



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Fall 2016

Joseph A. PETRARCA

55TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



CAPITOL OFFICE

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DISTRICT OFFICES

620 N. Chestnut St.
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901 Jefferson St.
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BUDGET PASSES

Petrarca votes against tax increases

I'm happy to report the state budget passed and was signed into law. It means those who rely on and provide social services, those who plan to attend college with financial aid and our public schools won't have to suffer from uncertainty.

It increases school funding statewide, and locally by nearly \$1.5 million, which should help prevent property taxes from rising. Check out the chart to see how your school district fared.

Higher education also saw an increase in state funding, which benefits state-owned, state-related, community colleges and universities across the state, including Pitt, Penn State, IUP, and Westmoreland, Armstrong and Indiana community colleges. And, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) also saw an increase in funding to help students with financial aid.

This budget also includes extra funding to treat heroin abuse, as well as new funding to reduce waiting lists for home- and community-based services to help seniors stay in their own homes and adults with intellectual disabilities stay in their communities. Funding also was provided for up to 180 new state troopers.

However, I am disappointed the budget included tax increases, which I did not support. **As you may know, I have never voted for a tax increase of any kind, ever.**

There were no broad-based increases, but the tax increases are applied to cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, lottery winnings and digital downloads — all products used by working families. I did not see the benefit of placing an extra burden on working families without also reducing local school property taxes, which did not happen.

Still more needs to be done, including school property tax reform and pension reform, and I look forward to addressing those issues in the future, without the specter of an unfinished budget looming over the state.

School District	Total formula-based education funding increase over last year
Apollo-Ridge	\$202,073
Blairsville-Saltsburg	\$205,052
Derry Area	\$234,802
Greater Latrobe	\$359,654
Kiski Area	\$362,204
Leechburg Area	\$114,195

Petrarca bill to fight child abuse, animal cruelty

There are a number of studies that connect animal abuse to family violence. Based on that, I have introduced a bill (H.B. 2007) that would require the cross-reporting of these types of potential abuse cases.

Essentially, my bill would be another tool in the toolbox in the fight against child abuse. It's widely acknowledged that animal abuse can be a precursor to violence against a person, so it makes sense to have those tasked with investigating animal abuse to report anything they may see or suspect regarding child abuse when they are performing their job. The same would apply to child welfare workers. If they witness or see signs of animal abuse, they would have to report it, as well.

Law enforcement and animal and child welfare agencies have increasingly recognized the benefit of working cooperatively to stop abuse. I think it makes sense.



On April 17, the governor signed the medical marijuana bill into law. I was part of the bipartisan task force that regularly met last fall to craft the law that permits the use of medical marijuana, while strictly regulating its use, and the growing, processing and dispensing of the product. Under the new law, Pennsylvanians with any of 17 qualifying medical conditions, including cancer, epilepsy and post-traumatic stress disorder can use medical marijuana with a doctor's order.

Judiciary Committee Update

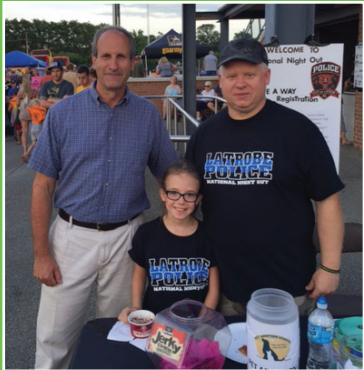
I chair the House Judiciary Committee, which is one of the most active committees in the House, reviewing and acting on hundreds of bills. The committee usually meets weekly — and sometimes more than that — to review and debate issues, bills and policies. Of the 365 bills that have been referred to my committee, nearly 100 have been reported out and a significant number of those have become law.

As chairman, I have been able to bring government officials to the district. In July, Gov. Tom Wolf and other important stakeholders came to discuss opioid addiction and the devastating problems of overdoses. I am happy that we will convene a special session of the legislature on the opioid epidemic this fall. In August, I convened a

Judiciary Committee meeting in our area on police body cameras. It is important that we totally vet this issue to properly balance the concerns of the public while ensuring the safety of our officers.

