



***MONROE MATTERS***

**State Representative**  
**MAUREEN MADDEN**

Representing the 115th Legislative District

Summer/Fall 2020



**A Safe Reopening**

We are all learning how to navigate the ever-changing waters of COVID-19: nurses, doctors, scientists, elected officials, small business owners, first responders, parents, teachers, and students. However, the one sentiment we all share is maintaining the health and safety of our children.

# School Reopening Plans

## ESASD

East Stroudsburg Area School District (ESASD) has developed an in-depth Health & Safety Plan for the upcoming school year, highlighting its own hybrid schedule. Under this schedule, two groups of students labeled Group A and Group B will be alternating between in-person and remote learning. Both groups will have two days of in-person instruction, with three days of remote learning. Those who have special learning needs will have the opportunity to attend in-person classes more often. Students without internet access will have the option to receive two days of remote learning in a supervised location within one of the school buildings and will be provided offline instructional resources to be used on Wednesdays. This same option will be extended to those who need it, regardless of internet access issues.

Please visit the school district's website, [www.ESASD.net](http://www.ESASD.net), for answers to frequently asked questions regarding COVID-19 health and safety

plans that will be updated weekly. The detailed reopening plan also can be found on the website.

There is no set deadline to enroll students in the East Stroudsburg Area Cyber Academy. More information on how to enroll can be found on the school district's website.



*Principal Michael Catrillo*



*TreVaughn Ellis – Class President*



# SASD

Stroudsburg Area School District (SASD) will tentatively implement a hybrid learning curriculum where students will attend classes in person for two days and hold online classes for three days.

To facilitate the new changes, the district will be conducting online “orientation days,” sharing videos through social media and the district website to familiarize students with the new procedures. SASD will also be providing each student with three masks. This extra PPE facilitates the mask sanitization process while ensuring students will still be wearing a mask. There will be “mask breaks” when social distancing is taking place. Students will also have the option to remove their mask when exercising outside and eating. Face shields are also allowed where applicable.

Although the district encourages parents and guardians to drive or walk the students to school when possible, school bus seating will be spaced, and face masks will be required. Screening will be required at every school entrance, which will involve a wellness and temperature check. Spaced lines will be placed outside and throughout all buildings to ensure social distancing. Classes also may be staggered to reduce the number of students in the hallways. The idea of staggering students continues into the lunchroom when feasible, and students will be seated to allow for 6 feet of social distancing. Students will also be required to wash their hands before and after eating.

The Stroudsburg Area Cyber Academy is available for those who will not physically attend school throughout the 2020-21 school year. It is a no-cost remote learning curriculum. Further information can be found on the Stroudsburg School District website, [www.sburg.org](http://www.sburg.org), under the “Resources” tab.



*Mackenzie Roman and her family on graduation day.*

# Broadband for All

In the Summer of 2019, Rep. Madden coordinated with the residents of Snow Hill Falls, members of Gov. Tom Wolf’s office and Blue Ridge Communications as part of the Governor’s restore PA Initiative to expand broadband access in Cresco. This project, though still in progress, highlights the continued lack of internet access in other rural communities across Monroe County and the Commonwealth. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, many schools shifted to virtual learning and school districts worked with families by providing mobile internet hotspots and computers. This was necessary to ensure that students had adequate tools to continue learning. However, this solution is only temporarily sufficient to address the widespread issue of limited internet connection.

To remedy this disparity, the Monroe County Commissioners are inviting you to take a survey to determine precisely where the signals – internet and cellular – need to be improved. Before you complete the survey, please note:

1. You will complete the survey as one of three types of user – business, education (either a teacher or parent of a student), or regular user.
2. The survey should be completed using the cell phone or computer that you usually use and should be completed in the location (home or office) where you usually use it.
3. It will take less than five minutes to complete!

The Commissioners are asking for as many responses as possible. You can take the survey by going to the links:

**Resident Survey:** <https://arcg.is/1jy8TT>

**Business Survey:** <https://arcg.is/faG8L>

# PMSD

On Aug. 12, the Pocono Mountain School District Board voted 8-1 to approve the Path to Reopening Plan recommended by the administration team.

PMSD Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Robison stated, “All Pocono Mountain School District schools will be reopening on Aug. 31, 2020, under the PMSD Learn from Home Virtual Program, which will provide 100% virtual classes for students in grades K to 12. Our administrative team developed this instructional model

based on feedback from parents who wanted school to start virtually, but with asynchronous and synchronous instruction, so their children would have daily interaction with their district teachers. We are excited to start the 2020-21 school year and hope to be able to bring our students back to safely attending classes in their school buildings very soon. We will re-evaluate our program, the COVID-19 spread, and any new CDC and DOH guidance in October.” For more information about the Path to Reopening, please visit [www.pmsd.org](http://www.pmsd.org).

