



STATE REPRESENTATIVE Joe Ciresi

146th Legislative District

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Summer 2020

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When our lives changed...

Certain times are etched in your memory forever. It was the week of March 9, and Montgomery County Commissioner Dr. Val Arkoosh had convened an impromptu call with area legislators to address a rapidly evolving situation. Since then, my office has worked to harness every resource within reach to keep people fed, housed and safe during a global pandemic.

We made sure that our office remained accessible to you by phone, email and social media at a time when many other offices were not. In the past five months, my Royersford District Office provided over 2,700 constituent services, including assisting with over 1,200 unemployment claims, and executing a district-wide outreach effort to inform small businesses of grant opportunities. Since the beginning of the summer, my office has been open by appointment, and we also remain accessible by phone, email and social media and are ready to help – answering questions about changing state orders and guidance, resolving issues with unemployment compensation, providing information about small business grant programs and so much more.

To do our part in minimizing the spread of COVID-19, and to comply with the Department of Health's orders, we require all visitors wear masks. We sanitize the office between appointments and have installed plexiglass shields for the protection of our visitors and staff.



Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Mask Donations – Thank You!



Early on during the pandemic, my office began receiving questions from constituents asking what they could do to help. I want to thank those of you who responded by opening your hearts. You donated countless cloth masks, thanked essential workers and first responders, and heeded DOH orders that disrupted most aspects of your life.

In response to our call for people to drop off cloth material and ties in bins at the back of our Royersford District Office, many people volunteered to sew the masks together. As a result, we were able to donate boxes of cloth masks and nurse caps to local hospitals, nursing homes, fire and police departments, grocery stores and community residents.

Pennsylvanians have shown that we can stick together and rally to help one another get through the pandemic.

Sharing some masks for distribution with friend and colleague Rep. Wendy Ullman.

An Independent Voice for Our Citizens

As we've gone through various stages of the pandemic, I've continuously served as an independent voice to keep our citizens healthy and safe as well as to protect our taxpayers, small businesses and economy. This has meant supporting Governor Wolf when I believed his actions were necessary to protect public health, and it's also meant speaking out and voting against him when I felt they were causing an undue burden on our economy, including:

- **Urging the Governor and Department of Health to amend reopening criteria regarding nursing home COVID-19 cases, which moved us into the Yellow Phase.**
- **Joining with my colleague, Rep. Tim O'Neal (R-Washington), to call for an investigation of the state's unemployment compensation system failures during the pandemic.**
- **Voting to reopen lawn and garden centers and working with the Governor to designate construction as an essential business.**
- **Joining with my colleague, Rep. Todd Polinchock (R-Bucks), to push through a bill to allow real estate transactions to continue.**
- **Leading a group of legislators calling on the Governor to allow restaurants, hair salons and barber shops to operate in the Yellow Phase, resulting in outdoor dining in Yellow and haircuts in Green.**
- **Drafting legislation to give taxpayers more time to file their state income tax returns and pay their local property taxes.**

Through discussion, compromise, and negotiation instead of hostility and grandstanding, we were able to achieve real progress on reopening our economy without sacrificing public health. As we persist through this pandemic, I will continue to work with the Governor and his Administration on striking that balance, providing relief for struggling small businesses and advocating for the interests of my constituents.

Budget Update – Investing in Pandemic Response

While we'd normally spend the month of June focused on drafting our state's annual budget, this year has been anything but normal. With so much uncertainty about what the state's financial situation will look like as we progress further, we voted this spring to pass a five-month spending plan and will revisit and revise the plan as appropriate soon.

At the same time, I'm proud to have supported a bipartisan effort to provide \$2.6 billion in relief and to respond to the pandemic using a combination of state and federal CARES Act funding, including:

- \$300 million being transferred to the Property Tax Relief Fund, for a total allocation of \$621 million.
- \$692 million to support pandemic response, expand testing and provide PPE for our health care providers and nursing homes.
- \$225 million to create a Statewide Small Business Assistance program, modeled after legislation I introduced.
- \$175 million to create an emergency Rent and Mortgage Assistance Grant Program to keep struggling Pennsylvanians in their homes.
- \$50 million for fire and EMS companies.
- \$32 million to PHEAA to increase state grants and automatically put eligible student loans into forbearance.

