



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Joseph A. PETRARCA

55TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Summer 2016



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WOMEN & FAMILY UPDATE

Medical marijuana legal in Pa.



At the bill signing of historic medical marijuana legislation.

The need for medical marijuana was brought to my attention by a woman in my district whose son suffers from many seizures every day. The more this concerned mother talked about the relief available from medical marijuana, the more determined I became to help this family, and others like them, gain access to this medicine.

In April, Pennsylvania became the 24th state where medical marijuana is legally available, thanks to a new law I helped get through the legislative process.

The law allows Pennsylvanians with any of 17 qualifying medical conditions to use medical marijuana.

The effort to make this happen was a long process, but is one that I am proud of. I was part of a bipartisan task force that met weekly over the summer and fall of 2015 and made recommendations for what ultimately became the law. Our task was twofold: to permit the use of medical marijuana, so that Pennsylvanians suffering from debilitating conditions and illnesses can obtain palliative care, while strictly regulating and controlling the use of medical marijuana.

Under the law, medical marijuana will be dispensed through licensed distributors and available to those certified by their physicians to benefit from the drug. The law also will regulate the growing, processing and dispensing of the product.

The Health Department is working to implement the medical marijuana program in Pennsylvania, and temporary regulations are expected to be issued by the end of the year for growers/processors; dispensaries/laboratories; physicians; and patients/caregivers. The temporary regulations will be in place until the formal program is up and running.

THE 17 QUALIFYING MEDICAL CONDITIONS

- Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)
■ Autism
■ Cancer
■ Crohn's disease
■ Damage to the nervous tissue of the spinal cord with objective neurological indication of intractable spasticity
■ Epilepsy
■ Glaucoma
■ HIV/AIDS
■ Huntington's disease
■ Inflammatory bowel syndrome
■ Intractable seizures
■ Multiple sclerosis
■ Neuropathies
■ Parkinson's disease
■ Post-traumatic stress disorder
■ Severe chronic or intractable pain of neuropathic origin or severe chronic or intractable pain in which conventional therapies is contraindicated or ineffective
■ Sickle cell anemia

Safe Harbor letters for medical marijuana now available

A provision in the new medical marijuana law permits Pennsylvania parents, legal guardians, caregivers and spouses to possess and administer medical marijuana obtained from outside the state to minors in their care.

This is done with what the Health Department is calling a Safe Harbor Letter. Continued on next page

Safe Harbor letters

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Once approved, this letter should be carried whenever medical marijuana is being transported outside of an individual's home.

The letter may be applied for online at <https://apps.health.pa.gov/PASafeHarbor>, but all applicants will need a photo ID, a criminal record background check and a Safe Harbor Letter Physician Form from the minor's Pennsylvania-licensed doctor. Legal guardians also will need to provide guardianship papers, while spouses must provide a marriage certificate, and caregivers, proof of caregiver status.

Please keep in mind that while this letter may cover this activity in Pennsylvania, the U.S. Department of Justice still considers marijuana a controlled substance and has the authority to enforce laws relating to its use and possession.

For more information about any aspect of the new medical marijuana law, please contact one of my offices.

Taking control of one's health

When we have medical tests done, we tend to assume that "no news is good news," meaning the results were normal if we don't hear back from the doctor. However, health care providers face increasing caseloads and more paperwork than ever, which can increase the chance of misread test results or even the results being overlooked entirely.

I support a bill that would require a summary of medical imaging test results that include a significant abnormality to be sent directly to the patient or designee, in addition to the physician. A "significant abnormality" is defined as a finding that requires follow up medical care within three months.

This proposal would allow patients to be more proactive in their health care and provide a safety net in case there is any breakdown in communication between a physician and his or her patient. The bill passed the House with my support and is now in the state Senate.

Infant car seats must be rear facing



Children already must be properly and securely fastened in an approved child safety car seat, but a new law, which goes into effect in mid-August, requires children younger than 2 to be secured in a rear-facing safety seat.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that infants should ride in rear-facing car seats, and the American Academy of Pediatrics says a rear-facing seat does a better job at protecting an infant's head, neck and spine because it distributes the force of a collision over the entire body. Now, our state law follows these guidelines, too.

Other aspects of Pa.'s child car seat law:

Car safety seat — infants to age 4

Booster seat — children 4-8

Seat belt — children 8 to 17

Remember: failure to do any of the above is a primary offense. That means police can make a traffic stop just for this.

My organ transplant anti-discrimination bill passes House

When a mom was told by the medical transplant team that her disabled son was being removed from the transplant list because he is disabled, she made it her mission to change that. I and many others heard her story and went to work to correct this injustice.



I sponsored a bill that would prohibit discrimination against any potential organ transplant recipient on the basis of a physical or mental disability.

House Bill 585, which is now before the state Senate for consideration, would prevent a person with a disability from being deemed ineligible for a transplant simply because of his or her disability, unless a doctor determines the disability is medically significant to receiving the organ donation.

