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Democratic Chairman

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HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE UPDATE

Dear Friends,

A new year has started and with it the opportunity to make a difference in our communities every day. Since being sworn into office in 2001, I've made it my priority to help those who need it the most – our children, our elderly, and the victims of the ongoing opioid epidemic.

Getting things done in the Capitol is hard, especially nowadays, when we face a polarized and divided atmosphere. However, most of the time we find common ground and solutions to the issues affecting the residents of Pennsylvania.

Achievements from last year include:

- A greater investment in schools, including increased funding for the School District of Philadelphia and necessary funding for our state-related universities like Penn State and Temple to avoid tuition increases for in-state students.
- Allowing the Liquor Control Board to immediately suspend the licenses of nuisance bars and nuisance “stop-and-go” establishments that are damaging our communities.
- A fix for the Actual Value Initiative (AVI) to help even out property tax bills after the city's reassessment.

As the Democratic chairman of the House Human Services Committee, I will continue to work hard to ensure that we promote legislation and reforms to reduce costs, increase access, enhance quality, and improve the health of all Pennsylvanians.

I appreciate your feedback as always and welcome your emails, letters and calls. It is a joy to be your state representative and something that I take very seriously. Please contact me if you need help with any state-related matter.

Read on and get the latest news from the Human Services Committee.



Regulations for recovery houses in Pa. become law

While many recovery houses do an exceptional job providing various services for their residents, others are owned and operated by landlords whose facilities are basically “warehouses” with little to no oversight or programs. A new law signed by the governor last December will hold those owners accountable. Starting this year, they have to meet the same standards as other medical facilities throughout Pennsylvania.

The new law includes my proposal to finally address the Air Bridge, a network that has promised Puerto Rican drug users treatment in lavish recovery houses in cities like Philadelphia. However, once people arrive to receive treatment, they are taken to live in run-down homes, share beds with several other people and are forced to relinquish their food stamps and other public assistance benefits.

My language will ban the owners, administrators and employees of recovery houses from requiring residents to sign over their public assistance benefits. It will also ensure that all drug and alcohol recovery houses throughout Pennsylvania not in compliance with federal, state or local law be referred to the appropriate agency for further investigation.

My colleague Rep. Jason Dawkins also collaborated with language to prohibit drug and alcohol recovery houses from discriminating against people with a physical or mental disability, including substance abuse disorders. It will also require that all facilities in Pennsylvania comply



Last year, I hosted a public hearing in Philadelphia to gather insight from community stakeholders and craft a solution to the Air Bridge issue.

with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

This is an enormous step forward, but the government should remain committed to helping men and women in building lifelong foundations in recovery. We must ensure educational and job opportunities are available for this population. Otherwise, it will continue to be a vicious circle.

If we really want to help those who are struggling to maintain their sobriety, they must have access to facilities that will maximize their chances for success – not set them up to fail.

Opioid and heroin ‘disaster’ declared

In January, Gov. Tom Wolf issued a statewide emergency declaration, calling the opioid and heroin crises a disaster. By doing so, he acknowledges that the epidemic is a public health emergency affecting every corner of our state.



Sadly, more Pennsylvanians die from opioid overdoses than fatal vehicle accidents, according to the state’s Department of Health. Statistics provided by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency said overdose deaths grew by more than 30 percent in 2016. At least 14 Pennsylvanians die every day from an overdose. In 2016 alone, we registered more than 4,600 deaths.

Gov. Wolf’s declaration is intended to:

- Make sure that barriers are removed for first responders, health care providers, and government agencies.
- Speed up and expand access to treatment.
- Enhance coordination and data collection to improve state and local response.

Throughout Philadelphia and the commonwealth, too many families have watched their loved ones die due to opioid overdoses. I applaud and support Gov. Wolf’s actions and I will remain committed to leading Pennsylvania from addiction to recovery.

Pennsylvania will become a national leader in the fight against the opioid epidemic, joining Maryland, Massachusetts, Alaska, Arizona, Virginia and Florida in declaring some form of public health emergency.

The declaration is aligned with House Democrats’ Plan for PA, which emphasizes putting people first by protecting their safety, health, financial security, dignity and opportunity.

State Rep. Angel Cruz’s office provides bins for safe needle disposal

There has been an observed increase in the number of syringes left on our streets and in response to an increasing number of complaints and questions from concerned citizens, I’m taking the first step to combat the problem.



Residents of the 180th Legislative District can drop off needles between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday to Friday at my district office, located at 3503 N. B St., Unit 7.

Although most of the used needles from exchange programs are collected and disposed of properly, every year thousands are carelessly discarded outside, creating hazards for the rest of the citizens, including children, first responders and even our pets.

When someone is injured by a needle that has been thrown away, there is no way of knowing if the person who used it had an infection. That’s why we are starting this campaign, to ensure people know what to do in case they find used needles on the streets.

The biowaste bins were provided by a private nonprofit organization aimed at promoting health, empowerment and safety for communities affected by drug use and poverty.

More information can be obtained calling my office at (215) 291-5643.

Hannah's Law Update

As you may know, I've been advocating for expanded newborn screening in Pennsylvania for many years. I continue to call on the Pennsylvania Department of Health to fully implement Hannah's Law (Act 148 of 2014), which I



sponsored, and begin screening newborns for lysosomal storage disorders, particularly Krabbe disease, as called for under the law.

More than two years have passed since Act 148 of 2014 became law, but the Department of Health is only screening for two disorders added under the law. Unfortunately, the department has moved the remaining disorders from its mandatory to its supplemental screening list.

This causes mass confusion as newborns are not being screened for supplemental diseases, unless parents specifically ask for it to be done.

