

# PATRICK J. HARKINS

## DEAR NEIGHBORS,

There are exciting developments to report since my prior newsletter in January!

We recently finalized a new state budget for 2022-23. The \$45.2 billion spending plan includes a historic investment in our public schools that will provide the Erie City School District with more than \$6 million in Level Up funding. Other highlights of the new state budget include funding increases to boost school security, improve access to child care, help residents with home repairs and expand affordable housing.

In other news, the boundaries of the First Legislative District will be changing soon, as the new maps created by redistricting take effect later this year.



You'll find more about the new budget and additional news affecting our district in the pages to follow. Please remember – if you need help with any state-related matter, my talented staff and I are here for you. Stop by my office at 460 E. 26th St. or call (814) 459-1949 to schedule an appointment. On the back page, you'll find a list of some of the many ways we can help.

*Left: It is always inspiring to spend time with House Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton.*

*Right: During Working Animal Appreciation Day, I met some of the animals who serve the public and thanked the first responders and public safety professionals who work with them.*



## NEW CHILD CARE TAX CREDIT WILL HELP FAMILIES WITH COSTS

The new state budget taps \$90 million in remaining federal rescue funds to support Pennsylvania's child care providers, who were hit so hard by the pandemic. The funding will support hiring and retention efforts so the industry can continue recovering and be there to provide the critical support working families need.

The state budget also creates a new child care tax credit program which is modeled after the existing federal child tax credit. The state child care tax credit is for 30% of the federally approved expense.

Parents and guardians will be able to claim the state tax credit when filling their 2023 state taxes. Families could be eligible for \$180 (one child) or \$360 (two or more children) for households earning above \$43,000, or \$315 (one child) or \$630 (two or more children) for households earning less than \$43,000.

The rebate will be subtracted from the total amount of taxes owed to the state, or, if the credit is worth more than the amount of taxes owed, the rebate will be refunded to the filer.



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# BONUS REBATE COMING UNDER THE PROPERTY TAX/RENT REBATE PROGRAM

Residents who received rebates under the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for the 2021 claim year will be receiving an additional one-time rebate equal to 70% of their regular rebate.

No additional action is required to receive the supplemental rebate, which will be sent to claimants via the same method – check or direct deposit – used to deliver their standard rebate.

Residents who have not yet filed for their standard rebate can still do so: the deadline to apply has been extended through Dec. 31 of this year.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 and older; widows and widowers 50 and older; and people with disabilities 18 and older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, and half of Social Security income is excluded.

To learn more, visit [www.revenue.pa.gov](http://www.revenue.pa.gov) and enter “Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program” into the search bar. You can also call the department at 1-888-222-9190 or contact my office at (814) 459-1949 for more information and help applying.



## WATCH OUT FOR THESE SCAMS!

Be alert to the following scams, which include:

**Unclaimed Property.** Fraudulent texts are targeting potential unclaimed property recipients. The state Treasurer’s Office never reaches out to anyone about any program via unsolicited text messages, and any such text is a phishing attempt.

**Pension poaching.** Dishonest pension advisors are attempting to get veterans or their family members to pay for pension-related services that the state already offers for free.

Please remember that veterans and their families should never pay to:

- ✓ Obtain forms or submit applications.
- ✓ Restructure assets in order to “qualify.”
- ✓ Receive the promise of eligibility for a pension.
- ✓ Receive a lump sum payment on a pension.

There are dedicated veteran service officers who can help you for free. Contact Erie County Veterans Affairs at (814) 451-6265.

**Fake business investigation letters.** These have the Department of Revenue’s name and logo on the top and claim that the business owner is being investigated for alleged violation of delinquent sales tax liability. The letter tells the recipient to call a number listed at the end to comply. The letter may look legitimate, but it is a scam!