As more funding from the federal government becomes available, I will continue to fight to make sure every dollar and tax credit provided makes the largest positive impact on our communities, and I will hold these programs accountable for their spending.



Leading the Push for Small Business Relief

I understand that times have been tough for a lot of our small businesses. I've heard their concerns, and that is why I was the first to introduce small business relief legislation – grants, not loans – in House Bill 2452, and I was pleased to see that bill incorporated into what became a \$225 million COVID-19 Relief Small Business Assistance program.

I've also written legislation to provide relief for non-chain local restaurants, delay the payment of

business' annual registration fees, create a grant program to help small businesses' afford COVID-19 mitigation measures, re-capitalize the COVID-19 Working Capital Access Loan Program, and provide technical assistance to help small businesses' and non-profits access pandemic relief resources. I will continue to advocate for small businesses – the heart of our communities and economy – so that we can all get through this together.

Lowering Property Taxes Through Education Reform

Making sure that our residents can stay in their homes despite the burden of property taxes is one of my top priorities. With Harrisburg gridlock continuously preventing a path forward on property tax reform initiatives, I promised to look at new, innovative and reachable approaches to address this problem. In my last newsletter, I told you that I was working to identify opportunities to reform mandates in education and reduce costs, and I'm proud to say that, since then, I've identified multiple opportunities to do that and achieve significant savings for taxpayers.

Comprehensive Charter School Reform

After months of working with Governor Wolf, legislators on both sides of the aisle, and education experts, we came up with a comprehensive reform to our outdated charter school law that I will be introducing as House Bill 2261. Among other provisions, my bill: extends the same financial, ethics and Sunshine Act requirements to charter schools that apply to school districts; standardizes the processes for charter school applications and charter amendments; and creates an accountability matrix to evaluate the performance and governance of charter schools – all while retaining school choice.

In addition, my bill would save taxpayers \$280 million annually through a series of charter school funding reforms, including \$2.6 million for the four school districts that I represent:

- Perkiomen Valley School District: \$509,390.
- Pottsgrove School District: \$703,768.
- Pottstown School District: \$1,270,000.
- Spring-Ford Area School District: \$914,374.

These funding reforms are accomplished through applying the same special education funding formula that school districts use to charter schools, requiring the use of actual instead of budgeted expenditures in tuition rate calculations, and enacting a data-based statewide cyber charter tuition rate, which can currently vary from \$7,700 to \$21,400 per student even at the same cyber charter school. By focusing on commonsense reforms that fix what's wrong with our charter school law, I'm proud of the bipartisan support my bill has attracted and look forward to continuing to push for it.



Pre-pandemic, I discussed fair funding and charter school reform at an education roundtable with Education Secretary Pedro Rivera (far left) at Pottstown School District.

Shared Services – Doing More with Less

Earlier this year, I was proud to support and vote for Act 50 of 2020, allowing the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education to implement an ambitious shared services plan – projecting to save \$80-\$120 million over seven years – among its member universities to improve efficiency and cut down on administrative expenses. Simultaneously, I was drafting legislation to promote cost-saving cooperation among local governments and school districts through shared services.

In early August, I introduced House Bill 2760 with bipartisan support, creating a state grant program to incentivize and support local governments (including school districts) to partner with each other for shared services such as regionalization, shared capacity, boundary change and personnel sharing. By taking advantage of economies of scale, we can spend fewer resources on administrative costs and overhead, putting that money back into providing services and lowering property taxes.

I look forward to announcing other initiatives soon to reform education and deliver savings to our taxpayers, including a school bus transportation efficiency bill I am working on with my colleague, Rep. Wendi Thomas (R-Bucks).

Vote by Mail

Mail-in voting is a secure, convenient and safe option to ensure that your voice is heard from the comfort of your own home. Since we're not sure what the fall will bring regarding COVID-19, I highly encourage utilizing this option for the General Election in November. You can apply for a mail-in ballot online (votespa.com) now, or send a paper application to:

Montgomery County Voter Services

P.O. Box 311

Norristown, PA 19404-0311

Also, make sure you're registered! Visit register.votesPA.com to check on your status or to get registered. Deadline is Oct. 19!

