

June 2020

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Throwing a safety line to our first responders

Emergency federal funding of \$50 million will help ensure fire and EMS companies around the state have the resources they need to keep operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If saving lives in the midst of a pandemic sounds daunting, it hasn't stopped our resourceful first responders.

Long before they had to deal with the challenges of COVID-19, Pennsylvania's firefighters and emergency medical services providers learned to make the most out of shoestring budgets.

Staffed largely with volunteers, fire and EMS companies supplemented state grant money with fundraisers to keep crews outfitted and stations equipped. They remained on the front lines, protecting our communities, even in the face of shrinking budgets and diminishing ranks.

Then, the pandemic struck, forcing an abrupt halt to the pancake breakfasts, spaghetti dinners and other popular community events that brought fire and EMS companies a reliable stream of supplemental funding. Our first

responders were left having to cope with a new, invisible danger – with fewer resources than ever.

To ensure they have the resources to carry on their life-saving work, we passed legislation to create the Fire Company and Emergency Medical Services Grant Program. Signed by the governor in late May, the law taps into \$50 million in federal funding under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

Although the new grant program won't eliminate the long-term recruitment and retention issues facing fire and EMS companies, it will help address critical funding shortfalls and new challenges created by the pandemic.

If additional solutions are needed, my colleagues and I will find them. Our first responders are always there for us – we'll be there for them, as well.

First responders and veterans will also benefit from a new law that will exempt veterans' associations and volunteer fire companies from a \$700 liquor license surcharge.

Honored by the Civil Air Patrol

In January, at a VAEP Committee meeting, I was honored to receive the Civil Air Patrol Commander's Commendation Award – the highest non-valor award that can be bestowed on a member.

Founded in 1941 and chartered by Congress several years later, the patrol acts as the U.S. Air Force's civilian arm. Its service-minded volunteers are committed to keeping our nation safe and prepared for any emergency.

To that end, the patrol carries out search-and-rescue missions, saving lives every year. It also performs disaster relief and humanitarian services, supports the nation's emergency preparedness, promotes air, space and cyber power, and works to promote youth interest in aviation, among other services.

I am humbled to be recognized by fellow members of the patrol and very much looking forward to continuing my service in the years ahead.

To learn more about the patrol, including how to become a member, visit www.gocivilairpatrol.com.



New job protections for Guard members, first responders impacted by COVID-19

Pennsylvania's National Guard members called to active duty to help fight the pandemic received new job protections with the bipartisan passage of legislation extending the Pennsylvania Heart and Lung Act.

The new law – signed by the governor in late April – ensures that Guard members, police, firefighters and other public safety workers continue receiving their full salary and benefits up to 60 days if they are temporarily unable to work because of COVID-19.

In addition to extending protections to Guard members, the new law eliminates a near-impossible proof standard that would have required workers to show that their COVID-19



infection or exposure was the direct result of their work and could not have resulted from a non-job-related exposure. Now, workers are covered by the act as long as they contracted COVID-19 or suffered an exposure leading to quarantine.

It's an essential protection for these frontline heroes who risk their own safety while working to protect the rest of us.

CARES Act funding speeds help to nursing homes, counties, small businesses

In late May, the General Assembly passed a spending package allocating **\$2.6 billion** in federal CARES Act funding, putting the money to work addressing the most urgent issues facing the commonwealth.

Nursing homes and long-term living facilities – hit hard by the pandemic – are a top priority, with nearly **two-thirds** of the state's COVID-related deaths occurring in these facilities.

The spending plan allocates more

than **\$692 million** to long-term living programs. Part of the funding will ensure that facilities have universal testing, additional staffing, personal protective equipment and other critical resources to reverse this alarming trend and secure the safety of our seniors and other vulnerable residents.

Other highlights of the CARES Act funding package include **\$625 million** to counties – including **\$7.72 million** to Lawrence County – to

address the impacts of COVID-19; **\$225 million** for small business assistance; **\$175 million** for rent and mortgage assistance to low- and middle-income families impacted by the pandemic; and **\$150 million** for schools to create and maintain a safe and sanitary environment.

Additional funding will support higher education, child care services, emergency responders, food and agricultural assistance, and other important programs.

Special courts provide a second chance for veterans charged with nonviolent crimes

With at least 800,000 former service members calling the commonwealth home, Pennsylvania has one of the largest veteran populations in the country. Although we prefer to think of our veterans as enjoying the well-deserved benefits that go along with living in freedom and peace, the harsh reality is sometimes very different.

