



YOUR REPORT

from State Representative

ROBERT FREEMAN

Vol. 34, No. 1

Summer 2020

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Legislature allocates CARES Act funding to address COVID-19-related needs

This spring, the budget process was particularly challenging because of the COVID-19 pandemic impacting businesses, industries, communities and families, creating unprecedented revenue losses, while the need for state assistance was at its greatest. As a result, the legislature passed an interim \$25.8 billion spending plan that funds most agencies for five months.

At the same time that the General Assembly passed an interim budget, a spending package was also passed allocating over \$2.6 billion in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding. The federal funding was used to address the most urgent needs and problems facing Pennsylvanians because of the COVID-19 pandemic. CARES funding could only be allocated if the state was under an Emergency Disaster Order and if the dollars were used to address COVID-19-related needs.

The CARES spending package included \$980 million to help provide services to our most vulnerable populations in the state with \$692 million for long-term living programs such as nursing homes, personal care homes and assisted living facilities, personal assistance services, child care services, intellectual disabilities and autism

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Law enforcement reform bills signed into law

On Tuesday, July 14, Governor Tom Wolf signed into law two landmark law enforcement reform bills to address police practices in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. Both measures were co-sponsored by Rep. Robert Freeman and passed both houses of the General Assembly unanimously in late June.

The first measure is Act 57 of 2020 which creates a statewide database to maintain records of misconduct by law enforcement officers and requires law enforcement agencies to conduct a thorough background investigation on potential new hires for a police department.

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Bill to help quiet fireworks

Responding to concerns from residents about the proliferation of fireworks being discharged beyond the Independence Day holiday, state Rep. Robert Freeman introduced legislation that would give municipalities more authority to regulate the use of fireworks and would increase penalties for violating those regulations.

“My House colleagues and I have been receiving complaints from people whose lives are being disrupted by fireworks being discharged throughout the day and late into the night across Pennsylvania. One of the reasons I opposed making these fireworks legal back in 2017 was because I thought they would be disruptive and unsafe,” Freeman said.

Freeman voted against the 2017 state law that allows consumers, 18 or older, to purchase and use “Class C” or “consumer-grade” fireworks.

“My proposal would give local governments the ability to deal with this disruptive behavior and would impose substantial penalties for those who violate the local ordinances,” he said.

Under Freeman’s bill (H.B. 2670) a municipality could enact an ordinance regulating the use of consumer fireworks, provided that the ordinance does not conflict with state law. The bill also would limit the use of fireworks to between 10 a.m. and 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 10 a.m. and 10 p.m on Friday and Saturday, with extended hours for certain holidays.

Additionally, the legislation would require each consumer fireworks purchase to include a notification that provides the conditions, prohibitions and limitations for using fireworks.

Those who violate the municipal regulations would face

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Rep. Freeman's office can help you with:

- PennDOT issues – vehicle registrations, handicap placards and driver's license applications
- Obtaining and completing state forms
- Voter registration, mail-in ballots, and absentee ballots
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation concerns
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Requests for literature – legislation, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- The status of the renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications by the Department of State
- Unclaimed Property/Treasurer's Office claims
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications, problems or questions
- PACE/PACENET prescription-drug applications for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints
- Liquor Control Board concerns or questions
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Applications for reduced vehicle registration fees for qualifying retirees

Rep. Freeman in the House chamber with Easton Area High School student Vincent Caminneci and his aunt Michelle Price. Vincent shadowed Rep. Freeman for the day on February 4 when Governor Tom Wolf gave his budget address to a joint session of the General Assembly.



Census

The 2020 Census will provide a snapshot of our nation. The Census counts every person living in the United States and is used for many things, including how much money the federal government gives Pennsylvania to support vital programs. The results of this once-a-decade count also determine how many seats the state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives and will be used to draw the boundaries of new Congressional and state legislative districts in the reapportionment process that begins in 2021.

Over the next decade, lawmakers, business owners, government agencies and many other important institutions will use 2020 Census data to make critical decisions that affect all of us. Ensuring an accurate and complete count of everyone is vitally important.

Rep. Robert Freeman encourages everyone to participate if you have not already done so. The process is safe. The answers are secure. And the funding that our communities depend on is determined by everyone's participation.

This year it is even easier to make sure that you and your family are counted. You can respond online, by paper form if you still have the one mailed to you, or over the phone. Visit the link <https://my2020census.gov/> for more information or call Rep. Freeman's office at **610-253-5543** should you have questions or require further information.

Please note, the deadline to answer the Census is September 30 so please don't delay in filling out the Census. Make sure you are counted!

