



State Representative

MARK LONGIETTI

Capitol Office:

103 Irvis Office Building
P.O. Box 202007
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2007
(717) 772-4035

District Offices:

2213 Shenango Valley Freeway
Unit 2-E
Hermitage, PA 16148
(724) 981-4655

182 Main Street
Greenville, PA 16125
(724) 588-1005
Tuesday & Thursday
9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Email: mlongietti@pahouse.net

Website: www.pahouse.com/Longietti

www.facebook.com/RepLongietti

STEM roundtable in Sharpsville highlights job opportunities

In September, I hosted a roundtable discussion on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education at Sharpsville High School. State Rep. Chris Sainato of Lawrence County co-hosted the forum, which highlighted high-paying career opportunities in advanced manufacturing using STEM skills, both locally and in our region.

We were joined by Mercer and Lawrence County representatives from government, education, business and nonprofit organizations to discuss existing career opportunities, connecting students to those opportunities and exposing students to STEM education through various means. A highlight of the roundtable was a presentation by Sharpsville High School students about their participation in a robotics competition through the Southwestern Pennsylvania BotsIQ program.

These students designed and built a robot that competed in a one-on-one battle with other robots, which challenged the students' ability to apply STEM skills and to think innovatively and logically. Perhaps the most important aspect of the competition is that it pairs students with a local business in the advanced-manufacturing sector to expose them to rewarding careers utilizing STEM skills, while also providing for mentoring opportunities. The Sharpsville High students were partnered with Sharpsville Container, a long-standing local business.

The future of STEM education is a matter of critical importance

for our national competitiveness in the global marketplace and for the success of individual businesses in our communities. STEM occupations will grow 1.7 times

faster than non-STEM occupations over the next 10 years, and it's estimated that by the next decade the number of computer science jobs in the United States will outnumber qualified

applicants by 1 million. For that reason, it is imperative we ensure our students have the opportunity to realize how exciting, relevant and financially rewarding STEM careers can be.

At the roundtable, we also heard statistics further highlighting the need for job seekers to be well-versed in STEM fields. Companies in Pennsylvania presently lack an available workforce that has the basic STEM skills needed to succeed at many jobs. There will also be an expected 130,000 manufacturing positions in Southwestern Pennsylvania over the next 10 years that require STEM knowledge.

It was obvious throughout the presentations that STEM fields can provide very rewarding career opportunities for students across Pennsylvania. However, we must continue raising awareness of their value to the individual pursuing a career in a STEM field, as well as to our country as a whole on the global level.

I plan on holding more roundtable discussions similar to this in the future to highlight more positives about career opportunities in STEM. I will provide more information as it becomes available.



Connor Williams, Ben McCall, teacher Ryan Miller, Roberta Pegg and Rep. Chris Sainato joined me in taking part in our STEM roundtable.



Basic Education Funding Commission leads to more equal distribution

Last year, I was appointed one of 15 members of the Basic Education Funding Commission. The task of the commission was to develop a new funding formula to distribute state funding to public school districts in a fair and equitable fashion, and to recommend that formula for adoption by the General Assembly. Pennsylvania has the dubious distinction of having the most inequitable funding system for public schools in the country, so the work of the commission was of critical importance. I am pleased to report that the commission came together on a bipartisan basis to unanimously recommend a new funding formula to the General Assembly and I am hopeful that formula will soon become law.

The commission held a series of public hearings across Pennsylvania to gather information from various stakeholders before developing a new funding formula. I was pleased to host the commission at a public hearing at Greenville High School, where a number of local superintendents and school officials had an opportunity to testify. At my urging, the commission included a recommendation in its final report that funding be provided for incentives to school districts desiring to consolidate. This recommendation was first suggested by Mark Ferrara, superintendent of Greenville Area School District, during his testimony at the hearing. I also suggested that the Pennsylvania Department of Education collect information so the formula can be adjusted in the future to consider districts with a significant number of students moving in and out, and to consider that educating transient students has a higher cost. This idea came from testimony offered by Mike Calla, superintendent of Sharon City School District, which has a high transient population.