# COVID-19 Testing Expansion

As Pennsylvania schools and businesses continue to slowly reopen, there is one issue of paramount importance: adequate testing. It is imperative to expand testing, as this is the best way to quickly identify cases, treat the infected, and isolate them before the virus spreads further. Testing is also necessary for accurate contact tracing, a critical step in containing the spread through contacting those who have been exposed to the virus and ensuring they quarantine for the minimum 14-day period.

On Aug. 11, Rep. Madden and her colleagues participated in a Policy Committee hearing regarding COVID-19 testing challenges in hopes of bringing home answers to their respective districts. Among the testifiers was Brian O'Neill, executive chairman and founder of Testing Centers of America (TCA), GENETWORx (Gx), and Nucleus Healthcare. These companies have the current capacity to process 125,000 tests per day and are aiming to reach 870,000 tests per day by the end of the year. Nucleus Healthcare, in partnership with Gx, has also provided a unique software application called Aura. Aura software facilitates essential processes for patients and customers, such as sequential testing, contact tracing, rapid diagnosis and test scheduling. In his testimony, Mr. O'Neill stressed the importance of expanding and having a quicker turnaround time for tests so those infected can get treatment as soon as possible. Faster results also ensure that those in contact with the potentially infected person are informed in a timely manner to prevent situations such as superspreading. Another aspect of Mr. O'Neill's testimony included how COVID-19 affects minorities. African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans are 2.6-2.8 times more likely to contract the virus and are nearly 5 times more likely to be hospitalized. Along with this information, data reports show that minority communities do not have the same access to testing as other areas. If the commonwealth is going to reopen, Rep. Madden said it is imperative that every Pennsylvanian has access to testing and treatment of COVID-19.

Additionally, on Aug. 11 Gov. Tom Wolf announced OraSure Technologies Inc., a Northampton County-based developer and manufacturer of rapid diagnostic tests, collection and stabilizations, will expand its operations in the Lehigh Valley. Not only will this create 177 full-time jobs and retain 233 jobs, but it also will increase testing accessibility. OraSure is developing a rapid antigen self-test which gives people the option to easily collect a sample themselves and read the results shortly after.

Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine stated at a hearing on Aug. 19 that in addition to their coordination with OraSure, they will be having a meeting with Mr. O'Neill to discuss a collaboration with his companies. Overcoming this virus has proven to be a team effort that will not slow until all Pennsylvanians are provided with the testing and treatment they need.

## CARES Act Funding Recap

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people from all walks of life have experienced extreme hardships. Pennsylvanians have been faced with not only the uncertainty of their health, but unforeseeable financial burdens as well. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, signed into law March 27, has provided \$150 billion for unprecedented financial situations. Since March, \$2.6 billion has been distributed to Pennsylvania and includes:

- \$150 million for worker protections
- \$870 million for business and local government relief
- \$347 million for education and early childhood
- \$30 million for health care
- \$225 million for food and shelter
- \$980 million for services for vulnerable populations

Throughout Monroe County, many small businesses and nonprofit organizations have benefited from this funding. The Paycheck Protection Program, established by the CARES Act, has assisted many small businesses in ensuring employees will not lose their jobs, nor will employers lose their staff. Child care providers and East Stroudsburg University received \$560,000 and \$1,945,888, respectively, for COVID-19 relief. Although these are not the only organizations in Monroe County benefiting from the relief funding, small businesses, child care facilities, and educators in the 115th District are highlighted due to their impact on our community.

## COVID-19 Relief Mortgage and Rental Assistance Grant Program

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a total of \$175 million has been allocated to assist homeowners, landlords and renters. The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency will administer the program. Applicants cannot exceed the county income limit and must verify reduced work hours or wages after March 1, 2020.

Eligible homeowners will receive payments not exceeding \$1,000 per month, for a maximum of six months. Eligible landlords who apply on behalf of the renters will receive payments not exceeding \$750 per month, for a maximum of six months. All payments will be made by Nov. 30. The deadline to apply is Sept. 30. Please visit [www.phfa.org](http://www.phfa.org) or contact Pocono Mountains United Way (570-517-3953) for more information.

# Fireworks Flare Tensions Across PA

As most of you have heard from your homes, cars and outdoor barbecues this summer, Pennsylvanians love fireworks. However, as many of you have relayed to Rep. Madden personally, it has become a complicated issue for our state.

Back in 2017, House Bill 542 was signed into law as Act 43 to legalize the sale of fireworks for consumers. This decision was made in light of a budget shortfall, and rather than create small enhancements to fix financial strain, the Governor and the General Assembly painstakingly negotiated a compromise to sell fireworks in order to fiscally stabilize the state budget to put more people to work.

As is with many last-minute decisions in the heat of budget discussions, this vote may not have been in the best interest of Pennsylvanians. Act 43 brings in needed financial stability to Pennsylvania and has presented great job opportunities for working families, but at what cost? For those reasons, Rep. Madden voted against the bill on final passage.

