



State Representative

Mike O'Brien

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REPORT TO SENIORS

2011



Dear Friend,

The door at my local office is always open to you from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. My staff can help you with any state-related programs or issues you may have including:

- PACE and PACENET prescription-drug cards
- PennDOT assistance
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program
- LIHEAP home heating assistance
- Tax program information
- Birth and death certificates
- Other state-related program information

Please visit my website at www.pahouse.com/OBrien for links to state programs and to stay up-to-date on my legislative work. While there, be sure to look for the “sign up for email alerts” tab so you can sign up to receive my email messages, which detail my progress in Harrisburg and the state-related issues that affect you and our community. I send them about once a week.

I encourage you to call my office at **215-503-3245** if you need help with a state-related matter.

I wish you a very joyful holiday season,

Bill to help more seniors “age in place” clears House

I voted for legislation in October that would allow more area senior citizens who rely on a caregiver to remain in their homes and apartments by expanding the types of caregivers eligible for financial support from Pennsylvania’s Family Caregiver Support Program.

The program reimburses eligible family members for the costs associated with caring for an older person, provided they live in the same household. The program also provides grants for home modifications and buying assistive devices.

Right now, the program’s rules bar non-relatives or relatives living outside the senior’s home from accessing the program. **These restrictions have resulted in many local area agencies on aging being forced to return unused funding for this program to the state, despite having a waiting list.**

House Bill 210 would expand eligibility to non-relatives or relatives living outside a senior’s home.

This legislation is important because some seniors live alone or far away from loved ones and depend on neighbors or friends for assistance. The economic value of those who care for Pennsylvania’s seniors in their homes has been estimated in the billions of dollars.

The bill awaits action in the Senate.



Official state I.D. card available

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, or PennDOT, offers an official state identification card that can be used as legal identification in place of a driver’s license. The forms are available in my office, online at www.dmv.state.pa.us, or by calling PennDOT’s Driver and Vehicle Services Customer Care Center at 1-800-932-4600.



Protecting seniors' access to PACE and PACENET

I voted for a law enacted earlier this year that allows PACE and PACENET prescription drug assistance enrollees to continue to maintain their income eligibility despite any Social Security cost-of-living adjustment.

A previous law maintaining seniors' eligibility for the PACE and PACENET prescription-drug assistance programs, even if a Social Security cost-of-living adjustment put them over the income limit, expired on Dec. 31, 2010. This new law extends the Social Security COLA exemption until Dec. 31, 2013.

PACE and PACENET programs

PACE Eligibility:

- Age 65 or older
- Pennsylvania resident for at least 90 days prior to applying for PACE
- NOT enrolled in the Department of Public Welfare's Medicaid prescription benefit
- Income limits: \$14,500 or less for a single person; \$17,700 or less for a married couple

PACENET Eligibility:

- Age 65 or older
- A Pennsylvania resident for at least 90 days prior to applying for PACENET
- NOT enrolled in the Department of Public Welfare's Medicaid prescription benefit
- Income limits: \$14,500 to \$23,500 for a single person; \$17,700 to \$31,500 for a married couple

Please contact my office if you need help determining your eligibility for either program.

Recognizing the lifetime dedication of local artists

In September I joined in honoring local artists Mary Blazic and Marie Ulmer at the "The First Ladies of Fishtown/Kensington" First Friday exhibition at the Goldfish Gallery.

Marie Ulmer (pictured with me) is a graduate of Kensington High School and the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Design. She served as an illustrator for the Philadelphia Free Library for 30 years and has traveled throughout the United States and Europe. Ms. Ulmer expresses herself artistically through pastels, prints, watercolors, silkscreen, ceramics, jewelry making, poetry and photography and has displayed her art in several local galleries.

Mary Blazic began developing her artistic skills during the Great Depression by practicing sewing, dress making, darning, embroidery, petit point, needlepoint, knitting and making lace. She later expressed herself artistically through oil and watercolor paintings and, following her retirement, she began to teach needlepoint at the Lutheran Settlement House in Fishtown. During her seventies, Mrs. Blazic began to receive public attention through the exhibition of her art, and the International Library of Poetry published one of her poems in 1998. Additionally, her home garden garnered third place during the Horticultural Society's City Gardens Contest.