The recommended formula includes student-weighted factors to account for the additional cost to educate students who live in deep and moderate poverty, as well as extra costs for



Our hearing with the Basic Education Funding Commission held in the Greenville Area School District was well attended and led to a positive discussion.

districts with a high concentration of poverty. Additionally, it includes district-weighted factors like a sparsity adjustment to account for the lack of economies of scale in rural areas. Finally, it recommends the state consider the local tax base of districts, so those lacking capacity to help themselves receive additional state support.

Combined with a restoration of the education funding cuts that took place under the previous administration, I'm confident we will move toward a public school system that works for children across the state. This agreement came forth in a bipartisan effort, with input from the House, Senate and governor's office, to solve this significant issue facing Pennsylvania. After hearing from numerous stakeholders, including organizations with a vested interest in education and teachers themselves, I truly believe we came to a solution that will benefit Pennsylvania's educational system for years to come.



Local fire companies receive state grants

HERE'S THE GRANT BREAKDOWN:

Clark Volunteer Fire Department.....	\$13,453
Farrell Volunteer Fire Department	\$10,498
Greenville Fire Company.....	\$14,284
Hermitage Volunteer Fire Department.....	\$14,284
Patagonia Volunteer Fire Department	\$14,007
Sharon Fire Department.....	\$14,284
Sharpsville Volunteer Fire Department.....	\$14,284
Shenango Township Volunteer Fire Department.....	\$11,791
Transfer Volunteer Fire Department	\$14,284
West Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department.....	\$14,284
West Salem Fire Department	\$12,899
Wheatland Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,068

This past year, the Fire Company, Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program helped many Mercer County fire companies continue their lifesaving work. This program is funded by gaming revenue and it could not go to a more worthy cause. The work our local fire companies do is vital to our communities, and I thank them for their contributions.



It was an honor to join Sen. Michele Brooks in presenting a citation to Robert Goeltz, who retired as Hermitage Fire Marshal last year.

Greenville receives state grant, loan for stormwater system

I was pleased to assist Greenville Borough in receiving a state grant and low-interest loan totaling \$995,000 to replace a deteriorated section of its stormwater collection system. As a result of the grant, the borough was able to address problems that occurred along Brackin Alley.

The funding enabled the borough to replace over 1,200 linear feet of stormwater sewer pipe, install 16 new catch basins and build an outfall headwall.

This was unfortunately necessary due to torrential rainfall last year that caused a section of Greenville's stormwater collection system under Brackin Alley to collapse. This opened up several sinkholes and sent sediment into the Shenango River.

The \$995,000 comprises a \$497,500 grant and a \$497,500 loan from the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority, which funds sewer, stormwater and drinking water projects throughout the state.

With the grant and the loan, Greenville was able to replace the damaged stormwater system and update the pipes to hopefully prevent problems from happening in the future.

Bills to improve PACE and PACENET pass House

PACE and PACENET are vital programs benefiting our senior citizens and ensuring they continue to receive the medicines they need. I'm proud to report that the House recently passed three bills aimed at improving PACE and PACENET and those who benefit from the prescription-drug programs.

House Bill 493, currently awaiting action in the Senate, would exempt veterans' benefits from income eligibility calculations for state programs, including PACE and PACENET. Our veterans have placed their lives on the line in defense of our country and should not be disqualified from receiving help with prescription drugs because of state benefits they earned.

House Bill 777, which was recently signed into law, is legislation I co-sponsored that extends the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment from being considered as income until Dec. 31, 2017. This will save approximately 16,500 Pennsylvania seniors, including 80 from our district, from losing

access to PACE and PACENET.

Finally, House Bill 190, which is currently awaiting action in the Senate, would exclude the accrual of interest from savings bonds for seniors 65 or older from being counted toward income when applying for lottery-funded programs such as PACE, PACENET and the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

Each of these bills will ensure that Pennsylvanians continue to have access to vital programs such as PACE and PACENET. I'm proud to have voted in favor of them and hope that each becomes law.