What is now being done to fix the noise pollution for frustrated residents? There are multiple pieces of legislation introduced in the House that Rep. Madden has co-sponsored to help remedy this ongoing issue:

- **H.B. 1687** would provide guidance to local law enforcement, increase fines, set time-of-day limitations on fireworks and require fireworks companies to notify every consumer about the state law.
- **H.B. 2657** would establish limits on when fireworks could be used and increase fines.
- **H.B. 2670** would allow for stronger local limits, create limitations on the time of day fireworks could be used and create notification requirements.
- **H.B. 2735** would ultimately repeal Act 43 of 2017 and reinstate the law to the original 1939 version – only allowing residents to purchase novelty fireworks such as sparklers and spinners.
- Lastly, the Senate recently passed an amendment to a bill that would allow some cities to ban all fireworks.

Many of Rep. Madden's colleagues in the House share her sentiment that repealing or modifying the fireworks law is going to be a continuous battle, as this law has provided needed funding to Pennsylvania. However, Rep. Madden will do everything in her power as your state representative to ensure your voices are heard in Harrisburg.

# Police Reform Laws Established To Prevent More Tragedies

Rep. Madden has long supported legislation to improve policing policies. This includes Act 57 and Act 59 which were recently signed into law by Gov. Tom Wolf.

Act 57 requires a thorough background check for law enforcement applicants before being employed and requires a law enforcement agency to disclose employment information. The law also establishes an electronic database housed and maintained by the Municipal Police Officers' Training and Education Training Commission that contains separation records of law enforcement officers.

Act 59 requires mental health evaluations with a focus on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) of law enforcement officers as a condition of continued employment. The evaluation may be upon request of a law enforcement officer or a police chief or within 30 days of an incident of the use of lethal force. The law also requires training for police officers on trauma-informed care, use of deadly force, de-escalation and harm reduction techniques, community and cultural awareness, implicit bias, procedural justice and reconciliation techniques. Under the law, magisterial district judges are required to complete, as part of their annual continuing education requirement, one course on the identification and reporting of suspected child abuse and court proceedings involving children.

Rep. Madden believes these laws will give police departments the tools to ensure they are not hiring officers with previous misconduct records, and that police officers are able to seek mental health treatment for any traumatic experience they may encounter in the course of their duties. The laws serve to protect citizens, police officers and their departments.

## Pending PUC Plans

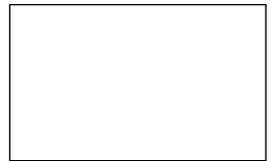
Pennsylvania American Water Company (PAWC) has requested the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) to approve a rate hike. If fully implemented, this would result in an increase of approximately \$15 per month to customers. The rate hike is tentatively scheduled to begin February 2021. Since the last rate hike, PAWC is reporting over \$1.64 billion in system improvements.

For many customers of PAWC residing in A Pocono Country Place and Blue Mountain Lakes, this rate hike will be an added burden in what are already uncertain economic times due to COVID-19. Rep. Madden believes the upgrades are necessary and will provide customers with improved water quality. However, for those with already stretched budgets, the increase will be burdensome. Rep. Madden believes that stretching the rate hike over four years would be less impactful to customers and expressed this during an Aug. 25 PUC hearing. Although the eight virtual hearings have concluded, the conversation has not. Rep. Madden will continue to advocate on your behalf as the situation unfolds. For the most up-to-date information, please visit [www.puc.pa.gov](http://www.puc.pa.gov).



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# Tina Nixon Chairs ESU's Presidential Search

Rep. Madden would like to recognize Tina L. Nixon for being the Committee Chair on East Stroudsburg University's (ESU) Presidential Search Committee. The Committee, composed of 21 selected members, is responsible for recommending a presidential appointment to the Board of Governors of the State System of Higher Education and Chancellor Dan Greenstein.

Tina Nixon stated: "It is with great honor to serve as the Chair of the ESU's President Search Committee as an Alumni and Trustee. I, as well as the entire search committee, am committed in finding a replacement that will continue to build upon the wonderful foundation laid by President Welsh and the team of exceptional leaders at ESU. Someone who will continue to put students first and provide fearless leadership during these challenging times. We know we have our work cut out for us, but we are committed to selecting the best candidate who

meets the needs of the students, faculty and the community."

Tina Nixon graduated with her bachelor's degree as part of ESU's class of 1989. Currently, she is a member of ESU's Council of Trustees and is the first black woman elected to the position\*.



As a Harrisburg native, she began her career in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives working for former Speaker of the House K. Leroy Irvis. For over 30 years, Nixon has continued to work in the human services field combating a multitude of issues facing those who do not have a voice. She has received countless accolades and is highly involved in her community.

\*In the first edition of Rep. Madden's Summer 2020 Newsletter, it was inaccurately reported that Tameko Patterson was the first black woman appointed to the East Stroudsburg University Council of Trustees.

*thank you!* Rep. Madden would like to thank her staff, Marina Purcaro, Latisha Griffith, Danielle Cotumaccio and Collin DeVries for their collaboration on this newsletter.