I also support recently introduced legislation to make attacks on police officers a hate crime in Pennsylvania.

Good to be with the residents to support local police at the National Night Out event.



Cracking down on distracted driving

Studies have shown that distracted driving makes a person 23 more times likely to crash, and it can be just as dangerous as drunken driving. There were 66 fatalities last year due to distracted driving, and more than 300 fatalities in Pennsylvania over the last five years.

That's why I'm working on a measure to prohibit calls made on handheld mobile devices while driving. It would not prohibit hands-free calls, nor calls

made during emergency situations or by law enforcement or emergency service providers.

Distracted driving is a problem and we are all at risk.

Additionally, my committee had the opportunity to consider H.B. 853, which would toughen penalties for distracted-driving accidents.

The bill, which is now poised for a final vote in the Senate, was introduced after a motorcyclist was killed in 2013

when a driver who was texting struck his motorcycle from behind.

Currently, the penalty is a summary offense with a \$50 fine. The legislation would bring the penalty for distracted-driving accidents in line with drunken driving offenses, such as homicide by vehicle and aggravated assault while under the influence.

This sends a message that distracted driving is unacceptable, and it's a message I support.

Removing undue influence of special interests

I have and continue to be concerned about the undue influence of special interests in Harrisburg. That is why I am supporting a number of bills that would improve transparency in government and reduce the disproportionate influence special interests have in Pennsylvania politics.

I've already introduced legislation, H.B. 1972, that would prohibit legislators and the administration from being paid until a budget bill is enacted. I led by example and did not take my pay until last year's budget was passed. There is more we can do to fix what is broken in Harrisburg.

In addition to H.B. 1972, I am supporting:

- Banning all gifts to public officials worth more than \$25 (H.B. 1933);
- Limiting legislators' outside income to 35 percent of their base legislator salary (H.B. 566);
- Requiring public officials and employees to disclose the amount earned from employment other than their public employment (H.B. 567);
- Prohibiting public officials from holding a financial interest in contracts above \$2,500 with municipalities in their jurisdiction (H.B. 1979);
- Limiting campaign contributions and requiring shareholder approval of corporate campaign contributions (H.B. 1980);
- Prohibiting registered lobbyists from acting as campaign consultants or receiving compensation for campaign-related services (H.B. 1978); and
- Requiring full disclosure of funding sources for unaffiliated "issue ads" (H.B. 1982) and for issue ads advocating for or against specific candidates (H.B. 1695).

I think special interests hold too much influence over the political process. These bills are a comprehensive approach for improving government and helping to protect the people's interests.

Petrarca works hard to save you money!

In what has become an annual tradition, I am returning unused expense account money to the taxpayers. These are your hard-earned dollars, and I remain conscious of that and very careful about how I use them. I have returned over \$275,000 in unused expense money since I was first elected. This money is unexpended funds the House authorizes for my legislative expenses, postage and the operation of my district offices.

Legislative expense accounts are a controversial issue, and rightfully so. I use taxpayer money to benefit you by operating my local district offices and sending you periodic information about important state programs, issues and services. I maintain offices in Vandergrift, Derry and Latrobe at a very low cost. Due to the large geographic makeup of my district, these locations work well for the communities I serve.

I do not charge dinners to my expense account as some do; I have never flown to Harrisburg as some do; and I do not lease a car at taxpayer expense as many do. I will continue to be a responsible steward of taxpayer money, and I will continue to provide the high quality of service that you deserve.

Additionally, I have never voted for a legislative pay raise or pension increase.

House passes Petrarca’s statute of limitations bill

Earlier this year, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed a bill I co-sponsored that would abolish the criminal statute of limitations for future criminal prosecutions for child sexual-abuse crimes relating to a wide array of serious charges, including human trafficking, sexual servitude, rape, statutory sexual assault and crimes involving institutional sexual assault. In other words, this bill allows for prosecution of suspects no matter how much time has passed since the crime was committed.

