



Spring 2015

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## Sainato reappointed Democratic chairman of Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee

I have been reappointed Democratic chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for the 2015-2016 legislative session.

Our committee works in a bipartisan manner to pass important legislation to help Pennsylvania's veterans and emergency responders. I am honored to continue to serve as Democratic chairman for this session.

During the past few years, the committee has considered many bills that were signed into law. They include laws that expanded the Fire Company and Ambulance Service Grant Program, improved safety at gas stations, improved veterans' access to medication and ensured veteran preference laws are enforced for civil service jobs.

I look forward to a productive 2015-2016 session as the committee explores new initiatives to support our veterans and emergency responders.

In addition, I have been appointed to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council.

The council establishes policy and direction for the statewide emergency management program.

Its members include the governor, the lieutenant governor, the secretaries of the various state departments with emergency response and recovery capabilities, leadership of the General Assembly, representatives of county and municipal government associations, labor, and business and industry.

The council also reviews and approves certain actions required under the Radiation Protection Act. Under that act, the council approves annual work programs and spending plans for counties in emergency planning zones around the five nuclear power generating stations affecting Pennsylvania.

The council also acts as the State Emergency Response Commission, which oversees the various hazardous materials emergency preparedness and response requirements contained in the federal Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act.



*I greeted members of the Lawrence County AmVets and the United States Submarine Veterans during the Veterans Day parade in New Castle.*

# Animal cruelty prevention legislation introduced

As we make our way from yet another record-breaking cold winter toward the “Dog Days” of summer, it is important to remember the well-being of our four-footed friends. Animal neglect is failure to provide basic care for an animal to thrive, which includes leaving your pets outdoors during extreme temperatures.

To prevent this, I have reintroduced legislation to increase penalties for

animal cruelty. House Bill 281 not only would increase penalties for animal cruelty, it also would make it a first-degree misdemeanor if an animal dies as a result of cruelty or neglect.

Lastly, the bill states that if a person intentionally kills or causes serious physical injury to a companion animal, they commit “aggravated cruelty” to an animal. Anyone convicted of this offense would

be charged with a first-degree misdemeanor.

Animal cruelty is not just deliberate abuse, but is also failure to take care of an animal. Neglected animals can suffer just as much as those who are harmed on purpose, as they are forced to endure miserable and often horrible conditions for a long time.

## Work continues on Pennsylvania’s 911 Emergency Telephone Act revisions



*The House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee has held several hearings to discuss major revisions to the state’s 911 law. Pictured with me are my Republican counterpart, Stephen Barrar, and the Democratic executive director of my committee, Amy Brinton.*

For the past few years, the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee has held hearings on a plan to overhaul Pennsylvania’s 911 Emergency Telephone Act. Throughout these hearings, the committee has discussed how Pennsylvania can keep pace with rapidly evolving technology and the costs of maintaining the emergency system. Updates to the act will reflect advances in available 911 technologies and provide a reliable funding source for emergency services.

During this time, the committee heard from state, county and municipal government officials, emergency dispatchers who use the system, members of the communications industry, and other stakeholders. Any and all feedback will be essential in drafting meaningful and effective legislation to update the act. It is my hope that this legislation will be introduced and brought before the committee for consideration by the end of April.

As Democratic chairman of the committee, I feel it is essential to fully explore needed updates to the law with regard to 911 surcharge fees, the funding disbursement formula and next-generation 911 technologies.



*I participated in a Wreaths Across America event at the state Capitol in a show of support for our veterans and their families.*



*I met with members of the Bessemer Fire Department during Bessemer Community Days.*

## My office can help with....

- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver’s license applications
- Requests for literature of all kinds – bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information
- 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 prescription-drug cards for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints

## Committee meets with veterans and emergency response stakeholders

The Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee held several informational meetings in March to examine issues important to Pennsylvania's veterans and emergency responders. The committee heard from a variety of agency officials, including:

- Rick Flinn, director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). He provided us with an overview of the agency and explained PEMA's 2015-16 legislative priorities.
- State Fire Commissioner Tim Solobay. He spoke about how the Office of the State Fire Commissioner is focusing on increased training and education in the fire services community to prevent fatalities. He stressed that all emergency service and emergency medical service workers must be properly trained. He also stressed his concern with the significant reduction in firefighter recruitment and retention, sharing that, at one point, Pennsylvania had 300,000 emergency service providers, but now only has about 50,000. He noted that his office is looking into ways to increase retention and recruitment efforts.
- Tracy Wingenroth, government affairs consultant for the Fireman's Association of the State of Pennsylvania, and Don Konkle, executive director of Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute. They explained their legislative priorities and shared their hopes for generating consensus on firefighter-related issues. Both echoed the concerns of Fire Commissioner Solobay and would like to see added recruitment/retention initiatives as well.
- Richard Gibbons, director, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services for the Department of Health. He provided the committee with an overview of emergency medical services in the state and discussed initiatives.

The committee also held a hearing to discuss veterans' issues in Pennsylvania. Several groups presented information, including the Pennsylvania War Veterans' Council, which discussed its legislative priorities and other issues directly impacting veterans throughout the state.

Brig. Gen. Jerry Beck, deputy adjutant general for veterans affairs at the Pennsylvania Department of Military & Veterans Affairs, highlighted several programs within the department. He noted how the Veterans Trust Fund, which began accepting donations on Nov. 11, 2013, has received more than \$1.8 million in donations, and averages about \$110,000 per month. Gen. Beck also noted that by collaborating with several state agencies, nonprofit organizations and federal programs, DMVA has been able to help support programs for homeless and/or unemployed veterans. According to the latest Point in Time Survey of 2014, Pennsylvania has 1,411 homeless veterans. Through successful programs in cities such as Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, about 30 percent of previously homeless veterans are now in permanent housing and are being helped with finding employment.

## Sainato bill to extend death benefits to Civil Air Patrol members passed unanimously



*I met with members of the Lawrence County Civil Air Patrol. They are volunteers who work side-by-side with our emergency responders.*

I recently reintroduced legislation that would extend the Emergency and Law Enforcement Personnel Death Benefits Act to members of the Civil Air Patrol Pennsylvania Wing whose deaths are related to performance of their duties. House Bill 49 unanimously passed the House of Representatives on Feb. 3 and is currently awaiting consideration by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

The Civil Air Patrol (CAP) is a federally supported, nonprofit organization serving as an official civilian auxiliary arm of the U.S. Air Force. The CAP Pennsylvania Wing consists of 2,200 volunteers across the state who support emergency service responders, not only in Pennsylvania but across the country.

Members of CAP PA Wing provide valuable services and do so daily in the same dangerous environments as other emergency responders. They are perhaps the nation's finest force of citizen volunteers, working alongside our state police, fire officials and other emergency service professions – often placing their lives in danger to help or save the lives of others. These courageous men and women knowingly risk their lives to respond to emergency situations and certainly deserve the same line-of-duty death benefits we currently afford to other emergency responders.





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## Inside:

- House passes Sainato bill to extend death benefits to Civil Air Patrol
- Sainato reappointed Democratic chairman of Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee
- Revisions coming to Pa.'s 911 law

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## Be prepared; plan to survive a disaster

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. The best way for you and your family to survive is by being prepared.

Being prepared can help you respond effectively in a dangerous situation and sometimes even avoid the danger completely.

Local responders may not be able to reach you immediately, or they may need to focus their efforts elsewhere. Your ability to be self-sufficient may be a matter of survival for you and your family. Don't wait for help that may not be available or may come too late. Take control of your own safety.

To learn how to make an emergency plan for your home, vehicle and workplace, please visit [www.readypa.org](http://www.readypa.org).

## 10 Potential Emergencies

Floods	Influenza pandemic
Fires	Hazardous material incidents
Terrorism	Earthquakes and landslides
Winter storms	Nuclear facility accidents
Dam failures	Tropical storms, tornadoes and thunderstorms

## Local veterans' assistance at my office

I have arranged to have a representative from the American Legion make regular visits to my local office at 20 S. Mercer St., Z-Penn Building, New Castle, to help veterans with their concerns and issues.

The service is available on a first-come, first-served basis from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. the last Thursday of every month. Veterans should bring their DD214 or other proof of service with them.

Information available as part of this service includes veteran housing benefits, financial assistance, employment benefits, veteran and dependent education benefits, and other state-sponsored veteran programs.



*I visited with the Union Varsity Cheerleaders during the Union Township Fire Department's Balloon Quest.*