These wonderful women are in their 90s and continue to create beautiful art today. I presented them House of Representatives citations to honor their lifetime dedication to the arts.



Need a helping hand?

The Philadelphia Corporation for Aging and a network of agencies throughout the city offer older residents a wide range of programs and services, including:

- Adult day care and home health care
- Counseling and legal assistance
- Free transportation
- Protective services
- Emergency services
- Family caregiver support
- Senior centers and volunteer services

For more information, contact the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging at (215) 765-9000, or visit its website at www.pcaCares.org.



Prevent elder abuse

Elder abuse and crimes targeting older people come in many forms, including neglect, and physical and financial abuse. Learn how to stay safe and report suspected abusers.

Any person who believes that an older adult is being abused, neglected, exploited or abandoned may call the statewide elder abuse hotline at 1-800-490-8505. The hotline is open 24 hours a day.

SOME SIGNS OF ELDER ABUSE ARE:

- ✓ Bruises or broken bones;
- ✓ Weight loss;
- ✓ An older person never goes outside or never sees visitors;
- ✓ Withdrawing large sums of money from a savings account without apparent reason;
- ✓ Signing over his or her home to a relative.

Although these signs do not always mean elder abuse, it is important to be aware that elder abuse can occur at any time to anyone.

If you or someone you know is being abused, please call the hotline for help.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate forms in my office

A non-government group in Harrisburg identifying itself as the Senior Advisory Center is offering to fill out senior citizens' Property Tax/Rent Rebate forms for \$39.

Do not pay for this service.

Seniors can receive free assistance with the forms from my office.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program provides rebates of up to \$975 based on rent or property taxes paid. The program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians who are 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and those 18 or older with permanent disabilities. The income limit for homeowners is \$35,000; the income limit for renters is \$15,000.

Applicants need only count half of their Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits when applying.

The deadline to apply for a rebate on property taxes or rent paid in 2010 is Dec. 31. Forms for a 2011 tax rebate will be available in my office in February.

Protect Yourself!

How to avoid becoming a victim of identity theft

Nine million Americans have their identity stolen each year and the problem continues to grow. Protect yourself by using these tips to help prevent identity theft:



- Keep your credit card in sight when it's being charged.
- Report all lost or stolen cards immediately to the credit card company, the three credit bureaus and your local police department.
- Save and match credit card receipts with monthly statements. Check online accounts daily if possible.
- Shred unwanted documents with personal information including pre-approvals for credit cards received in the mail and bills with account numbers.
- Cancel unused credit cards and charge accounts. Destroy all old cards you no longer use. Cut them so that the number is unrecognizable.
- Don't leave receipts behind at ATMs, on counters, at financial institutions, trash receptacles, or at gasoline pumps.
- Memorize PIN numbers and cover the keypad with your free hand to prevent shoulder surfing. Use different PIN numbers for each account if possible.
- Beware of mail, telephone, or email solicitations offering prizes, especially if personal information is requested.
- Do not provide information in response to emails requesting updated account information. Financial institutions will never request personal information via email.
- Install and keep anti-virus and spyware software updated.
- When Internet shopping, make sure the company is reputable and displays an approved security symbol. Log out of the site when finished.

Do you suspect fraud?

If you suspect fraud or have another consumer complaint, contact the Office of Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Protection at (215) 560-2414.

State Representative Michael H. O'Brien

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lpo.kaf.1211

Home heating aid applications available

Applications for Pennsylvania's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program are currently available.

LIHEAP helps low-income people pay their heating bills through home energy assistance grants and crisis grants. Crisis grants are for people who are facing emergency situations, such as a broken furnace or an unexpected

fuel shortage.

For more information, please contact the Philadelphia County Assistance Office at **215-560-1583** or contact the toll-free LIHEAP hotline at **1-866-857-7095**. For additional information on energy assistance and tips on energy savings, visit the Public Utility Commission's website at www.puc.state.pa.us.



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My office can help you with:

- Car registrations, special tags, handicap placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kind
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Problems with the Department of Public Welfare (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- Requests for literature of all kind – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property tax/rent rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- PACE cards for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints
- Liquor Control Board concerns or questions
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Information about federal, state and local government agencies

ANY QUESTION ABOUT STATE GOVERNMENT!