Get Counted
2020 Census

More info | www.2020census.gov

How to take the 2020 Census



Online



Phone



Mail

Why it matters

Federal funding
For local programs and organizations

Better planning
For roads, schools, healthcare and emergency services

Determines representation
In Congress and the state legislature

Helps businesses
Locate factories and stores, recruit employees and conduct market research

Shape your future
Your community, your voice



Personal Notes...

The Times In Which We Live

Dear Friends,

We live in disconcerting times. The last several months have been filled with stress and trepidation as we navigate the surreal experience of living through the worst pandemic Americans and the world have experienced since the 1918-1919 Influenza Epidemic. The United States has the most cases of COVID-19 infections of any nation in the world and the death toll has taken more lives here in the United States than the total number of Americans who perished in World War I and the Korean War combined.

The statistics would have been far worse had governors in our region not acted as swiftly as they did to put in place Emergency Disaster Orders directing people to shelter at home and limit trips outside of the home to essential trips. Governor Tom Wolf and his administration have taken a lot of heat for their swift response to the pandemic and the measures they took to mitigate it, but they have worked diligently to limit its spread and ensure that our hospitals and medical personnel were not overwhelmed. There have been some missteps and adjustments to the governor's Emergency Disaster Order along the way, but by following the science and the advice of medical experts, Pennsylvania has done better at stopping the spread of COVID-19 than most states. In June, Pennsylvania was recognized by the CDC as one of only three states for COVID-19 reduction success. A Drexel University study shows that had the shelter-at-home order not been put in place at the time that it was, then Pennsylvania would have witnessed 7,000 more deaths in Philadelphia alone and the state's total death toll would have been significantly higher than it is. One only needs to look at the rise of infections in the states that reopened too soon, such as Florida, Texas and Arizona, to see the difference. Florida registered over 15,000 new infections on one Sunday in July and Texas and Arizona have witnessed substantial increases of new infections in the thousands that have overwhelmed their hospitals and medical facilities.

As is true of all times of great challenge and threat to the well-being of our communities, there have come forth heroes within our communities whose selfless devotion to duty and helping the afflicted has made a significant difference in the lives of many. We owe a debt of gratitude to our first responders, particularly the firefighters and EMS personnel who have answered emergency calls for help, and to our health care workers, the doctors, nurses, assistants and technicians who have waged this war against COVID-19 in our hospitals and other medical facilities, and to the grocery store clerks, food suppliers, delivery people, and postal workers who diligently ensured that our most basic needs are met.

While dealing with the pandemic, our country was shocked by the terrible killing of George Floyd. His last eight and a half minutes of life gasping for breath and calling out for his mother were disturbing to watch and unleashed a wave of protests across the country as Americans confronted the systemic racism of our culture and society. Most protests were peaceful demonstrations for change

and the reforming of policing practices. Their call for change resonated and the Pennsylvania General Assembly responded by unanimously passing two measures. The first established a statewide system of background checks of those applying to join a police department to determine any misconduct in their record as a police officer in another department. The second bill requires mandatory training to detect child abuse, instruction on how to interact with people from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, training on the use of deadly force and how to de-escalate highly charged situations and to ensure harm reduction, and to provide for more widely available PTSD evaluations, particularly in cases where lethal force was used. These landmark measures were signed into law by Governor Wolf, making a thoughtful and reasonable step in addressing reform.

While we grappled with both a pandemic and the aftermath of George Floyd's death, our communities were subject this summer to the jarring experience of fireworks going off throughout the day into the late night, in defiance of state law. I have introduced legislation that would give local governments more authority to regulate the use of fireworks, but I also have co-sponsored legislation to ban their use. If those using fireworks cannot act responsibly, then the legislature has no other recourse but to go back to the way our fireworks law was before the 2017 change that permitted their use. Those setting off fireworks may have been letting off steam in the tense time in which we live, but their disruption to neighborhoods and blatant disregard for others and the law has been untenable.

To address the needs of those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and Emergency Disaster Order, the legislature distributed CARES funding from the federal government which, you can read about in this newsletter. That critical funding seeks to address the financial needs of all sectors of our communities from businesses, to school students, to hospitals, to emergency personnel, to our most vulnerable populations in nursing home care or struggling to deal with tough times and keep a roof over their head and food on the table. My staff and I have also made ourselves available to constituents filing for Unemployment Compensation, businesses seeking direction in regard to complying with the Emergency Disaster Order, and seniors needing assistance in filling out their Property Tax/Rent Rebates, as well as many other constituent inquiries.