If you have questions or need assistance with either PACE or PACENET, please don't hesitate to contact my constituent service office at (724) 981-4655.



Congratulations to Olive Thompson on her 100th birthday!

Local libraries receive Keystone Grants

I am pleased to report that three local libraries received Keystone Grants to assist in renovating their facilities.

Greenville Public Library received a \$500,000 grant as part of a \$1.4 million project to expand and renovate the library. Recently, a groundbreaking was held to begin the project, which includes additions to the west side and front of the library to add 1,535 square feet of space, moving the children's library to the lower level so it has more room to accommodate the growing children's program, and installing an elevator and making the entire building handicapped accessible. The work will also include adding a new meeting/reading room, renovating the work room areas to improve efficiency and installing LED light fixtures.

The Community Library of the Shenango Valley, located in Sharon, received a \$53,150 Keystone Grant to assist in making the front entrance and restrooms handicapped accessible. Library board President Frank Garguilo welcomed news of the grant, stating, "Our board and staff thank the state for viewing the project worthy of funding."

The Stey-Nevant Library, located in Farrell, received a \$27,656 Keystone Grant to replace old light fixtures, which use bulbs that are no longer manufactured, with new energy-efficient lighting. Additionally, the grant will be used to replace back doors that have become worn and are difficult to securely latch. Responding to news of the grant, librarian Margaret Orchard remarked, "This is the answer to my prayers. It will certainly make a difference in the look of the library."

I was pleased to support each of these grant requests, and I know that many of our citizens will enjoy the enhanced library facilities for years to come.



Congratulations to the Greenville Library and board President John Hauser on the grant award.

Progress following Blight Summit in Sharon continues

In late 2014, I was pleased to host a Blight Summit in the City of Sharon that included code officers and municipal officials from across Mercer County. Blight is a growing problem in many municipalities, as abandoned and neglected homes, buildings and properties threaten neighborhoods by presenting safety hazards and havens for crime, lowering property values and diminishing quality of life.

At the summit, participants received a handbook developed by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania entitled, "From Blight to Bright," which outlined such strategies and tools as consistent and progressive code enforcement and development of a land bank as authorized by a 2012 state law. Local officials testified about the challenges and we heard from officials in other counties that have tackled this problem.

Since the initial summit, a group of local officials has met regularly to consider the creation of a land bank in Mercer County, and I have actively participated in those meetings. Land banks work to clear obstacles to redevelopment by



Progress continues to be made following our 2014 Blight Summit.

acquiring abandoned and dilapidated structures, and then deciding if it's better to demolish or rehabilitate them. They also work to remove liens and clear back taxes. Additionally, some have expressed interest in conducting quarterly meetings of local code officials to share challenges and best practices, and I plan to help convene such meetings.

I will continue to work with code officers and officials from Sharon, Farrell, Hermitage, Sharpsville and Greenville to decide on the best way to fight blight in our cities and boroughs and restore our communities.

Delayed Keystone Exams requirement nears passage

As of this writing, Senate Bill 880, which would delay the implementation of the Keystone Exams until the 2018-19 school year, is awaiting final passage in the Senate before heading to Gov. Tom Wolf's desk for signature into law.

I've heard from many people in our district and around the state about their concerns with the Keystone Exams being used as a graduation requirement. In too many cases, some students do not perform under the stress of a high-stakes standardized test, while teachers are forced to throw creativity and innovation aside in order to "teach to the test."

Yet, under current law, students will be required to attain passing scores on Keystone Exams in algebra 1, literature and biology as a condition of graduation, unless S.B. 880 is adopted. And, if a passing score is not achieved after two attempts at the exam, a project-based assessment will be required.

