



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

# Joseph A. PETRARCA

55TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Summer 2019



#### CAPITOL OFFICE

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P.O. Box 202055  
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239 Longfellow St.  
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(724) 567-6982

#### DISTRICT OFFICES

620 N. Chestnut St.  
Derry, PA 15627  
(724) 694-5298

Latrobe Municipal Building  
901 Jefferson St.  
Latrobe, PA 15650  
(724) 539-7560

## SENIOR UPDATE

### Protecting the Medical Assistance Transportation Program

In recent weeks, you may have heard about a plan to change the Medical Assistance Transportation Program, or MATP. This is a program that provides transportation for Medical Assistance recipients who do not have reliable transportation available to them for medical appointments, visits and appointments to pharmacies, dentists and other providers.

My colleagues in the House and I are concerned about a plan that was put in place by the state Department of Human Services, which mandates that these shared ride services must go through a statewide or regional vendor, instead of county or locally based services. This could pose significant issues for the more rural and sparsely populated areas of our state.

Two bills have been introduced, one in the House and one in the Senate, that would ask DHS to hold off on enacting this plan until a thorough review has taken place that would look at access, community needs and resources statewide.

Currently, there are some serious concerns that this plan, while being touted as saving money,

could actually cost the state more. Other programs contributing to the state's shared ride system could be affected, such as the senior shared ride program. It could also impact service hours available for transportation, a change in providers, and could result in a potential for higher costs for clients.

Bottom line: We need to see how this plan will truly impact people. What may work in Pittsburgh or Johnstown may not work in Latrobe, Derry or Vandergrift. We need to ensure our most vulnerable citizens – those with disabilities and seniors – get access to the care they need and deserve.



### Farmers Market Nutrition Program

If you are 60 or older, you may qualify for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), which provides fresh, nutritious, locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs from approved farmers markets in Pennsylvania.

Seniors must be 60 or older by Dec. 31 of the program year and meet income eligibility guidelines.

Recipients are given a list of participating farmers and farmers markets, where they receive SFMNP checks that can be redeemed for fresh fruits and vegetables grown in Pennsylvania.



Contact your county Area Agency on Aging office to find out more and to apply:

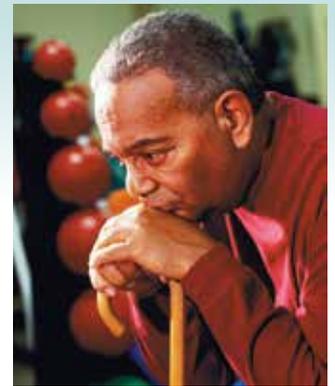
- Armstrong County: 724-548-3290
- Indiana County: 724-349-4500
- Westmoreland County: 724-830-4444

# Identity Theft Prevention

Our great state is home to 2 million seniors, considered one of the highest senior citizen populations in the country.

However, seniors can also be among the most likely to become victims of identity theft.

According to the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, many criminals seek out seniors as vulnerable targets to profit off them. Nationally, seniors lose \$3 billion each year to scams and fraud.



## HERE ARE SOME PREVENTION TIPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM IDENTITY FRAUD:

### DOCUMENT SHREDDING

One of the more common methods of identity theft involves 'dumpster-diving,' where a thief will root through a person's trash in search of documents with sensitive information.

Ensuring these documents are properly disposed, primarily through shredding, is a good way to prevent identity theft from happening to you.

#### Documents that should be considered for shredding include:

- bank statements
- credit card bills
- receipts
- utility bills
- ATM receipts
- pre-approved credit offers
- old medical records or receipts

### SAFE ONLINE BEHAVIOR

Be mindful of passwords you use for websites, including those you may frequent for online shopping or banking.



Try to memorize these passwords, as they'll be less likely to be detected by a potential identity thief. NEVER use your Social Security number as a password and be

sure to update your passwords on a regular basis.

When you're shopping online, make sure you're using a secure site, as denoted by an 'https' URL in your web browser's address or by a small padlock in the lower righthand corner of your web browser. The 'https' or the lock means that your data won't be accessed by would-be thieves.

Also make sure your computer, laptop, or other device (like an iPad) has the most up-to-date virus protection, which will go a long way in protecting you from any malicious programs that could record information about your website visits or personal information you may have saved on your device.

### USE CAUTION IN PROVIDING YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION

If you're asked to provide information, like your Social Security number, account number or credit card number by email, letter or phone, be suspicious.

If the communication you received is from an existing account or government program that you're currently enrolled in, the person or entity contacting you should already have this information.

When in doubt, don't provide this information, whether over the phone, by email/internet or letter. Instead, reach out to the entity/company/organization for a trusted phone number to ensure the communication that was provided to you is legitimate.