We will make it through this turbulent time and eventually return to normal, but everyone needs to do their part as we soldier on. Wear masks, practice social distancing, and wash your hands frequently and use hand sanitizer to stop the spread of COVID-19. It is little to ask of our fellow citizens, but it will save lives and protect our communities. Together we can succeed in the task that is before us.

Sincerely,

Bob Freeman

Legislature allocates CARES Act funding to address COVID-19-related needs

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programs, domestic violence programs, and homeless assistance services.

Another \$870 million was allocated for business and local government relief, of which \$625 million is for a county block grant program to assist local governments, \$225 million for small business assistance, and \$20 million for a cultural and museum preservation grant program.

Education and early childhood programs received a total of just over \$347 million for School Safety and Security Grants, Pre-K Counts, Head Start and child care services, as well as funding for the State System of Higher Education and higher education financial assistance for students.

Food and shelter considerations received \$225 million in CARES funding for food security and relief and other food access programs. At least \$175 million is for mortgage and rental assistance to help those who became unemployed after March 1 or saw their household income reduced by 30% or more.

Worker protections were provided an allocation of \$150 million for hazard pay, fire company and EMS grants, and health care assistance to acquire medical equipment and supplies for health care entities to meet patient and staff needs.

Another \$30 million was provided to assist community-based health care centers, vaccine development, and critical access hospitals.

In addition, there was a transfer of up to \$300 million to the Property Tax Relief Fund to make up for the shortfall in that portion of casino slots revenue that goes to property tax relief to school districts and homeowners, as it has in prior years.

A total of over \$1 billion in CARES funds remains to be allocated for relief efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic and are anticipated to be appropriated in the fall.

Bill to help quiet fireworks

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increased penalties under Freeman's bill. A first conviction would be a summary offense and would carry a fine between \$100 and \$500. A subsequent offense committed within one year of a prior conviction would be a third-degree misdemeanor and would carry a fine between \$500 and \$1,000.

According to the 2017 law, fireworks cannot be discharged:

- on public or private property without express permission of the property owner.
- from, within or toward a motor vehicle or building.
- within 150 feet of an occupied structure, regardless if a person is present.
- while the person is under the influence of alcohol, a controlled substance, or another drug.

"We need to give local governments the ability to deal with this disruptive behavior and impose substantial penalties for violating local ordinances. My proposed legislation will give them that option," Freeman said.

Freeman is also co-sponsoring a bill (H.B. 2735), that would repeal the 2017 fireworks law, reverting to what was previously permitted in Pennsylvania.

"If those using fireworks cannot do it responsibly with consideration for how disruptive they can be to a neighborhood, then the legislature has no other recourse than to repeal the 2017 fireworks law," Freeman said.

Both bills were referred to the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee for consideration.

Law enforcement reform bills signed into law

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"This law will go a long way to properly screen potential applicants for law enforcement positions, thereby protecting all the stakeholders involved and affected by law enforcement in Pennsylvania," Freeman noted. "It protects municipalities from unknowingly hiring a police officer with a history of misconduct and the societal and financial costs that go along with that. It also protects good police officers who don't want to work with people who have a history of misconduct, as well as protecting members of the community by promoting safety and trust in law enforcement officers by prohibiting officers with a checkered past from bouncing from one department to another."

Misconduct would include an excessive use of force, harassment, theft, discrimination, sexual abuse, domestic violence, coercion of a false confession, filing a false report or a judicial finding of dishonesty.

The second measure is Act 59 of 2020 which requires mandatory training to assist police officers in detecting and reporting suspected cases of child abuse, training on interaction with individuals of diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, training on the use of deadly force and de-escalation and harm reduction techniques, community and cultural awareness, implicit bias, procedural justice and reconciliation techniques. The law also requires post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) evaluations upon

request by a law enforcement officer or their supervisor and within 30 days of an incident of the use of lethal force.

"Law enforcement officers have tremendously difficult and stressful jobs," Freeman said. "Proper training to detect cases of child abuse and how to de-escalate highly charged situations and incidents can help to save lives. Implicit bias training and training on interaction with individuals from diverse backgrounds can provide better understanding between the police and the public and ensure proper conduct and better policing results. Increasing a police officer's access to PTSD evaluations helps to keep both the affected officer and the community safe."

Freeman is also co-sponsoring legislation to outlaw the use of chokeholds or using pressure to airways while detaining individuals. That legislation is currently in committee and awaits further action.

"These measures along with adherence to the Pennsylvania Accreditation principles for police departments and adoption of the Community Policing model by departments can go a long way to improving policing in Pennsylvania, reducing unnecessary escalation of confrontation and deaths, and forge a good relationship between the public and police officers to ensure proper conduct and public safety," Freeman said.