Congestion Relief Options Study to Be Released for Route 422 Corridor

A study on the options to relieve congestion in the Pottstown-King of Prussia Route 422 corridor is scheduled to be released in late August. Funded by a grant from the Pottstown Health and Wellness Foundation, it is being done by two Australian academics – Professor Peter Newman and Dr. Charlie Hargroves – who previously did a town hall on “trackless tram” with me in Pottstown and met with legislators and Governor Tom Wolf at my invitation in Harrisburg in 2019.

The study is designed to consider new technology and policy options that appear to be emerging around the world. Options considered include High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, shuttle bus services, single rail overhead services, shared water transport (fast catamarans or ferries), trackless tram corridors, air transport (helicopters, air taxis or drones), passenger rail on the freight line, economic incentives for off-peak travel, staggered work hours or tele-commuting, and car-pooling or shared transit services using new smart technologies. The final product will detail a general overview and description of each option, their benefits and possible issues, and suggest the best three options for further consideration.

In addition to this study, I have continued to push for a restoration of passenger rail and look forward to announcing news on that in late September.

Transportation Study Town Hall

Tune in for a town hall with me and Drs. Newman and Hargroves as they release their findings and transportation recommendations for the Route 422 Corridor. We will be streaming live on my website www.RepCiresi.com on

Wednesday, Sept. 2, at 7 p.m.

Questions can be submitted in advance to repciresi@pahouse.net. Further details of public access and virtual public meetings will be provided through my office.



I am always happy to recognize the accomplishments of our youths, including recent Eagle Scout earners Jonathan Brull, Simon Keen, and Evan Ciano.

Federal REAL ID Enforcement Deadline Postponed to October 2021

The Department of Homeland Security postponed the enforcement date for REAL ID from Oct. 1, 2020, to Oct. 1, 2021, in response to COVID-19 and the national emergency declaration. PennDOT suspended the issuance of REAL IDs during the pandemic and is expected to resume late summer 2020.

If you renew your non-REAL ID license and wish to upgrade to a REAL ID in the future, you will still be able to do so when issuing resumes. An upgrade to REAL ID will cost a one-time fee of \$30, plus a license renewal fee of \$30.50, and will add four years to the expiration date of your license. REAL ID is optional, and PennDOT will continue to offer standard, non-REAL ID licenses and photo ID cards.

The federal REAL ID Act has been extended in Pennsylvania until
October 1, 2021

The best thing you can do to prepare for REAL ID is to get your documents together:

- ✓ Proof of Identity
- ✓ Proof of Social Security number
- ✓ Two current, physical proofs of PA residency
- ✓ Proof of all legal name changes

Visit PENNDOT.GOV/REALID

Upcoming Events

Drive-Through Senior Fair

While we regrettably had to cancel our in-person senior fair, my office is partnering with the Tri-County Active Adult Center and PMA Specialists to host a drive-through senior fair! We will be putting together bags with information and handouts from over 100 vendors on senior services and benefits. All you have to do is stop by and pick it up – without even leaving your car! To minimize contact and ensure traffic flow, **RSVPs are required.** To RSVP, please contact us at repciresi@pahouse.net, (484) 200-8265 or www.RepCiresi.com.

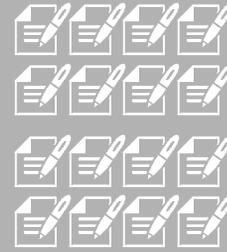
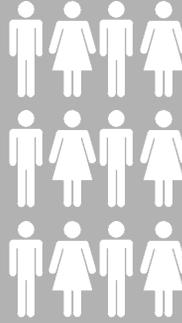
At our Royersford District Office (*enter parking lot off Oak St.*):
Monday, Oct. 12 and 26: 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Tuesday, Oct. 13 and 27: 10 a.m. – noon

Coming Soon: Shredding Event!

My office will be hosting another free shredding event for my constituents in October – stay tuned to my website and social media for date, time, and location to be announced in early September!

