

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Bob Merski

REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

OF THE 2ND LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



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A look back at 2019 ...

As my staff and I enter our second year serving the 2nd Legislative District, I am very proud of our commitment to the people of Erie.

With transparency and accountability in mind, I want to share all our work with you, the taxpayer. I truly believe good government is “of the people, for the people, and by the people,” which is why I make it a point to be as engaged in the community as possible.

As you can see from the graphic, 2019 was a busy year. I am proud to report that we brought back \$23 million to the district, working with the entire delegation to make sure Erie gets its fair share of state dollars.

Our office has helped more than 5,600 people with state services such as PennDOT, rent and tax rebates, EMTA bus passes and issues navigating state government.

We proudly branched out from our district office, providing over 640 hours of service in satellite locations including Erie City Hall, the Summit Township Municipal Building and the GECAC Senior Center West on 8th and Cranberry. These satellite offices allow us to engage directly with you, for convenience and outreach in the community.



In Harrisburg, as a freshman, I sponsored five bills, co-sponsored more 120 bills and cast over 900 votes. This job is important to me because YOU are important to me. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as your state Representative.

... and a look ahead to 2020

In addition to my work in Harrisburg, staff and I have many exciting events planned for the year ahead. Some of those include:

- a *Senior Caregiver Seminar* to help those caring for elderly friends and relatives. The event will be held from 4 p.m. – 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 26 in the Community Room at 100 State Street.
- a *Voting Workshop*, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of State and Erie County Board of Elections, to highlight changes in the voting law

and explain the new voting machines. Details to come

- a program in partnership with the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Office to talk to students about the dangers of vaping. Details to come.
- *Property Tax/Rent Rebate Workshop*. Times and locations to be announced.

We do all of this with you, our community, in mind. This is your state government, and we’re committed to doing all we can for a better Erie.

We look forward to serving you in 2020!



My bills to bolster safety, help military spouses

The year ahead promises to be a busy one. In addition to serving you here at home, I'll be working hard in Harrisburg to pass laws that make our community as strong, safe and productive as possible.

In the coming months, I'll be working to pass my bills that would:

- *Ensure safer childcare facilities.* This legislation, which I co-wrote with state Rep. Pat Harkins, would strengthen fire safety regulations governing childcare facilities by requiring the state to check all smoke detectors during annual inspections and requiring facilities to install interconnected smoke detectors so occupants would have time to escape, regardless of where in the building a fire starts.
- *Provide a path to freedom for human trafficking victims.* My bill would help captives in these desperate situations by mandating that life-saving hotline information be posted in public restrooms – considered to be the safest places for trafficking victims to ask for help – on mirrors, in the stalls and near hand dryers.
- *Extend tax breaks to military members' spouses.* Active-duty service members are entitled to tax exemptions for their service income. My bill would extend this tax benefit to the spouses who live with active-duty service members deployed outside Pennsylvania, to make life easier for those who provide such important companionship and support to their family members in uniform.

In addition to my own legislation, I'll be working hard to pass other bills that address critical issues, including the high number of Pennsylvanians struggling to afford their prescription medications.

I'm proud to be co-sponsoring legislation that would help lower the costs of prescription medications by creating a state oversight board with the power to set pricing limits. The bill would also create a pathway to drug importation in the event a drug company refuses to sell medication at the purchasing limit.

I'm also co-sponsoring a bill that would help cities like Erie, which have many non-profit organizations, obtain state funding from the Johnstown Flood Tax.

I'll keep you posted on these measures in the months ahead!

New law boosts PA National Guard, helps military families

A new law will help boost retention rates for Pennsylvania's National Guard while expanding educational opportunities for Guard members' families.

Under the Military Family Education Program, which was signed into law last summer, Guard members who re-enlist for a second term can now earn some college benefits for their spouses or children at any Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency school.

I supported the law because I believe it will help ensure that our Guard remains one of the most powerful in the nation while also giving something back to the military families who sacrifice so much on our behalf.

2020 bringing changes to the ballot box



New laws going into effect this year will make voting more accessible and convenient for Pennsylvania residents.

Some of the changes will make it easier to vote by mail. For example, unlike in past years, you will no longer have to provide an excuse if you wish to vote by mail.

There is also more time to request a mail-in or absentee ballot, which you can now do up to 50 days before Election Day. After you complete your mail-in or absentee ballot, you will have until 8 p.m. on Election Day to submit it.