## DOUBLE-DIGIT-PERCENTAGE INCREASES COMING TO OUR SCHOOLS

The new state budget contains historic increases for Pennsylvania’s public schools, including an additional \$525 million for basic education and an additional \$100 million for special education. The budget also provides \$225 million in Level Up funding to Pennsylvania’s most underfunded districts, which will include more than \$6.6 million to the Erie City School District.

Schools in our district will see double-digit-percentage increases across the board. The Erie City School District will see additional funding of nearly \$16 million for basic education and nearly \$1.4 million for special education funding, while the Iroquois School District will receive increases of more than \$900,000 for basic education and \$120,000 for special education.

Although it won’t change the dynamic overnight, the new budget investment is a healthy step toward fairer funding for our schools. I have been fighting for those dollars to help level the playing field for our students and shift the burden from local taxpayers.

In addition to the basic and special education funding, our school districts and others throughout the state will each receive more than \$200,000 to fund school safety and mental health resources.



*It was a joy reading to the engaged pre-K students at Iroquois Elementary School.*

## NEW PROTECTIONS IN PLACE FOR TIPPED WORKERS

Tipped workers here in Erie and throughout the state finally have greater protections. New rules taking effect increase the amount of tips an employee must receive monthly before an employer can reduce the hourly wage; prohibit employers from deducting credit card processing fees from an employee’s tip; require employers to clarify that automatic service charges are not gratuities; and add other protections.



*I joined Erie High School Principal Donald Orlando and my colleague Rep. Bob Merski to present proclamations to Erie High School nurses Rachel Varney and Tamara Carney for their courage and professionalism during a school shooting incident.*

# DIALING 988 CONNECTS CALLERS TO NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

Pennsylvanians in crisis will have easier access to help, thanks to a new, three-digit dialing code. Dialing 988 will now link callers directly to trained counselors who are part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. Veterans can reach the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 and then pressing "1."

The counseling is free, confidential, and available on a 24/7 basis.

# NEW LAW WILL STRENGTHEN FIRE SAFETY FOR KIDS IN CHILD CARE

A new law I supported will help protect kids in child care by adding a number of fire-safety requirements. The law requires family child-care homes to have smoke alarms on every floor that are interconnected via hardware, Bluetooth or other means; a portable fire extinguisher for class B fires in cooking areas; and exits that comply with state regulations.

# YOUR TAX DOLLARS COMING BACK TO THE DISTRICT

During the first half of 2022, I helped bring more than \$19 million back to our district. Some highlights include:

- ✓ Nearly \$13 million for economic development and business growth, including funding for the development of the former Erie Malleable Iron plant into a high-tech business park, among other projects.
- ✓ \$3.2 million for infrastructure improvements and community programs.
- ✓ More than \$1.3 million to fight crime, improve probation services, strengthen services for sexual assault victims, better equip our first responders and respond to student mental health needs.
- ✓ Nearly \$1 million to expand housing-related services for families in need.
- ✓ \$500,000 in Ready to Learn Block Grant funding to the Erie City School District.

Additional funding included \$6.6 million in federal dollars to help Erie hospitals and behavioral healthcare centers replenish critical resources and fund recruitment and retention efforts.

# STRENGTHENING CELLPHONE CONNECTIONS

In May, I hosted a community town hall with state Rep. Bob Merski to address cell service problems on Presque Isle, the lake, and the surrounding shore. Many from our community attended and expressed how connection problems are affecting their businesses and lives. I was encouraged to see representatives from some of our local cell service providers there, who pledged to address the problem.



*Joining us for the cell phone town hall were Presque Isle State Park Manager Matt Greene and DEP Coastal Resource Manager and Presque Isle Advisory Board Vice Chair Don Benczkowski.*

# BILL WOULD LEGALIZE FENTANYL TEST STRIPS

In June, the House passed legislation that would legalize test strips that can detect fentanyl and other potentially lethal chemicals in drugs. I voted for the bill, which would remove these test strips from being classified as illegal paraphernalia, because access to this critical tool can help prevent overdose deaths.

