunized at a local pharmacy with parental consent, and eliminates a Pennsylvania requirement that only physicians could administer flu vaccines to school-age children. The law also will allow licensed pharmacy interns under the direct supervision of a pharmacist to administer the vaccine.

These changes took effect in late August.

The bill's intention is to increase vaccination rates and slow the spread of the flu, by expanding availability and convenience to families.

About 40 percent of Pennsylvania children did not receive a vaccination during the 2013-14 flu season, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. From late September to late June, there were more than 55,000 cases of the flu in Pennsylvania, according to the state Health Department. During that period, 216 people died as a result of the flu, including four children.





Task force working toward acceptable medical marijuana bill

Leadership in the state House of Representatives has asked me to be part of a bipartisan group of legislators to craft legislation on medical marijuana that would be passable by the House.

At issue are competing bills before the House. Both would legalize the use of medical marijuana in the commonwealth, but some believe S.B. 3 is too broad, while others believe H.B. 1432 is too narrow. Although each of the bills has its supporters, the belief is that neither bill would garner enough votes for passage.

Many in the General Assembly support legalizing medical marijuana, but, as they say, the devil is in the details. The hope is that this task force can develop a workable proposal that the majority of House members will support.

Medical marijuana as a palliative care option is one that an overwhelming number of people in the state want to see made available. It has the capability to ease the pain and suffering from debilitating conditions for which, in some cases, there is no other option for relief. If we can help those suffering, including offering a more normal childhood to children who suffer from multiple, sometimes even hundreds of, seizures a day, we need to do all that we can to make this option available in Pennsylvania. We must tailor the legislation narrowly to ensure that it will be used only for specific medical situations.

A June poll showed that nearly 90 percent of registered voters support the use of medical marijuana.

The task force, which is composed of five Democrats and five Republicans, plans to start drafting language for a proposal as soon as possible.

Bill that would ban e-cigarette, vaping sales to kids passes House



A bill that would ban the sale to minors of electronic cigarettes, vaporizing products and other devices used to ingest nicotine passed the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in June.

The legislation (H.B. 954) also would ban nicotine products from school grounds, including increasingly popular “vaping” products and electronic cigarettes.

We all know nicotine is extremely addictive, and products used to ingest it should not be available to minors. These products certainly do not have any place in and around our schools where young people can be tempted to start a destructive habit.

The bill awaits action by the state Senate.

Legislation would create state chief nursing officer

Earlier this year, the state House of Representatives passed a bill, that I co-sponsored, which would name a chief nursing officer of the commonwealth. The CNO of the commonwealth would fill a void in the Department of Health and would be modeled from the role of the physician general.

THE ROLE OF THE CNO OF THE COMMONWEALTH WOULD INCLUDE:

- Advising the governor and the secretary of Health on health policy.
- Participating in the decision-making process of the Health Department on policies relating to all nursing and public health-related issues.
- Reviewing professional standards and practices in nursing and public health.
- Consulting with recognized experts on nursing and public health matters.
- Providing advice on nursing and public health.
- Coordinating educational, informational and other programs for the promotion of wellness, public health and related nursing issues in the commonwealth and serving as the primary advocate for these programs.
- Consulting with experts in the commonwealth and other states regarding health-care research, innovation and development which relate to programs and issues of importance to the department and the commonwealth.

THE CNO WOULD HAVE TO MEET THE FOLLOWING QUALIFICATIONS:

- Be a graduate of an accredited school of nursing.
- Be a registered nurse with an unencumbered license issued by the commonwealth.
- Have at least 10 years of experience as an R.N.
- Have an advanced degree in nursing or public health.

The office of CNO would remain vacant if the secretary of Health is an R.N.

Registered nurses are the largest licensed professionals in the commonwealth and play an integral role in shaping the health care environment. It is imperative that the General Assembly and governor include registered nurses and other members of the health delivery team in health care-related decisions.

The legislation (H.B. 389) awaits action by the state Senate.

Mental health awareness required for law enforcement

A new state law will provide training for law enforcement officials and members of the judicial system on identifying and interacting with people suffering from mental illness, intellectual disabilities and autism.

The legislation moved through the House Judiciary Committee, of which I am the Democratic chairman.



The law requires police officers and the minor judiciary, such as magisterial district judges, to receive training on the recognition and proper de-escalation techniques to be used when interacting with people with mental illness, intellectual disabilities or autism.

Municipal police officers will be required to receive training through the Municipal Police Officers' Education and Training Commission. Training for magisterial district judges will be done through continuing education requirements and would need to take place every six years.

Step one is getting the appropriate training. Step two is putting it to work. I cannot stress enough the importance of de-escalation techniques that will be part of the trainings. If a police officer can quickly identify a person experiencing a mental breakdown and use proven crisis intervention techniques to de-escalate a situation, we have a public safety victory.

Additionally, the training will include instruction on diversionary options. It will include information on services available for people with mental illness, intellectual disabilities or autism.

Do you have difficulty paying for your prescriptions?

Pennsylvania's PACE program can help

PACE, PACENET and PACE Plus Medicare are Pennsylvania's prescription assistance programs for senior citizens. The programs offer low-cost prescription medication to eligible Pennsylvania residents who meet the income qualifications.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for PACE and PACENET, you must be:

- 65 or older
- A Pennsylvania resident for at least 90 days prior to application
- NOT enrolled in the Department of Human Services' Medicaid prescription benefit

What are the income qualifications?

PACE and PACENET eligibility is determined by your previous calendar year's income.

PACE

- For a single person, total income must be \$14,500 or less
- For a married couple, combined total income must be \$17,700 or less

PACENET

- For a single person, total income can be between \$14,500 and \$23,500
- For a married couple, combined total income can be between \$17,700 and \$31,500

What is PACE Plus Medicare?

Under PACE Plus Medicare, PACE/PACENET coverage is supplemented by federal Medicare Part D prescription coverage and offers older Pennsylvanians the best benefits of both programs. Older adults continue to receive the same prescription benefits while, in many cases, saving more money.

My office can provide you with more information about PACE, PACENET and PACE Plus Medicare, and help you with the application process.





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Give the Gift of Life

Each day, about 77 people in the United States receive an organ transplant, but another 18 on the waiting list die because not enough organs are available.

Being an organ donor can mean saving the life of someone who needs a heart or a kidney transplant. Donating tissue can restore a burn victim's skin, replace a damaged cornea, or even replace damaged veins or heart valves. Donors have the potential to save many lives and offer peace of mind to help one's family heal.



Becoming an eligible organ donor is free, easy, and anyone can do it. One can become an organ donor when applying for or renewing a state identification card or driver's license.

Anyone over 18 is eligible to become a donor.

If you have reservations about organ/tissue donation but want to help, make a donation to The Governor Robert P. Casey Memorial Organ Tissue Awareness Fund and mail it to:

Pennsylvania Department of Health
Bureau of Administrative and Financial Services
Division of Budget
P.O. Box 90, Room 832
Health & Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA 17108

For more information on organ and tissue donation, call **1-877-PA HEALTH** or contact my office.



Stay up to date!

You can stay updated on my legislative activities in Harrisburg and state-related issues that affect your life. Just "Like" my legislative Facebook page: www.facebook.com/RepJoePetrarca or sign up for email alerts on my webpage, www.pahouse.com/Petrarca.

My office can help you with:

- Free notary service
- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- PACE prescription-drug cards for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups