



CAPITOL UPDATE

State Representative

MARTY FLYNN

Representing the 113th Legislative District

Summer 2020

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While visiting Discovery MI Pre-school I got to spend some play time with several of the children!



My regional office manager Angela Rempe Jones visited the McNichols Plaza Elementary School. During her visit, she read to a group of early elementary students as part of Read Across America day.

Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, I visited some of our elementary and pre-schools and met with administrators, staff and children.

We are now in unprecedented times. I am working with our local, state and federal partners to ensure safety and proper funding for all of our educational facilities, from pre-school to post-graduate.

As these circumstances change, we are dedicated to be fluid and make the necessary adjustments to stay strong both economically and personally.

From left, Bob Durkin, president, The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce; Kristine Augustine, vice president, The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce; Amy Ware and Erin Pallo, owners of Learn and Grow Early Childhood Center; and State Representative Marty Flynn.



Taking care of our veterans

Valhalla Veterans Services has been awarded a \$25,000 grant to train veterans and veterans' helpers to become first responders for suicide prevention.

The organization provides a program that delivers the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training workshops free to veterans. It also provides counseling services and resilience and cognitive behavioral techniques to veteran inmates in need.

Suicide is an important problem affecting military service members and we need to find those veterans in our towns and cities so we can help them.

The funding is from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to support programs offering services to veterans suffering from opioid use disorder and their families.

In addition, the Treatment Court Advocacy Center of Lackawanna County received \$50,000.

The center helps participants in the various Lackawanna County Treatment/Problem Solving Courts as they seek to overcome obstacles in achieving sober, drug-free and productive lives. With the funding, the organization will provide case management, family assessments and family service plans to veterans suffering from opioid use.

The grants are part of a \$55.9 million grant secured by the Wolf administration to bolster the state's response to the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic.

Veterans Memorial at Scranton High School



I am so proud to have been a part of the group that brought to fruition the Veterans Memorial Park that now sits at the entrance to Scranton High School/Scranton Veterans Memorial Stadium.

This project began about five years ago as the wish of veterans James Kuchwara, Pat Ahern and other members of VFW Post 25 in Scranton.

The objective was to honor the memory of all Scranton heroes who were killed in action over the last 100-plus years.

Today and forever more, residents and visitors can stop at this beautiful memorial, pay respects to our native sons and daughters and reflect on the service and sacrifice made by all members of our Armed Forces.

This dedicated, hard working, active committee is due a HUGE thank you from our entire community.



Seniors: Scams targeting Property Tax/Rent Rebate recipients, Medicare beneficiaries

The best way to beat scammers at their own game is to stay one step ahead of them. You can do that by understanding the latest schemes and reporting them if you are targeted. Here are a few recent ones to watch out for:

PROPERTY TAX/RENT REBATE SCAM

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue recently issued a warning about a scam targeting seniors receiving rebates through the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

The scam involves a call from someone claiming to work for the department. The caller says that the senior's application for the PTRR program has been approved, asks if they would like the rebate directly deposited into a bank account, and then requests their bank account number.

Although the Department of Revenue does contact applicants via automated calls to confirm that their information has been received and approved, the department does NOT collect an applicant's banking information over the phone. Instead, if the department needs additional information, it will send a letter through the mail.

TIPS TO GUARD AGAINST ANY SCAM

Finally, there are steps you can take to stay safe from any scam.

Never share financial or other sensitive personal information with anyone who contacts you unsolicited. If you receive an unsolicited phone call, remember this rule: When in doubt, hang up.

Be wary of scammers who use "caller ID spoofing" technology to make it appear that they are a legitimate government or law enforcement agency. Do not automatically trust the name you see on your caller ID screen.

Familiarize yourself with these common characteristics of scams: a sense of urgency or limited-time offer; payment by wire transfer or gift card; secrecy as a condition; guarantees of low risk with high rate of return; unsolicited offers, including social media outreach, such as a post on your Facebook wall mentioning you.

Finally, if you think you have been a victim of a scam, report it by calling the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Senior Protection Helpline at 1-866-623-2137.

Check out Department of Aging COVID-19 resource guide

The state Department of Aging offers a comprehensive resource – the COVID-19 Resource Guide for Older Adults – providing a wealth of information on meals, prescriptions, protective services, scams to watch out for and tips on how to stay active and connected. Visit the department's website at www.aging.pa.gov to find the guide.

Taking care of schools during the COVID-19 emergency

Over \$6 million awarded to local schools

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded federal emergency funding for Pennsylvania schools to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

Local school districts received the following funding:

- **\$3.9 million** to Scranton School District.
- **\$226,310** to Abington Heights School District.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the learning dynamic from classrooms to the homes of students and teachers. It is imperative that students receive the quality education they deserve, despite the current circumstances.

The funding may be used for a wide range of purposes, including food service; professional training; technology purchases; sanitization and cleaning supplies; summer and after-school programs; and mental health supports. Funds must be used by September 2022. School entities are encouraged to prioritize investments for vulnerable students and families, including those living in the deepest poverty, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.

Helping students with online learning

A \$500,000 Continuity of Education Equity Grant was awarded to the Scranton School District to purchase computer-related equipment.

Now more than ever, students must be properly equipped to handle online classroom learning and this funding will help to make technology readily available to students in the district.

The Scranton School District was one of three schools in Pennsylvania to receive a \$500,000 grant. It will be used to buy 1,575 Chromebooks, charging carts and insurance.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the grant can be used for laptops, tablets or hot spots or non-digital purchases, such as paper lessons, postage, transportation of materials and coursework.

CEEG grants are designed to help provide access and inclusion for all learners by bridging the gap for students who are currently limited in their ability to participate in continuity of education. In addition, schools with the highest percentages of students lacking access to resources were given priority in receiving these grants.

Schools from across Pennsylvania compete for this type of grant and I am fortunate to secure this large amount of funding to bring students up-to-par with online learning.

PROMOTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OUR SENIOR COMMUNITY IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF MY WORK AS YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

Here is a look at bills I have supported that are now law – or poised to become law – in Pennsylvania:

Medication synchronization. Act 46 of 2019 allows patients to synchronize their medications to receive them on the same day each month, instead of having to make multiple visits to the pharmacy.

Extending the Social Security COLA moratorium. Act 95 of 2019 allows thousands of seniors to retain their PACE/PACENET benefits if they receive a Social Security COLA and extends the moratorium on the law until Dec. 31, 2021.

Tax credit for school volunteer service. Act 20 of 2020 authorizes school districts to implement programs allowing taxpayers 60 or older to receive a property tax credit in exchange for school services, such as tutoring and mentoring.

Long-term care residents. Act 24 of 2020 allocates funding from the federal CARES Act, including money to protect long-term care facility residents from COVID-19.

Prescription drug benefit fraud. Act 14 of 2020 will help cut drug benefit fraud by requiring the State Department of Aging to monthly cross-reference its list of beneficiaries with death records maintained by the Department of Health.

The following bills are in committee or passed the House and await action by the state Senate:

Protecting seniors from abuse. House Bill 1930 would strengthen criminal background check provisions, require financial institutions to train employees to recognize signs of potential financial abuse of an older adult, and improve the process of making an abuse report. The bill is in the House Rules Committee.

Elder abuse prevention. A package of bills – H.Bs. 397-400 – would permit care facility residents to place electronic monitoring devices, strengthen investigation and punishment

of financial exploitation, and make it a crime to post social media photos of care dependent individuals without their consent. House Bills 397, 398 and 399 are in the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee. House Bill 400 passed the House unanimously and is in the Senate.

Tax credit for volunteer service. House Bill 974 – which I am co-sponsoring – would permit municipalities to establish programs allowing residents 60 or older to receive a real property tax credit in exchange for volunteer service. The bill passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support and is in the Senate.

Background checks for adult guardians. House Bill 2209 would require background checks for adult guardians and prohibit convicted felons from serving as guardians. The bill is with the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee.

Minimum nursing hours requirement. House Bill 2607 would restore a requirement that long-term care facilities provide residents with a certain number of general nursing care hours. The requirement was waived earlier in the year. The bill is with the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee.

Transparency in long-term care facilities. House Bill 2437 would require the state or county Health Department to publish the number of COVID-19 cases as a percentage of the total residents and the protocol for isolating positive cases. The bill passed the House unanimously and is in the Senate.

Personal protective equipment for long-term care facilities. House Bill 2509 would establish a grant program to reimburse long-term care facilities for part of the costs of purchasing personal protective equipment. The bill passed the House unanimously and is in the Senate.

My office can help you file for Property Tax/Rent Rebate

I want to remind you that my office can help you apply for a rebate under the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program. The deadline to apply for a rebate for taxes or rent paid in 2019 has been extended to Dec. 31, 2020.

Supported by the state lottery, the popular program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 annually for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters, and half of Social Security is excluded.

