



State Representative • 33rd Legislative District  
**FRANK DERMODY**

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## NEWS YOU CAN USE

Dear Friends,

I am happy to provide this update on state news including information about a number of programs that may be helpful to you.

It's a privilege to serve as a state representative in Harrisburg and I try to do this job in a nonpartisan way. Those in the middle class – working people, unemployed people and retired people – often are called upon to support the work of government without getting all of the benefits. Much of my work is to try to make things more fair.

Whether the challenge is rising property taxes, higher college tuition, or preserving important programs that benefit older residents, there are things that state government should do to help ensure fairer treatment of people where they live, learn and work.

For instance, the last few state budgets made deep cuts to school funding that I voted against. I am continuing to try to reverse this trend so that the state pays its full and fair share for basic and higher education. Those cuts shifted costs to families who were asked to pay higher property taxes or college tuition.

When a proposal was made in 2012 to outsource management of the Pennsylvania Lottery to a foreign company, I led the effort to stop that plan. The lottery is one of Pennsylvania's best assets. It provides about \$1 billion each year to fund programs for senior citizens and it continues to see record sales year after year. We should never put that at risk by turning it over to a private firm with other priorities. I am pleased to report that the plan was finally dropped at the end of 2013 and funding for senior programs is safe.

There is a lot going on in our area. The renovation of the ATI-Allegheny Ludlum mill in Brackenridge and Harrison is almost complete and will help keep jobs here for hundreds of workers. The Turnpike widening project west of the Allegheny Valley interchange is making steady progress. And every day the new Hulton Bridge between Harmar and Oakmont gets closer to reality.

Look for updates about these and other projects in the future. For now, please take a look at the information in this newsletter, which is focused on programs to help people. I hope you will find some news you can use!

Sincerely,

Frank Dermody

## How to avoid electricity bill spikes

This winter, thousands of Pennsylvanians were shocked when their electric bills doubled or tripled in one month. Those customers who had a variable-rate contract with an electric supplier, or who had a fixed-rate contract that expired, were subject to the price spikes. To avoid this problem, be sure to check the terms and conditions of your contract with your electric supplier.

You can obtain information regarding the current status of your contract, including whether your rate is fixed or variable, and any cancellation fees, by calling the supplier. The name and phone number of your supplier, along with the current rate you are paying, can be found on your monthly bill.

As a result of the price spikes, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission has approved new rules to help consumers.

One rule, which took effect in June, requires competitive energy suppliers to clearly disclose the details of their offers, especially the risks of variable-rate offers. In regard to fixed-term contracts, suppliers must notify customers by mail if their contracts are expiring or if there are changes to terms of service.

Another rule will shorten the time to switch suppliers. Currently, it takes up to 40 days; however, the new rule, which is expected to take effect by the end of the year, will require the change to occur within three days of the request.

You can learn more about shopping for electricity suppliers, or choose another supplier, by visiting [www.papowerswitch.com](http://www.papowerswitch.com), a website maintained by the PUC.





## Precautions to take when hiring a home improvement contractor

Pennsylvania's Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act requires all home improvement contractors, with limited exceptions, to register with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office and to display their registration number on all advertising and contracts.

To determine if a contractor is registered, call the Home Improvement Consumer Information Toll-Free Helpline at 1-888-520-6680 or visit [www.attorneygeneral.gov](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov).

The Pennsylvania attorney general offers the following advice to those considering hiring a contractor:

- Obtain more than one bid for the job.
- Check for complaints filed with the Better Business Bureau.
- Thoroughly check your contractor's references.

Consumers should beware of unknown or out-of-town contractors, salespeople who offer a discount if you allow your house to be shown to other prospective purchasers, companies that offer a bargain rate because the "equipment is already in the neighborhood" or "we have materials left over from a job down the street," and contractors who use terms like "special introductory offer."

To file a complaint, call the Bureau of Consumer Protection Toll-Free Helpline at 1-800-441-2555 or visit [www.attorneygeneral.gov](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov).

## My office has Property Tax/Rent Rebate applications

The annual Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program deadline has been extended to Dec. 31.

The program provides qualifying senior citizens and other Pennsylvania residents with rebates based on the property taxes or rent they paid the previous year.

The program is open to Pennsylvania residents 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and people 18 or older who have a disability. The income limit to qualify is \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters. Applicants must count all sources of income toward the limit, but only half of any Social Security, Supplemental Security or federal Railroad Retirement Tier 1 benefits toward their total income.

The maximum property tax or rent rebate for most qualifying Pennsylvania residents is \$650. You can download a form online or get one from my office.

Remember: There is no charge to apply for this program. If you receive an offer to help you file an application for a fee, please ignore it. My office can help you file for FREE.