This law was passed by the House, passed by the Senate, and signed by then-Gov. Tom Corbett. The Department of Health must begin implementing this law and stop dragging their feet when it comes to the health of our newborns. There is no reason for Pennsylvania to be so far behind nearly every other state in the country when it comes to newborn screening.

I will continue to work closely with the Department of Health to find a solution and to address the issue through legislative means, but I would like to see the department take immediate steps to clear up the confusion that currently exists.

Lysosomal storage disorders are inherited metabolism disorders caused by a deficiency of specific enzymes required for the breakdown of nutrients. Infants born with these disorders appear healthy at birth and symptoms do not usually show until the child is between 3 and 6 months old. There are no viable treatments once babies have symptoms, which is why early detection is key.

To prevent the Department of Health from removing diseases added to the mandatory and supplemental listing of diseases for newborn screening, I've introduced H.B. 1351, legislation that would limit the Department of Health's ability to make changes to the Newborn Child Screening and Follow-up Program.

Other bills I've introduced on the same issue:

- **H.B. 1081** – Would merge the mandatory and supplemental disorder lists so that every baby in Pennsylvania will be screened for every recommended disorder, and create a funding mechanism for the screening.
- **H.B. 746** – Would require the Department of Health to require testing of cytomegalovirus (CMV) in newborns who fail their newborn hearing screening or if the parent or guardian of the newborn requests the newborn be tested for CMV. The department would also be required to provide educational information regarding CMV.

Additionally, pamphlets regarding Pennsylvania's Newborn Screening Program are available in my office. I encourage expectant families to know their options.

Lead poisoning: the warning for parents & the actions being taken in Harrisburg

Lead poisoning is well-known but the dangers for young children tend to slip under the radar. I want to make sure parents and caregivers know the risks and are aware of the actions being taken in Harrisburg to ensure their child's safety.

Just recently, I was glad to see Gov. Tom Wolf join in my fight to bring the concern to the forefront. The startling statistics speak for themselves. For kids, the state Department of Health says lead can:

- Cause coma, convulsions, and even death;
- Create learning difficulties;
- Interfere with growth;
- Harm hearing; and
- Delay development.

Those facts are frightening for any parent to hear, especially for those who aren't even aware the safety hazards exist.

Gov. Wolf is echoing my push for universal blood testing for children under age 2 across the state. He is seeking analyses to determine who is at risk for lead poisoning and where kids with the highest and lowest blood-lead levels live. This effort mirrors legislation (H.B. 666) I introduced last year, and with the governor's help, I'm confident it will make traction in the legislature.

This latest action is crucial considering the results of a recent report by our health department, showing only 28 percent of children aged 0-23 months were tested for lead in 2015. That means the other 72 percent could be at risk for health problems and not even know it.

I am also pushing to increase lead testing in:

- Drinking water (H.B. 667)
- Daycares (H.B. 669) and
- Older rental properties where lead paint was likely used (H.B. 668).

The frustrating part for me is the research is out there, yet the state still lags in taking the proper preventative steps to combat the issue. With the governor in our corner, I am optimistic change is on the horizon and our children will have a fighting chance against lead poisoning.

Residents with questions or concerns are encouraged to call the toll-free Lead Information Line at 1-800-440-LEAD, or go online to www.health.pa.gov and search "lead" on the home page.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Forms Now Available

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program applications for the 2017 tax year are now available at my office – and my staff is ready to help you file yours for free!

The rebate program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and people with disabilities 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters. Half of Social Security income is excluded and the maximum standard rebate is \$650.

The deadline to apply for a rebate on property taxes or rent paid in 2017 is June 30, 2018, and the rebates normally are distributed beginning July 1. So, the sooner you file, the sooner you will receive your money!



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Stay updated! Stay connected to what's happening in Harrisburg and in the community by signing up for my email updates. Go to www.pahouse.com/Cruz to sign up.

MY OFFICE CAN HELP YOU WITH:

- Car registrations, special tags, titles and license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Unemployment compensation problems
- Birth certificate applications
- Pennsylvania income tax problems
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, welfare)
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information, student aid information, etc.
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the PUC
- Consumer complaints
- Complaints about state road conditions
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding local accomplishments and family milestones
- Problems or questions about PennDOT
- Tours of the State Capitol for individuals or groups
- Disability plates and placards
- PACE cards for senior citizens
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- Local government officials' problems with state agencies

Any problem with your state government!

Pa. receives extension for Real ID enforcement

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) granted Pennsylvania an extension through Oct. 10, 2018, on Real ID enforcement. This means Pennsylvania residents will be able to enter federal facilities and board commercial aircraft using current Pennsylvania driver's licenses and non-driver's ID cards, neither of which are Real ID-compliant yet, through that date.

PennDOT anticipates that Real ID-compliant licenses will be available in Pennsylvania in the spring of 2019. Until then, PennDOT will continue to request extensions from DHS until Real ID-compliant licenses and ID cards are available for purchase. No Pennsylvania resident is required to get a Real ID-compliant driver's license or ID card — you don't need a Real ID-compliant license to drive, for instance. But if you choose to get one, you will be able to use it to board a plane and enter federal buildings when DHS ultimately enforces the Real ID Act

requirements.

PennDOT will implement a one-time \$30 fee in addition to the current standard driver's license/photo ID fee for a Real ID

Act-compliant license or ID card.

Renewing a Real ID Act-compliant ID, however, won't cost anything extra.

NOTE: If your driver's license expires before Real ID-compliant licenses are available in Pennsylvania, you will have to pay to renew your license and, if you choose to, pay again to get a Real ID-compliant license when it's available.