The bill also would increase the length of time, from age 30 to age 50, for when child sexual abuse victims could file civil claims. And, it would waive sovereign immunity for state and local public institutions in cases of gross negligence, which would allow civil cases to be filed against them. Too many times, institutions have escaped responsibility for their failure to protect those entrusted to their care.

Abolishing the criminal statute of limitations will send a message to abusers that they no longer can be free from prosecution simply because the statute of limitations expired on their crime before they could be brought to justice.

Expanded wine sales, improved convenience on tap

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

The goal of the legislation is to modernize rather than dismantle a state store system that annually delivers millions of dollars to help balance the state budget and provide over 5,000 good-paying jobs to Pennsylvania residents with the potential to create more jobs.

I am pushing the legislature to update laws relating to beer distributors this fall to ensure they remain competitive.

Here’s what Act 39 of 2016 allows:

- Grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants and hotels to sell wine
- Direct wine shipments by the case
- Expanded hours — state liquor stores can be open on Sundays and holidays
- Ability for PLCB to take advantage of better pricing on wine and liquor and offer coupons and loyalty programs in state stores
- Expanded hours for selling beer, wine and liquors at casinos
- An expected \$150 million a year in generated revenue

Around the District



It’s always fun to visit the Derry Township Agricultural Fair. The committee did a marvelous job and this is a wonderful community event.



Despite some rain, the Festa Italiana di Vandergrift was a great time as always.



I enjoyed talking with constituents at the Unity Township senior picnic.



Wonderful times in Latrobe with my friends at the VFD serving pierogies again this year and at the Fred Rogers commemoration.



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Upcoming Events

Rep. Petrarca's Senior Fairs

Thursday, Oct. 6, 9 a.m. to noon
School House Hall, Oklahoma
and

Friday, Oct. 7, 9 a.m. to noon
Huber Hall, Latrobe

I encourage senior citizens to come out and get valuable information from my staff, as well as numerous agencies about different programs and benefits for which they may qualify. The event is free, with various giveaways and chances to win door prizes. Flu and pneumonia shots will be available with your Medicare Part B or insurance cards. Some of the agencies attending are the PA Office of Consumer Advocate, Social Security, different utility companies, health care agencies, home and assisted-care agencies, and many, many more. I hope to see you there!

- **State Trooper Stephen J. Limani also will be on-hand to give a presentation on senior safety. The Diabetes Prevention Program Coordinator for the Ligonier Valley YMCA also will speak.**

Fall Shredding Events

Monday, Oct. 3, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Derry Township Municipal Building
and

Monday, Oct. 10, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Vandergrift VFD #1 parking lot

I encourage everyone to protect yourself from identity theft. This is an opportunity for people to destroy unwanted documents that contain personal information and could be used by identity thieves. Bring all of the documents you no longer need that contain personal information, including Social Security numbers, credit card numbers and bank account numbers. All paper will be shredded on site.

There is a three box limit (average size, please).

- **WE CANNOT ACCEPT:** Phone books, spiral notebooks, binders, floppy discs, CD/DVDs, bound books or magazines, steel binder clips, steel ACCO fasteners and other hard metal or plastic materials.


I hope to see you at these events!

Stay up to date!

Connect with me on social media!

You can stay updated on my legislative activities and state-related issues that affect your life. Just "Like" my legislative Facebook page or sign up for email alerts on my webpage.

 www.facebook.com/RepJoePetrarca

 www.pahouse.com/Petrarca

Jury duty exemption for those 75 or older

A new law permits people 75 or older to opt out of jury duty. Pennsylvania is now one of 27 states that exempts elderly people from serving on juries.

If you are selected for jury duty and do not wish to serve because you are 75 or older, you may note that in the appropriate section of the jury questionnaire.



We had a great crowd on my recent bus trip to the Capitol.