I believe it is necessary to take a step back and fully assess this requirement, especially when considering the cost to implement the exams with a new school funding formula on the horizon. The implementation of these exams was a product of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education without legislative input. I'm glad so many of my colleagues agree we need to reevaluate this law before it's required to begin.

S.B. 880 unanimously passed the Senate and was amended in the House before passing that chamber unanimously. Because it was amended, it must receive concurrence in the Senate one more time.

The amendment we added in the House Education Committee aims to rectify a situation I was made aware of



It was a privilege to read to children from Sharpsville Gardens Preschool last summer.

by school officials from the Reynolds School District. They brought to my attention that project-based assessments have precluded students from pursuing career and technical education opportunities. This simply isn't fair to those students, and it is unresponsive to the needs of our economy, which has a growing number of unfilled jobs in technical fields and skilled trades.

The amendment ensures that those students who take the project-based assessment would not be prohibited or hampered in their ability to pursue career and technical education. It also requires the Pennsylvania Education Department to investigate alternative methods for students to demonstrate proficiency for graduation, in addition to the Keystone Exams.

In the end, we all have the same goal – to ensure our students are properly prepared for life after high school. This legislation would help us reach that goal and make sure we're doing it in the most practical way possible for our students and our school districts.

Congratulations to these local teams and their recent accomplishments!



Farrell Boys Basketball Class A state runner-ups.

Greenville High School Wrestling celebrating 800th win.



Hickory High School Football Class AA District 10 champs.

Reynolds High School
Wrestling Class AA
Team State champs.



Sharpsville Football Team,
2014 District 10 champs.



I was proud to help honor our veterans in Sharon on Veterans Day.

Congratulations to Chris Davis on attaining the rank of Eagle Scout in his troop.

I was honored to present Buhl Park officials with a citation honoring the park's 100th anniversary.



It was an honor to present the Rev. Lee D. Penvose with a citation honoring Evangelical Lutheran Holy Trinity Church in Greenville on its 150th anniversary.



State Rep. Mark Longietti
P.O. Box 202007
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2007



lpo.kaf.0116

Budget impasse unacceptable for Pennsylvanians

On Dec. 29, Governor Tom Wolf approved a portion of a budget spending bill sent to him by the legislature. The approved portion allowed funds to flow to social service agencies, counties and schools. I supported the release of these funds as it was imperative that county senior citizen centers reopen, that nonprofits receive reimbursements for services provided to vulnerable citizens, and that schools remain open without borrowing additional funds.

However, Governor Wolf vetoed a portion of the spending bill because it did not represent a balanced budget. Standard & Poors, an independent, national rating agency, confirmed this by stating that the spending plan was "structurally unbalanced" and would lead to a \$2 billion gap by the next budget year. The governor called for a return to the budget framework that legislative leaders from both parties had previously agreed upon as it would put Pennsylvania back on a fiscally responsible path while restoring some of the funds cut from public education and county human services during the administration of former Governor Tom Corbett.

I did not support the spending bill that the legislature sent to Governor Wolf because it was not fiscally responsible. We must truly balance our budget and not create a looming fiscal crisis in the billions of dollars. Also, we must not simply shift the burden to local governments by continuing large cuts to schools and counties. In too many cases, that forces schools and counties to raise property taxes, which are already a burden to families on fixed incomes. Finally, we must invest in early childhood education because it saves us between \$7 and \$17 for every dollar invested, while helping children achieve their potential.

A bill to achieve these goals received two preliminary positive votes in the House, but then the Speaker abruptly adjourned session before a final vote to send it to the governor. My



I was ready to work toward a reasonable compromise on the budget, but the Speaker of the House did not have us in session as I said he should.

calls for a final vote and for the Speaker to keep the House in session each and every day, weekends and holidays included, until a final budget was passed were ignored. Twice, I found myself alone on the House floor in protest, lacking the opportunity to vote.

As we move forward, it is my hope that a final compromise budget will be soon reached. I will continue to be your voice calling on the legislature to finish its job and imploring my colleagues to make the compromises that are necessary to do the same.