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

The maximum standard rebate is \$650, but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975.

To learn more, visit www.revenue.pa.gov.

For help applying, call my office to set up an appointment – and remember to bring identification, proof of age and income, and a copy of your 2019 rent statement or tax return showing property tax paid.





Helping our frontline workers

One of the major positive effects of donating to a charity or an organization is just feeling good about giving. Now more than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, donations are appreciated.

Recently, we visited South Abington Police Department and the Chinchilla Hose Co. Pictured above are Chinchilla Hose Co. Chief Sean Connolly and South Abington Twp. Police Chief Robert A. Gerrity. We were happy to donate 250 masks and hand sanitizer to our volunteers. They are our frontline workers and I am proud of the work they are doing during the COVID-19 crisis and throughout the year.

Fire companies and EMS personnel are facing another type of dilemma. I am working with many fire companies and rescue squads in my district to apply for some of the \$50 million in grants available to fire and EMS companies. We need to support them in the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

Gov. Tom Wolf has set aside \$44 million for fire and rescue companies and \$6 million for EMS companies.

Many rescue personnel that I have talked to say they have been overstressed and have had financial setbacks during the pandemic.

In addition, companies were forced to drastically reduce fundraising opportunities since the pandemic started in March.

Unfortunately because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am unable to hold my popular Senior Fair. I am hoping to hold this event in the near future, but it may not happen until next spring.

Our shredding event is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 3 from 11AM to 1PM. HOWEVER – if the COVID-19 virus is still causing shutdowns, we will have to postpone the event again. If we are able to hold the event on October 3rd, constituents must follow six-foot social distancing guidelines and wear masks as suggested by the Centers for Disease Control. My office will issue more information as we near the shredding date.

Census participation helps our local community

A \$6,000 grant was awarded to the Scranton Lackawanna Human Development Center to support grassroots efforts promoting awareness and participation in the 2020 U.S. Census.

We need this grant funding to increase census participation in our hard-to-count communities and help to achieve a complete count because everyone should be counted.

When people respond to the census, they are helping our local area get its fair share of more than \$675 billion per year in federal funds so it can be used for local schools, hospitals, roads, public works and other vital programs.

The 2020 Census will determine each state's Congressional representation and be used to draw both Congressional and state legislative districts.

The results of the count will also inform us how hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funding are allocated to more than 100 programs.

The Census 2020 outreach grant program focuses on supporting efforts that target hard-to-count populations including, but not limited to, those who do not speak English as their primary language; ethnic minority, immigrant, and rural communities; children; the elderly; the LGBTQ population; and people experiencing homelessness.



Late night debate in the House chamber during the COVID-19 pandemic.

\$200,000 grant helps to protect children

The Children's Advocacy Center of Northeast Pennsylvania has been awarded \$198,838 in grants from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

This child advocacy center provides efficient and sensitive medical and mental health services. There are many benefits of having this center in Lackawanna County, such as providing quicker follow up to child abuse reports, better collection of information and coordinated investigations that lead to more effective prosecutions.

The grants will be used over two years to strengthen forensic interviews and forensic medical exams for suspected child/teen victims of physical and sexual abuse and/or neglect in Lackawanna County.

The Children's Advocacy Center of Northeastern Pennsylvania is a private, nonprofit charitable organization whose mission is to provide assessment and treatment of child abuse and neglect.



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Food Assistance Helps Needy in 113th District

I worked to bring home \$552,959 in food pantry funding to help my constituents stay fed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Food Recovery Infrastructure Grants are from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

The following grants have been awarded in the district:

- **\$161,682** - Friends of the Poor.
- **\$144,245** - Meals on Wheels of Northeastern Pennsylvania Inc.
- **\$127,054** - Scranton Lackawanna Human Development Agency Inc.
- **\$87,800** - Keystone Mission Rescue Alliance Inc.
- **\$24,412** - The Community Intervention Center of Lackawanna County.
- **\$7,766** - The Wright Center Medical Group, The Wright Center for Community Health.

Many people in the district are opening empty cabinets at home and they are worried about how they are going to feed their families. Our food pantries play a central role with local organizations to address the needs of people in Lackawanna County who need food, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Throughout this pandemic, my office has continued to serve my constituents through my drive-thru window available in my West Scranton District Office.

This unique legislative office service is available Monday through Friday from 10 AM to 5 PM.

Together we will get through this ...

My office is always available for your state-related concerns. You can email me at RepFlynn@pahouse.com, call my office at (570) 342-4348 and make an appointment or leave a message and we will get back to you.