## Proposed enhancements to rebate program

Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is a valuable program for hundreds of thousands of our residents.

I supported several enhancements to the program by voting for legislation that would:

- Permanently extend the program's deadline to Dec. 31. The program's regular deadline is June 30, but the state regularly extends the deadline until the end of the year. This would make the extension permanent.
- Double the amount of death benefits that may be exempted when considering income for program eligibility. Current law exempts the first \$5,000 of death benefits. The bill would increase that amount to \$10,000.
- Allow an executor to apply for the rebate on behalf of a deceased applicant if the individual was eligible for the program on the date he or she died. Currently, deceased applicants must have lived the entire year for which their claim is filed.

Since the program's inception in 1971, more than \$5 billion has been distributed to older adults and adults with disabilities.

The legislation is currently being considered by the Senate.





## Veteran designation on Pa. driver's licenses

In 2012, Pennsylvania enacted a law to provide veterans with a designation on their Pennsylvania driver's license – or state-issued identification card.

The designation is now available. The special license, which bears an American flag and the word "Veteran," will enable veterans to provide proof of military service without having to carry multiple IDs or discharge papers.

Qualified applicants for a veteran designation on their driver's license include those who have received a Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty/DD214 or equivalent for service in the U.S. Armed Forces, including a reserve component, or the National Guard.

There is no extra fee for the updated license, besides the normal fee for a new license. For more information about the new license or details on how to apply, contact my office.

Numerous other states, including Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Utah, have enacted similar legislation.

## New license plate available

Pennsylvania vehicle owners can show their support of veterans with the new "Honoring Our Veterans" license plate available through PennDOT.

The plate features images of the American flag and a bald eagle with the words "Honoring Our Veterans."



The plate is available for cars and light trucks. It costs \$35, and \$15 from each sale goes to the Veterans Trust Fund, which provides grants to veterans' service organizations and other organizations assisting Pennsylvania veterans.

That same law also creates a voluntary \$3 check off on driver's license and vehicle registration forms where people can donate to the veterans' service organizations that help our veterans.

Please call or stop by my office for a form to obtain the new plate or for help with any other PennDOT driver or vehicle service.



## Honoring our service members' final wishes

Legislation to ensure that Pennsylvania respects the final wishes of our service members when they make the ultimate sacrifice was recently signed into law.

Act 45 recognizes the DD Form 93 as the formal mechanism for service members to determine who has the right to make decisions regarding the disposal of their remains.

Previously, state courts had to honor a will, even if it varied from a DD Form 93 that was executed at a later date. Act 45 makes it legally clear that these decisions should be determined according to the wishes of the person in military service as authorized on their DD Form 93. This will help in instances where a will has not been updated and family members, including current and former spouses, are in conflict over the decision.

Pennsylvania had been one of the few states that did not recognize the document as an acceptable form for military personnel.

## SAVE THE DATE!

Friday, September 26

# Senior Health & Services Fair

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Pittsburgh Mills Mall - entry 5

Sponsored by Rep. Frank Dermody

## Law establishes state program for vet-owned small businesses

Veteran-owned small businesses are now included in the Department of General Services Small Diverse Business Program. Formerly known as the Small Disadvantaged Business Program, the program offers special assistance with state contracting opportunities to business owners who are women, disabled or minorities – and that list now includes veterans.

The law was designed to encourage state agencies to contract with veteran-owned small businesses, and sets a statewide participation rate goal of 3 percent. The law also sets up regulations to deter and penalize businesses that claim they are veteran owned, but are not, in order to participate in the program.

For more information on this program, visit [www.smallbusiness.pa.gov](http://www.smallbusiness.pa.gov).



**STATE REP. FRANK DERMODY**

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# MY OFFICE CAN HELP YOU WITH:



- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Assistance in obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- 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
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- Consumer complaints
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups

**Call my office toll-free at 1-800-582-8683**

## Unwanted calls? Register with Pa.'s Do Not Call list



The best way to limit unwanted telephone solicitation calls is to enroll in the Pennsylvania "Do Not Call" list. Once you are on this list, telemarketers are prohibited from calling you unless the call is for an exempted purpose.

*To register your phone number on the state "Do Not Call" list, call the Office of Attorney General, Bureau of Consumer Protection Toll-Free Helpline at 1-888-777-3406 or visit [www.attorneygeneral.gov](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov).*

I recently voted for legislation that would bolster Pennsylvania's "Do Not Call" law, the Telemarketer Registration Act.

### House Bill 129 would make two improvements:

- It would remove the five-year time limit a subscriber is permitted to remain on the Do Not Call list without having to re-register. A subscriber would only be removed from the list upon their request; and
- It would bar telemarketing on legal holidays.

The bill is awaiting consideration in the state Senate.

