

SUMMER 2020

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Responding to our first responders

New law tackles depression, post-traumatic stress among frontline emergency workers

We ask a lot from our first responders, who stand ready on a moment's notice to intervene between our community and disaster. First on the scene, they are called on to make quick, life-or-death decisions under dangerous circumstances – all while witnessing extreme human pain and trauma.

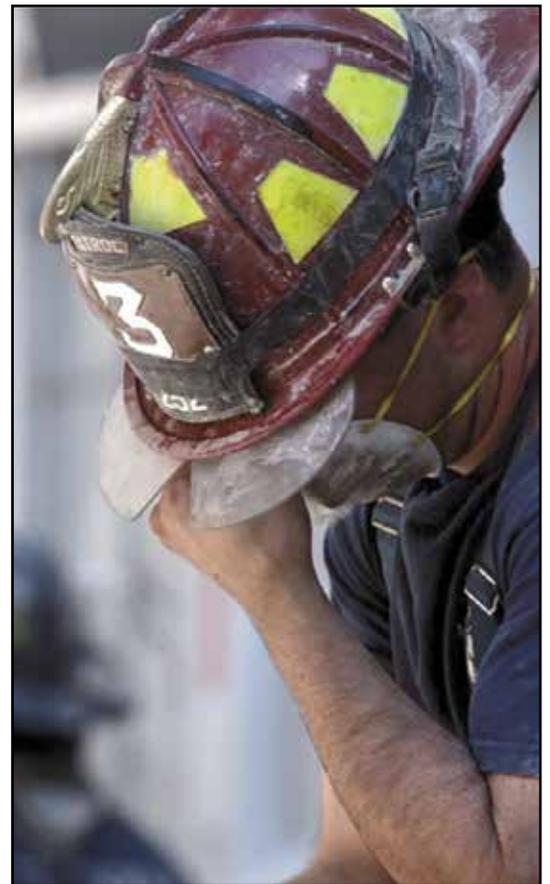
The stress of the job exacts a heavy toll: Studies show that an estimated 30% of first responders suffer conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress, compared to 20% of the regular population. One recent study showed that more first responders died from suicide than in the line of duty.

It's time to do something to address their mental health needs, which is why I supported legislation to create the Emergency Responder Mental Wellness and Stress Management Program.

The legislation passed the House and Senate with unanimous, bipartisan support and, as of this writing, is awaiting the governor's signature. Once it is signed and takes effect, the law will establish new procedures to help agencies and departments better address depression, post-traumatic stress and other behavioral health conditions emergency responders face.

The law will also create a peer-to-peer support program, a toll-free helpline for first responders, a "critical incident" stress management program to address the impact of responding to fatal or near-fatal incidents, and trauma and suicide awareness training for employers.

Our first responders have our backs 24/7, regardless of the cost. This new law will help us better care for these frontline heroes as they navigate the pressures they face in the line of duty.



I was proud to join VFW Post 315 members for the Veterans Day Parade in downtown New Castle last year.

Questions about the Military Family Education Program?



Last year, the governor signed into law a bill I co-authored with my Republican Co-Chairman Steve Barrar, establishing the Military Family Education Program.

The law allows Pennsylvania National Guard members who re-enlist for an additional six years of service to earn five years of higher education benefits for their spouse or children. The program provides 10 semesters of tuition-free education for family members at state-approved schools.

If you have questions about the program, you can find a comprehensive list of FAQs online. Simply visit dmva.pa.gov and scroll down to the “Military Family Education” icon just below the flag.

The recognition they deserve: a medal for our Korean War veterans



Our Korean War veterans are truly unsung heroes. They performed a monumental feat in that conflict, preventing a North Korean takeover, despite brutal conditions and opposition from thousands of Chinese troops. Unfortunately, these veterans – including 75,000 in Pennsylvania – have not

always received the recognition they deserve for their valor.

I'm encouraging all Korean War veterans in our area to apply for the Ambassador for Peace Medal. This commemorative medal is an expression of appreciation from the Korean government to American military who served in the Korean War from 1950 through 1953.

To be eligible, veterans must have served in Korea at some time during the Korean War from June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953, or have participated in U.N. peacekeeping efforts until the end of 1955. Members of the U.S. Navy are also eligible if they served aboard a naval vessel that was assigned to Korean waters from 1950 to 1953.

In addition to a completed application, veterans applying must provide their Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty DD-214 form.

There are no costs or fees associated with applying for or receiving the medal, and it may also be awarded posthumously to a veteran's next of kin.

Feel free to contact my office for more information or assistance applying.

Veterans plates: show your support while on the road

Specialty veterans plates are a great way to show your support for our PA veterans: \$15 from the sale of each plate sold goes to benefit the Veterans Trust Fund.