### ADDITIONAL TIPS TO AVOID SCAMS AND FRAUD

**Secure your mail:** Never leave your mail unchecked for long periods of time, as identity thieves often look to steal sensitive information or documents from mailboxes. If you plan on being away, contact the U.S. Postal Service toll free at 1-800-275-8777 and ask that it hold your mail until you return. You can also opt out of junk mail by contacting the sender and requesting to be removed from the distribution list. You can call 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (888-567-8688) to be removed from its mailing lists for free credit card offers.

**Check your credit report:** it's a good idea to check your credit report at least once a year to get your credit score and correct any erroneous information that may appear on your report. You're entitled to a free credit report every 12 months. For more information, visit the Annual Credit Report site, which is a centralized site where every consumer gets access to their free credit report granted by federal law: [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com).

**Be aware of email and call scams (ex: IRS, Social Security):** If you receive a call or email that appears to be from the IRS, Social Security or other entity, it could likely be a scam. Hang up immediately if it's a phone call and delete any questionable emails. The IRS – or any other credible government agency – does not call or email you to demand immediate payment.

# Free help with Property Tax/Rent Rebate and Property Tax Assistance



My offices have applications available for the state's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program. You can contact any of my offices for an application and for FREE help with applying. The application deadline is traditionally June 30 but has been extended to the end of the year.

This program, which permits many state residents to receive rebates on property taxes or rent paid in the previous year (2018 for this year's program), is open to 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 is excluded, and the maximum standard rebate is \$650.

Claimants must reapply for rebates every year, since 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 2018 and meet all other eligibility criteria.

A law that I supported ensures Pennsylvania veterans who receive a state-provided stipend related to their military service will not be shut out of this program if it puts them over the income limit. This law also ensures that federal Veterans Administration benefits do not push a veteran over the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program income limit.

Our offices can also assist you with resources and information if you are struggling to pay for property taxes.

## Does the state have something that belongs to you?

Approximately one out of every 10 Pennsylvanians has unclaimed property with the state. Does the commonwealth have something that belongs to you? I'm working with the state Treasurer's Office to return more than \$3.4 billion in unclaimed property to its rightful owners.

Examples of unclaimed property include:

- Closed bank accounts
- Uncashed checks
- Lost stocks and bonds
- Contents of safe deposit boxes
- Expired gift cards
- Insurance policies



Please contact my offices to receive free help in determining whether you have unclaimed property.

## New hire, changes at Latrobe office

I'd like to announce that Shannon Cypher has joined my district office staff as a legislative assistant and will be working daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Latrobe office, located in the Latrobe Municipal Building at Jefferson Street.

Cypher, who has experience in state government, is well-versed in handling a variety of issues and concerns for constituents.

It's vital that as elected officials, we be accessible to the people we serve. Shannon is excited to help constituents with various PennDOT and Department of Revenue forms, as well as answer any questions about state services, programs and notary services.

The Latrobe office can be reached at (724) 539-7560.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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## My office can help you with:

- Car registrations, special tags, titles and license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Unemployment compensation problems
- Birth certificate applications
- Finding unclaimed property held by the state Treasurer's Office
- Pennsylvania income tax problems
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, welfare)
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, PA maps, senior citizen info, etc.
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the PUC
- City government officials' problems with state agencies
- Citations from the PA House of Representatives for outstanding local accomplishments and family milestones
- Consumer complaints
- Complaints about state road conditions
- Problems or questions about PennDOT
- Disability plates and placards
- Tours of the State Capitol for individuals or groups
- PACE cards for senior citizens
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- Free notary service

**Any questions you have about state government!**

## Senior Discounts

While many restaurants and retail shops offer valuable discounts to seniors, you may not be aware that the commonwealth provides discounts to seniors for a variety of state services. Here are a few that you may want to consider:

### Hunting and fishing licenses

The state Fish and Boat and state Game commissions make it easier on the wallet for seniors to enjoy fishing and hunting in Pennsylvania.

Seniors 65 or older may purchase yearly hunting and fishing licenses at reduced rates of \$13.90 for a hunting license and \$11.90 for a fishing license. Lifetime licenses are also available at \$51.90 for hunting or fishing.

You can find out more information on fishing licenses, the latest stocking guides, fishing information for your region and more by visiting the state Fish and Boat Commission website at [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com).

Game news, state game lands maps and other helpful information can be found on the Pennsylvania Game Commission's website at [www.pgc.pa.gov](http://www.pgc.pa.gov).

### Reduced automobile registrations

PennDOT offers retired Pennsylvanians earning less than \$19,200 annually a reduced yearly automobile registration rate of \$10, compared to the normal \$37 (\$38 after July). The income limit to qualify for this discount is per person, it is NOT based on household income.