REP. CIRESI'S OFFICE BY THE NUMBERS

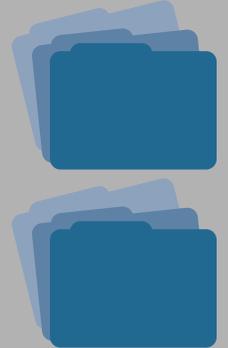
8,079
 Constituent Services Provided



905
 Bills Co-Sponsored

22
 Bills Introduced

6,695
 Cases Completed



Addressing Prescription Drug Affordability

I understand that the high and skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs creates a burden for many Pennsylvanians. Earlier this year, I joined with legislators and health care advocates at a press conference unveiling a package of bills to control the unsustainable growth in prescription drug prices and make health care more affordable for all of us.

Even before the pandemic, one-fifth of Pennsylvanians were not filling prescriptions, skipping doses or delaying care due to cost, which is unacceptable. That is why I am proud to be a co-sponsor of the following bills to rein in the cost of prescription drugs:

- **House Bill 2212: Would establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board to identify drugs that pose affordability burdens and set limits that customers could pay for crucial drugs.**
- **House Bill 1873: Would set a mandatory price cap on the monthly cost of insulin for patients at \$100 a month and urges the attorney general to investigate the skyrocketing**

price of insulin, which averaged \$450 a month out-of-pocket in 2016.

- **House Bill 2225: Would direct the Department of Health to study and design a cost-saving prescription drug importation program, allowing a well-researched program to be implemented with federal approval. Florida estimated that its drug importation program design would save consumers over \$150 million on prescription drugs annually.**

These legislative proposals follow our successful bipartisan passage of Act 42 of 2019 last year, which I co-sponsored and voted for and is projected to save \$30-\$35 million annually by having Pennsylvania set up its own health insurance exchange instead of paying the federal government, redirecting the savings into a reinsurance program and insurance premium reduction. The Pennsylvania Insurance Department is reporting that this legislation would reduce premiums by 5.3% for 2021. I will continue to work on other bipartisan legislation to increase access to health care and prescription drugs.

PUA and Additional Unemployment

The Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program is available for self-employed workers, independent contractors, gig workers and workers impacted by COVID-19 but not eligible for regular unemployment compensation.

If you are on traditional unemployment and exhaust your benefits before your benefit year expires, the newly created Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) and Pennsylvania Extended Benefits (EB) programs will provide up to an additional 13 weeks each of unemployment benefits for a total of 26 weeks. If you have



an active UC claim, you should be automatically enrolled in these programs.

To apply for unemployment compensation or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, reach out to my office for help or visit www.uc.pa.gov.



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LPO.AD.0820

Stay up to date with Rep. Ciresi

I maintain an email list for those who wish to receive periodic updates from me, including legislation updates, event announcements, traffic updates, state and local program information, and more. You can sign up on my website at

www.RepCiresi.com

You also can follow me on social media, which is regularly updated with information from Harrisburg and events right here in Montgomery County.

   @RepCiresi ·  RepCiresi@pahouse.net

Over \$12 million in grant funding delivered to the 146th District

I am proud to have helped deliver over \$12 million in state grants to the district in my first term in office. Since my last newsletter, our district has received:

- \$1 million to Royersford Borough to restore the railroad trestle bridge over the Schuylkill River.
- \$783,421 to Limerick Township for sidewalk improvements along Lewis Road.
- \$400,000 for upgrades to Limerick Community Park and Royersford Victory Park.
- \$836,000 for stormwater and sanitary sewer rehabilitation in Pottstown Borough and Perkiomen Township.
- \$277,410 for the installation of a permanent traffic signal at the intersection of Route 29, Bridge Street and Graterford Road in Perkiomen Township.
- \$351,582 for redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization in Pottstown Borough.
- \$91,947 for new equipment for Pottstown High School's Career & Technical Education Department and the Western Montgomery Career and Technical Center.
- \$620,000 in school safety grants for Pottstown, Pottsgrove, Perkiomen Valley and Spring-Ford school districts.
- Over \$175,000 to 12 local volunteer fire and emergency service organizations.