In fact, many veterans return to civilian life suffering from post-traumatic stress injuries, traumatic brain injuries or other service-related problems that can lead to homelessness, addiction and criminal activity.

Fortunately, some veterans who end up in the criminal justice system have an alternative to sentencing: participation in a veterans' treatment court.

Modeled after drug courts, these special, problem-solving courts are designed to provide treatment and support – rather than punishment – to veterans who are charged with nonviolent crimes and are struggling with addiction, mental health problems, or both.

Instead of being sentenced, veterans receive counseling, treatment for their addictions or illnesses, educational

assistance and health care support. To ensure that they comply with program requirements, they are closely supervised by specialized probation officers and required to make regular court visits.

In December, the House unanimously adopted a resolution I supported honoring the work of Pennsylvania's veterans' treatment courts. Much work remains to be done, however, because many counties still do not have these courts.

To that end, I'm supporting legislation that would install a specialized veterans' court in any Pennsylvania county that does not have one.

I'm also supporting legislation that would permit veterans who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress injuries or a traumatic brain injury after they have been imprisoned to apply to a court for relief by arguing that their diagnosis was a mitigating factor in their crime.

Considering how much our veterans have sacrificed on our behalf, it's only fitting that they receive a second chance and the promise of rehabilitation.

Around the district

One of the best parts of my job is getting to work with the open-hearted, civic-minded members of our community. Here is a look at just a few of those great groups.



At the Holy Spirit Parish Christmas Festival.



Helping members of the Eintracht Singing Society celebrate the group's 125th anniversary.



Joining the volunteers of Lawrence County Empty Bowls for a terrific fundraiser.



Honored to receive the EMS Lawrence County Council Award for my work supporting first responders and EMS providers.



With members of the Mahoning Township Fire Department.



With Boy Scout Troop 721 at the Bessemer Rotary Dinner.



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COVID changes fire training, EMS certification process

In an effort to combat COVID-19, the Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of EMS has issued an exception for the renewal of expired EMS certifications.

Those individuals whose EMS certification expired after December 31, 2014, may apply to the Department to have that certification reinstated through October 15, 2020, without examination or meeting continuing education requirements.

In addition, the State Fire Commissioner encourages fire companies to continue training as needed while following Governor Wolf's and the state Department of Health's directives on group size and social distancing. Many fire departments have begun delivering training via various online platforms, such as Zoom or Skype.

Local Educational Training Agencies (ETA) are making case-by-case decisions on whether to hold classes as directed by their agency leadership. Local ETAs have been encouraged to deliver live virtual lectures on their agency's platforms. Contact your local ETA for more information.

Stopgap budget plan provides funding through November

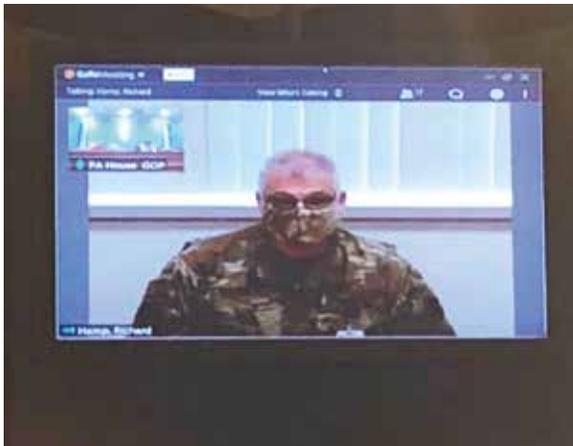
When budget time rolled around this spring, lawmakers were facing a litany of unanswered questions created by COVID-19 and its impact on the state economy. Postponed tax filing deadlines delayed receipt of about \$1.7 billion in revenue normally collected in April, and reduced economic activity because of the pandemic pushed the shortfall to more than \$2 billion.

To keep the state running, the legislature passed a \$25.8 billion interim budget. Signed by the governor in late May, the stopgap plan funds most agencies for five months, with the exception of public education, which received flat

funding for a full year. The interim plan imposes no new taxes.

To address the loss of casino revenue, we also passed legislation to transfer up to \$300 million in emergency funding to the Property Tax Relief Fund to make the full property tax relief payment to school districts and homeowners.

When we return to the table later this year to pass the remaining budget, we will have a clearer picture of the state's revenue – and hopefully signs of an economic turnaround spurred by new business activity.



Adjutant General Anthony Carrelli providing a video briefing to the VAEP Committee.