

# **GREG VITALI**

STATE REPRESENTATIVE — 166TH DISTRICT

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## ***LEGISLATIVE REPORT***

**AUGUST 2016**

# **GREG VITALI**

**STATE REPRESENTATIVE — 166TH DISTRICT**

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## ***New law will make alcohol purchases more convenient***

A recently enacted state law will improve customer convenience when purchasing alcohol in Pennsylvania. The law allows:

- Customers to purchase up to four bottles of wine at restaurants, grocery stores and hotels.
- Customers to buy wine from a licensed wine producer, such as a winery, over the internet and have it shipped directly to their home.
- More Wine and Spirit Stores to be open Sundays and holidays, and to have longer hours.
- Wineries, distilleries and breweries to sell their products at farmer's markets.

- Beer, wine and liquor to be sold at casinos 24 hours a day.
- Some gas stations with restaurant licenses to sell beer to go.

The new law provides safeguards in the sale of alcohol, including prohibiting powdered alcohol products from being sold or possessed within the commonwealth. All alcohol service employees are also required to complete Responsible Alcohol Management Training.

The new law goes into effect Aug. 8, but it may take several months for customers to see some of these changes.

## ***Home energy efficiency loans available***

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The Keystone HELP Energy Efficiency Loan Program offers low-rate loans for home energy efficiency improvements. These improvements include insulation, new heating and cooling systems, energy efficient windows and doors, Energy Star appliances and more.

Loans are available in amounts ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000 and come with a fixed interest rate of 4.99

percent. There is no penalty for pre-payment.

This program is a public-private partnership with the Pennsylvania Treasury and Pennvest.

This program is available for Pennsylvania homeowners who meet certain income requirements and are using the funds for their primary residence.

For more information, visit [www.keystonehelp.com](http://www.keystonehelp.com).

## ***Judicial retirement referendum may again appear on ballot***

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When voters go to the polls in November, they may be asked to vote on the following ballot question:

*“Shall the Pennsylvania Constitution be amended to require that justices of the Supreme Court, judges, and magisterial district judges be retired on the last day of the calendar year in which they attain the age of 75 years?”*

Currently, judges are required to retire at the end of the year during which they turn 70.

This change would apply to all judges in the state, including Supreme Court Justices, Superior Court Justices, Commonwealth Court Justices, Court of Common Pleas Judges and local District Justices.

This question was on the April primary ballot but that vote was invalidated by the General Assembly shortly before the election. The question has since been reworded.

Supporters of the referendum argue that judges are living longer and should be allowed to serve longer, while opponents believe that our justice system is improved when new voices are added to the bench.

The outcome of this referendum has political considerations, particularly with the future makeup of the state Supreme Court. The question is currently the subject of multiple lawsuits, which make it possible that it may not be on the fall ballot or its results will again be invalidated.

## ***Department of Revenue creates unit to combat tax-related identity theft***

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If you are a victim of tax-related identity theft, there is a new place to turn for help.

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue launched a new Personal Income Tax Fraud Investigation Unit dedicated to assisting victims of identity theft and combating tax refund fraud.

The goal of the new unit is to help ID theft victims resolve fraudulent tax refund issues as soon as possible.

Tax-related identity theft occurs when stolen information is used to file a tax return in someone

else’s name to obtain a fraudulent refund.

For more information, visit the Department of Revenue’s website at [www.revenue.pa.gov/GetAssistance](http://www.revenue.pa.gov/GetAssistance) and click on Identify Theft and Victim Assistance.

If you are a victim of identity theft or discover a fraudulent Pennsylvania Personal Income Tax Return was filed in your name, call the Fraud Investigation Unit at 717-772-9297 or email them at [RA-RVPITFRAUD@pa.gov](mailto:RA-RVPITFRAUD@pa.gov).

## ***Join my email update list***

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I maintain an email list to provide you with the latest information about public meetings, traffic alerts, community events, state and local programs and services, and other items of interest to the community. If you would like to be added to my email list, please email my office at [RepVitali@pahouse.net](mailto:RepVitali@pahouse.net) with your name, full address and telephone number.

## ***New law changes child car seat rules***

Under current law, all children under 4 must be in a car seat when riding in a vehicle. That requirement doesn't change, but a new provision has been added to require that all children under 2 must be in a rear-facing car seat.

However, a child under 2 will not be required to be

rear-facing if the child has outgrown the maximum height and weight requirements of the car seat manufacturer.

The law takes effect Aug. 11. For the first year a violation will result in a warning but after that violations will result in a \$125 fine.

## ***New law allows parents and spouses to obtain disability license plates***

Under a new law, a parent or spouse of a person with a qualifying disability is eligible to apply for a disability license plate. Previously, only the person with a disability could request the license plate. A plate was only issued if the person with the disability was the owner/co-owner of the car.

A disability plate allows a vehicle to be parked in spaces designated for disabled persons. Under certain circumstances, upon request of a person with a disability, local authorities may erect a sign on a roadway as close as possible to the person's residence

indicating that the place is reserved for the person with a disability.

Qualifying disabilities include: blindness, limited use of an arm or both arms; inability to walk 200 feet without stopping to rest; restriction by lung disease; use of portable oxygen; a cardiac condition; or severe limitation in the ability to walk due to arthritic, neurological or orthopedic condition.