As of this writing, the bill is in the state Senate Judiciary Committee.



*State Rep. Bob Merski and I welcomed state education officials to the House chamber.*

# PROGRAMS CAN PROVIDE MORTGAGE, WATER, AND INTERNET ASSISTANCE

Residents who are behind on their mortgage payments because of pandemic-related issues may be eligible for the Pennsylvania Homeowner Assistance Fund, which can provide eligible households with up to \$30,000 in assistance. The program is available to residents with a household income equal to or less than 150% of the area median household income.

For complete eligibility requirements and to learn how to apply, visit [www.pahaf.org](http://www.pahaf.org) or call PHFA toll free at 1-855-U-Are-Home.

In addition to mortgage assistance, please remember that the following programs can help with:

- ✓ Water. The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program can provide eligible households up to two \$2,500 "crisis" grants – one for water service and one for wastewater service. Visit [www.dhs.pa.gov](http://www.dhs.pa.gov) and enter "LIHWAP" into the search bar.
- ✓ Internet. The Affordable Connectivity Program can help low-income households pay for Internet by providing monthly discounts of up to \$30 per month. Visit [www.fcc.gov/acp](http://www.fcc.gov/acp). Households already enrolled in another FCC assistance program – Lifeline – do not have to apply again for the ACP but can contact their Internet company directly to enroll. For more on that program, visit [www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov) and enter Lifeline into the search bar.





State Representative  
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## FIGHTING FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEE SAFETY



This April, I joined labor officials at the Capitol as the state announced plans to study the feasibility of extending OSHA workplace safety protections for PA's public-sector workers and urged passage of my bill that would put those protections in place.

For decades, Pennsylvania's public sector employees – including transit workers, bus mechanics, maintenance workers, equipment

operators, and virtually every other employee who works for the state – have lacked the same basic protections as workers for private companies because OSHA regulations apply only to private employers. It's an outrageous situation that needs to end.

The feasibility study – which is expected to be completed this fall – is a step in the right direction, but we already know the human cost of doing nothing – more preventable deaths and injuries. I'll keep fighting until my bill becomes law.

## HOW MY OFFICE CAN HELP

My office can help you with:

- ✓ Obtaining and completing all state forms, including PACE (senior prescription help), home heating/water assistance, Property Tax/Rent Rebate (for qualified applicants), PHEAA (higher education assistance) and others.
- ✓ Car registrations; special tags, titles and license applications; disability placards; other problems or questions involving PennDOT.
- ✓ Birth and death certificate applications/notarization of state documents.
- ✓ Unemployment compensation.
- ✓ Problems or questions regarding Department of Human Services programs, including SNAP/EBT and other assistance.
- ✓ Questions or problems regarding utilities and other consumer services.
- ✓ Fish and boat registration renewals/ATV registrations.
- ✓ Special occasion permits.
- ✓ State professional licensing assistance (barbers, etc.).
- ✓ Any problem or question involving state government!

The office is open Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

## FIXING THE FIREWORKS LAW

A new law will bring some commonsense restrictions to consumer fireworks use.

Under the new law, municipalities will have the authority to restrict the use of fireworks to between 10 p.m. and 10 a.m., except from July 2-4 and Dec. 31, when they can be used until 1 a.m. the following morning. (Fireworks will also be permitted over the Memorial and Labor Day weekends.)

There will also be greater penalties for improper sales or illegal use.

Most importantly, the new law gives local governments the power to ban fireworks in situations where they cannot be used in compliance with existing rules, including those prohibiting their use within 150 feet of buildings



*I recently toured the site of the former Erie Malleable Iron Plant. I worked to help secure \$4 million in funding from the Erie County Redevelopment Authority to develop the plant into a 21st Century high-tech business park.*

### SIGN UP FOR EMAIL UPDATES!

Visit my webpage at [www.RepHarkins.com](http://www.RepHarkins.com) to sign up for my email updates about programs, services, events and news involving our district!