Also new this year, you can request to be placed on a permanent mail-in ballot list. Once you're on the list, you will receive a mail-in ballot application every February. If you complete and return it, the county will send you ballots for all elections taking place that year.

Voters also will have more time to register under the new laws. The deadline is now 15 days before an election, rather than 30 days before.

Finally, new voting machines will keep our elections more secure by creating a paper trail!



Sunday hunting coming to PA

Great news for sportsmen: a new law ends the ban on Sunday hunting, allowing Pennsylvania to join the many states that have already done so.

The new law will allow hunting on three Sundays per year: one during rifle deer season, one during statewide archery deer season, and a third date to be determined by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The law also requires hunters to obtain a landowner's written permission before hunting on their land on these Sundays, and it strengthens penalties for trespassing.

Around the District



My Medical Marijuana information session drew an inquisitive crowd.



The Little Italy Farmers Market is a great place to connect with residents.



It was exciting to attend the opening of the Sports Book at PI Downs and Casino.



Above: Community members found great information at our Second Chance Expo.



Left: At the dedication of the LECOM Pharmacy Grand Opening.



At the dedication of the Flo Fabrizio Ice Center.



Young adults from around the community shared great ideas at our Millennial Brunch.



'Coffee with a Cop' was a great opportunity to trade thoughts with some of our area's finest.



Our home heating workshop was a terrific success and offered me a chance to talk one-on-one with residents.

Titus takes on: animal-related offenses



Name: Titus Merski
Breed: Airedale Terrier
Age: 5

Some folks think that all we dogs care about is eating, sleeping and playing. But the truth is, we're more interested in the law than you may think – and particularly in pet protection laws!

Here's the scoop on a couple of bills my dad and I will be supporting this year.

One involves heightened penalties for animal kidnapping. An estimated 2 million animals are stolen each year, and pet thefts increased by 31 percent between 2007 and 2017. Criminals sell these pets to puppy mills, research labs and even fighting rings. The bill

would add "teeth" to the law by making kidnapping a third-degree felony – or a second-degree felony for a second offense.

A second bill would help ensure abused or neglected animals are not returned to their abusers. There were more than 4,000 cases of animal abuse filed in Pennsylvania between August 2017 and June 2018. Unfortunately, the current law doesn't prevent convicted abusers from finding new animals after finishing their sentences. The bill would end this loophole by banning convicted abusers from owning or working with animals for at least two years.



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More of your tax dollars coming back to the district

I'm working harder than ever to bring your tax dollars back to Erie and our region! Since my last report to you in spring 2019, we've received more than \$18.5 million. Some of that funding includes:

- Nearly \$11 million for regional projects, including affordable housing, and other construction, renovation, and blight-reduction projects.
- More than \$2.5 million for programs addressing school safety, violence prevention, youth mentoring; and stronger protection, support and advocacy for domestic abuse victims and child abuse victims.
- More than \$2.4 million in tax credits to leverage funding for residential apartments, strengthen education, address blight, assist working families and crime victims and alleviate regional food insecurity.
- More than \$1 million to help small businesses and farms become more energy efficient and reduce waste and pollution.
- More than \$1 million to fund regional job training, bolster academic supports and other enrichment programs for elementary school students, enrich our school menus, expand the curricula for all grades, enhance teacher training, boost career readiness and provide special adaptive equipment.
- \$500,000 to fund the city's broadband deployment program and provide free public Wi-Fi access.
- More than \$142,000 for equipment, training and other essential resources for local fire and EMS services.
- Nearly \$170,000 to enhance operations and maintenance at Erie International Airport.



Our West Bayfront received a \$60,000 grant to fund a new splash pad for Bayview Park.

Road and Paving Updates

Location: Route 19 (Peach Street) – City of Erie
Project: Roadway restoration from 26th Street to 38th Street.
Cost: \$1.4 million

Location: 18th Street (local) – City of Erie
Project: Phase 4 (final) of streetscape in Little Italy neighborhood
Cost: \$176,000

Location: 38th Street (Route 4016) – City of Erie, Erie County
Project: Intersection safety improvement
Cost: \$440,000

Location: Bayfront Parkway (Route 4034) – City of Erie
Project: Resurfacing, Greengarden and Sassafra streets
Cost: \$2 million