The “Honoring Our Veterans” plate is available for cars, motorcycles and trucks with a registered gross weight of no more than 14,000 pounds and costs \$37. A more recent addition – “Honoring Our Women Veterans” – costs \$36, and a portion of the sale proceeds goes to the Veterans Trust Fund to support programs and resources benefiting women veterans.



And of course, for veterans and service members only, there are a wide range of U.S. Military Registration Plates available for every branch of service and for special designations, such as the Combat Wounded Veteran plate.

Recent additions to the military plates collection include the Soldiers Medal, the Legion of Merit, and the Veterans of an Allied Foreign Country – all costing \$20 – and the Purple Heart Medal motorcycle plate, which costs \$11.

To learn more about all these plates, simply visit PennDOT at dmv.pa.gov and search “license plates.”

Driver's licenses

You can also show your support when you apply for or renew your driver's license or photo ID, when you will have an opportunity to make a \$3 tax-deductible contribution to the Veterans Trust Fund. The additional \$3 is not part of the renewal fee printed on your renewal application, so you will need to add the donated amount to your payment.

Veterans: Remember that you can apply for a driver's license with a Veterans Designation at no extra cost. Visit PennDOT at dmv.pa.gov and enter “Veterans Designation” in the search bar.

Sainato: More than \$3.3 million to combat regional homelessness

Lawrence County Social Services will receive more than \$3.35 million in federal CARES Act funding to help district residents and those in surrounding counties who are struggling with homelessness or the threat of homelessness.

The grant – part of a package of nearly \$19 million in funding to 52 counties statewide – will help ensure housing is available for residents and working families at a time when safe, affordable shelter is critical.

Lawrence County will share the grant with 14 other counties, including Beaver, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clarion, Elk, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Jefferson, McKean, Potter, Venango and Warren counties.

The funding is the first of two emergency allocations of CARES Act funding being provided through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Around the district

One of the best parts of my job is getting to spend time with our area's remarkable veterans and other civic-minded community members. Here are photos from some of those occasions.



Honored to join members of American Legion Post 343 for their 100th Anniversary Celebration Dinner.



Attending last year's Lawrence County Civil Air Patrol Officer Installation Ceremony.



Meeting up with the New Castle Fire Department during a community picnic last year.



Catching up with the Pulaski Township Fire Department at the 2019 New Bedford Memorial Day Weekend Parade.



Proud to stand with the New Castle Area Honor Guard at the Rhoades Estates Veterans Day Program.



Impressed as I visited the Shenango AP History Class' Veterans Day Program.



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Veterans: Are you aware of these programs and resources?

As Democratic chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, it is important to me that our veterans receive the full benefit of all programs and services PA can provide. Here's a brief look at some of those resources.

- **Amputee and Paralyzed Veteran Program.** Provides a \$150 per month pension to veterans who served honorably, were PA residents on entering the military, suffered a service-connected injury or disease resulting in loss – or lost use of – two or more extremities, and have at least a 40% disability rating in each limb.

A similar pension program exists for blind veterans. To learn more about both programs, visit dmva.pa.gov, click “Veterans Affairs” at the top of the page, and scroll down to Programs/Services. To apply, call our local county Veterans’ Office at (724) 656-2180. My office can also help you apply!

I am supporting legislation to increase the monthly benefit for both programs from \$150 to \$200.

- **Educational Gratuities Program.** Provides financial aid of up to \$500 per semester for children of honorably discharged veterans who have service-connected disabilities and served during a period of war or armed conflict, or children of veterans who die or died in service during a period of war or armed conflict.

- **Veterans Crisis Line.** Free, confidential support is available for veterans who are feeling anxious, depressed or alone. Calling the crisis line 1-800-273-8255 will put you in touch with a caring, qualified responder. Many responders are veterans themselves.

The crisis line is available for all veterans, service members, National Guard and reserve, and family and friends.

- **Veterans Registry.** The DMVA provides an online registry to keep veterans and their families connected to state benefits, programs and services. It also allows veterans and family members to opt in to receive news, updates and the department’s weekly DMVA Digest. To learn more, visit dmva.pa.gov and click on the Veterans’ Registry link at the top of the page.

- **Veterans Temporary Assistance.** This program can provide veterans or their beneficiaries temporary financial assistance for life necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. Applicants who meet eligibility requirements can receive up to \$1,600 over a 12-month period.

To learn more, visit dmva.pa.gov, click on “Veterans Affairs” at the top of the page, and scroll down to Programs/Services. To apply, call our local county Veterans’ Office at (724) 656-2180. My office can also help you apply!

- **Veterans Resource Online Directory.** Here, you’ll find a comprehensive listing of resources – from business and finance to veterans’ health and vital records – all in one place. Simply visit dmva.pa.gov, click on “Veterans Affairs” at the top, and scroll down to Programs/Services, where you will find “Veterans Resource Online Directory.”