This law goes into effect on Sept. 20. To apply for a disability license plate, you can obtain the application online at [www.dmv.pa.gov](http://www.dmv.pa.gov) or contact my office.

## ***New driving-under-the-influence interlock law***

A new state law expands the one-year mandatory ignition interlock requirement to first-time DUI offenders with a blood alcohol content of .10 percent or higher. Current law requires second and subsequent offenders and those who refuse chemical testing to install ignition interlock for one year after serving their required license suspension.

The law gives first-time DUI offenders the option of applying for a newly created ignition interlock limited license immediately, as opposed to serving a suspension.

The new requirement will not apply to individuals who enter into the court system's accelerated rehabilitative disposition (ARD) program, which is a pre-trial diversionary program.

An ignition interlock is a device attached to the ignition system of a vehicle. In order to start the vehicle, the driver must blow into the device. If a measurable amount of alcohol is detected, the vehicle will not start.

The law takes effect in August 2017.

## ***Deadline for Property Tax/Rent Rebate extended***

The deadline to apply to the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for a rebate on property taxes or rent paid in 2015 has been extended from June 30 until Dec. 31, 2016.

The program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and people with disabilities 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters. Half of Social Security income and all Social Security cost-of-living increases are excluded, and the maximum standard rebate is \$650.

Claimants must reapply for rebates every year because they are based on annual income and property taxes or rent paid each year. Spouses, personal representatives or estates may file rebate claims on behalf of deceased claimants who lived at least one day in 2015 and meet all other eligibility criteria.

The state began distributing rebates on July 1 to those who have already applied to the program.

The application is available on the Department of Revenue's website at [www.revenue.pa.gov](http://www.revenue.pa.gov) or at my office.

## ***Upcoming household hazardous waste collections***

There will be several household hazardous waste collections in the southeastern Pennsylvania region through the end of the year. All events will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., rain or shine.

- **Sunday, Sept. 18 at Penn State University** – Brandywine Campus, 25 Yearsley Mill Road, Media.
- **Sunday, Oct. 16 at the Lower Merion Transfer Station** – 1300 N. Woodbine Ave., Penn Valley.
- **Saturday, Oct. 22 at the Emergency Services Training Center** – 1700 Calcon Hook Road, Sharon Hill.

Household hazardous waste includes household products labeled poisonous, toxic, flammable,

caustic, corrosive, reactive or explosive. Items containing Freon and electronic waste will not be accepted.

For more information about collections in Delaware County, you may call the Delaware County Solid Waste Authority at 610-892-9627 or visit [www.co.delaware.pa.us/SWA](http://www.co.delaware.pa.us/SWA).

For more information about collections in Montgomery County, you may call the Montgomery County recycling hotline at 610-278-3618 or visit [www.montcopa.org/recycling](http://www.montcopa.org/recycling).

For a complete listing of collections in the five-county southeastern Pennsylvania region, visit my website, [www.pahouse.com/Vitali](http://www.pahouse.com/Vitali) and click on “Local 2016 recycling schedules.”

## ***Tax Amnesty Program encourages payment of back taxes***

Pennsylvania recently enacted a Tax Amnesty Program. It will allow for payment of delinquent taxes to the state without fees, interest, penalties and prosecution. The goal of this program is to raise revenue for the 2016-17 state budget.

The program will be offered during a 60-day period that will occur before June 30, 2017. The specific date has not been set. Any tax collected by the Department of Revenue can be eligible for the program, including personal income taxes, corporate taxes, and estate or inheritance taxes.

Those owing taxes from previous years who have

been notified that they have not been paid on time as of Dec. 31, 2015 will be eligible for the program. Those who owe taxes the Department of Revenue is currently unaware of – such as unfiled taxes or underreported incomes from previous years that have not yet been marked as late or unpaid, but could be discovered through an audit – may also be eligible for this program.

The program will not be offered to any individual that has been the subject of a criminal investigation or judicial proceeding for an alleged violation of tax law.

For more information, contact my office.

## ***Centers opening later this year to treat opioid addiction***

The recently completed state budget includes \$15 million for the establishment of Centers of Excellence across the state for treatment of Pennsylvanians with opioid-related substance use disorder.

Illegal opioid drugs, such as heroin and legally available pain relievers such as oxycodone and hydrocodone, can cause serious health effects in those who misuse them.

The strategy at these centers involves both behavioral therapy and FDA-approved medication that individuals take to help curb cravings and manage withdrawal symptoms.

The Centers of Excellence will be licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol

Programs as drug and alcohol providers that provide one of the three medications (buprenorphine, methadone and naltrexone) for the treatment of opioid dependency.

Local centers expected to open by Oct. 1 include: Crozer-Keystone Health System’s Community Hospital in Chester; Resources for Human Development Inc./ Montgomery County Methadone Center; the Penn Foundation Inc. in Bucks County; and at Temple University, Thomas Jefferson Narcotic Addiction Treatment/Maternal Addiction Treatment and Wedge Medical Center Inc., in Philadelphia County.

For more information, visit [www.ddap.pa.gov/overdose](http://www.ddap.pa.gov/overdose).