In Memoriam

John Fulton passed away suddenly on July 19. He was the Democratic Executive Director of the House Local Government Committee and worked with Rep. Robert Freeman, the Democratic Chairman of the committee, in that capacity for 13 years. According to Freeman, John was an excellent Executive Director, a very knowledgeable and skilled staffer, and a good friend. He was always available to assist members of the House and staff members with legislation and was a valuable resource to draw on for all issues pertaining to local government in Pennsylvania. His approachable and affable personality made him a pleasure to work with. He will be missed.

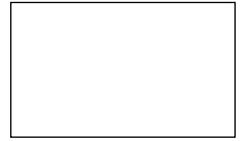
Local projects benefit from state funding

Rep. Robert Freeman's legislative district received a number of state grants in the first half of 2020. Below is a list of some of the projects receiving state funding that Freeman helped secure:

- \$1.74 million grant awarded to Easton Area Joint Sewer Authority to build a biogas cogeneration system, with a total cost of \$6 million, at the wastewater treatment plant in Easton.
- Multiple school districts were awarded \$510,000 in school safety grants for a variety of programs that address school safety, including risk assessment and violence-prevention efforts, classroom management, conflict resolution or dispute management initiatives, and to install or purchase technology related to school and student safety. Recipients include:
 - Bethlehem Area School District – \$385,000.
 - Easton Area School District – \$45,000.
 - Saucon Valley School District – \$40,000.
 - Wilson Area School District – \$40,000.
- \$350,000 in state grants for local projects, including:
 - West Easton will use a \$73,000 grant toward Phase II of its \$294,682 public works garage project. The borough will construct a 40-foot-by-60-foot pole building to serve as a garage and storage facility.
 - Freemansburg was awarded \$73,763 to purchase equipment for a security and informational technology improvement project including cameras, computers, an updated IT system, network and software.
 - Palmer Township received a \$64,642 grant to purchase a quick response vehicle to aid local paramedics.
 - Glendon was awarded a \$116,954 grant to provide stormwater management and road improvements to Berger Road. This grant builds
- on the \$80,000 grant Freeman was successful in acquiring previously from the Commonwealth Financing Agency for the project.
- The Redevelopment Authority of Easton received \$22,400 to assist in acquiring a parcel of land at 916 Pine Street for eventual redevelopment as passive and active recreation and to expand the community garden program.
- \$15,000 grant to fund census outreach was awarded to the city of Easton under the Census 2020 Outreach Grant Program and will fund the city's outreach efforts.
- \$67,500 in state grants for local projects, including:
 - \$40,000 for Centennial Park improvements to the city of Easton for replacement of recreational equipment and fencing.
 - \$7,500 for Easton Murals Arts Festival to the Greater Easton Development Partnership for the creation of public murals throughout Easton.
 - \$20,000 for a security and information technology improvements project in Freemansburg to install 43 security cameras at various borough properties and upgrade technology systems.
- \$20,000 conservation grant for Nurture Nature Center to develop a Watershed Friendly Properties Certificates Program throughout Pennsylvania.
- \$300,000 state grant to Wilson Borough to fund the replacement of the rapidly deteriorating Lehigh Drive bridge with a concrete box culvert bridge.
- \$16,564 in state funding to benefit the following two local historical organizations for general operating support:
 - \$9,154 for the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society.
 - \$7,410 for the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor.



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Important Census Information

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Rep. Freeman confers with Rep. Kevin Boyle of Philadelphia with Rep. Peter Schweyer of Allentown in the background. Representatives have been called upon to wear masks in the House chamber to reduce the possible spread of COVID-19.

Hellertown Days

Rep. Robert Freeman makes himself available to meet with constituents from the western end of his district in Hellertown Borough Hall on the first Thursday of every month from 10:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. Rep. Freeman will resume his Hellertown office hours when Borough Hall reopens to the public.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate deadline extended

The deadline to apply for the state Department of Revenue's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended to December 31. Rebates range from \$250 to a maximum of \$650. Eligibility requirements include: Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, or people with disabilities 18 or older; an income limit of \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, with only half of Social Security counted as income.

Spouses and personal representatives of estates may also file rebate claims on behalf of claimants who lived at least one day in 2019 and meet all other criteria.

The maximum rebate is \$650, although supplemental rebates for certain qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975. Applications and free assistance are available at state Rep. Robert Freeman's office located at 215 Northampton Street in Easton. If you would like to have help filling out the application, please call 610-253-5543 for an appointment.