Under the bill, as long as the person has the necessary support system to help ensure he or she can comply with post-transplant recovery, his or her inability to independently comply would not be deemed medically significant.



Fighting the battle against opioid addiction

Opioid addiction is the primary cause of the prevalent drug problems and deaths in our area. To that end, I participated in a Westmoreland County roundtable earlier this summer at Saint Vincent College with Gov. Tom Wolf to discuss initiatives in fighting the scourge of opioid addiction and the challenges we face locally and as a state.

The magnitude of the addiction and overdose death epidemic in Pennsylvania is shocking: at least seven Pennsylvanians die every day from a drug overdose. It's very apparent that a collaborative effort on the federal, state and local levels is crucial in combating this crisis.

Work has already begun. The legislature has enacted the following:

- Act 191 of 2014 created a program to ensure that information on potentially harmful prescription opioids could be collected and monitored by appropriate authorities, so law enforcement can monitor physicians who may be over prescribing;
- Act 139 of 2014, allows law enforcement and emergency responders to administer naloxone – the life-saving drug that can reverse opioid overdoses – and provide “good Samaritan” immunity for those responding to and reporting overdoses;
- Act 80 of 2015, created a pilot grant program for addiction services at state correctional facilities and post-release, relapse-prevention treatments; and
- Act 37 of 2016, allows the state Secretary of Health to add substances to the controlled substances list to keep pace with the designer drug trade.

In addition, a special session will be called in the fall to specifically address this issue.

Pennsylvania has made great strides tackling the scourge of opioid prescription drug abuse, but much more needs to be done.

Chemotherapy options just got easier

A bill I supported is now law that will help Pennsylvanians suffering from cancer.

It requires health insurance providers that cover intravenous cancer chemotherapy to equally cover oral chemotherapy treatment. Previously, some health insurers had placed oral chemo drugs on a specialty tier, which meant it cost more to use that drug for treatment.

This bill forces insurers to treat oral chemo the same as the more traditional intravenous chemo, giving patients the opportunity to choose their best treatment option, without the stress of unnecessary financial burden.

Forty states already have passed similar laws.

Pa. launches Zika virus prevention and awareness campaign

The state Health Department has launched its Zika Virus Prevention and Awareness Campaign to increase awareness of the virus and urge precautions when traveling to Zika-affected areas.

Posters with Zika virus prevention tips are in all airports in the state that have international destinations, including Pittsburgh.

The campaign notes that because no vaccine or treatment for Zika virus currently exists, the best way to avoid contracting the virus is to prevent mosquito bites by:

- Using insect repellent products containing DEET;
- Wearing light-colored, lightweight, loose-fitting clothing that covers hands, arms, legs and other exposed skin;
- Staying and sleeping in air-conditioned or screened rooms or under a mosquito net when outdoors; and
- Staying indoors when mosquitoes are most active.

No cases of Zika in Pennsylvania or in the continental U.S. have occurred from locally acquired infections. The only confirmed cases of Zika in Pennsylvania are in people who contracted the virus while visiting areas where the virus is actively spreading, such as Mexico, South America and the Caribbean.

However, the risks of locally acquired Zika infections are expected to increase as summer progresses. The Department of Environmental Protection is monitoring for the presence of mosquitos associated with Zika transmission and will implement control measures when needed.

Carbon monoxide detectors required in nursing homes

This law, which was signed in June, requires long-term care nursing facilities, personal care homes and other assisted living residences that use fossil-fuel heating systems to install carbon monoxide detectors.

This is a common-sense law that will save lives. Carbon monoxide detectors are just as important as smoke alarms and fire extinguishers in protecting lives, especially in facilities that care for senior citizens.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that's produced any time you burn fuel in vehicles, stoves, lanterns, grills, fireplaces or furnaces. Carbon monoxide can build up indoors and poison people and animals who breathe it.

The carbon monoxide poisoning rate is highest among people older than 65.



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Protecting abused spouses

There's a new law on the books that's designed to break down barriers for victims of spousal abuse.

Previously, an abuser could force his spouse to stay in an abusive marriage for two years simply by refusing to consent to a divorce. Additionally, the court could force the victim to attend up to three counseling sessions, further endangering her by forcing continued interaction with her spousal abuser.

The new law prevents that trap by presuming consent of the divorce if the abusive spouse has been convicted of a personal injury crime against the victim, thereby finalizing the divorce in 90 days.

No one should have to stay in an abusive marriage because of a manipulative spouse. This law gives the victims legal rights and protections to get out of the marriage quickly.



The House Judiciary Committee, of which Rep. Joe Petrarca is Democratic chairman, held hearings and discussions on this bill before it became law. From left, Rep. Mike Schlossberg, who introduced the bill; Gov. Tom Wolf; Mary Cochran, one of Petrarca's legislative staffers, and Sarah Speed, the Judiciary Committee's Democratic executive director, at the bill signing ceremony in Allentown earlier this year.

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
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Birth and death certificates
- 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