

# State Representative Harry A. READSHAW 36TH DISTRICT report



Winter 2016

1917 Brownsville Road • Pittsburgh, PA 15210 • (412) 881-4208 • [www.pahouse.com/readshaw](http://www.pahouse.com/readshaw)

## Dear Constituent,

I'm extending to you my best wishes, and reminding and encouraging you to utilize my district office for state-related issues.

Those on my district office staff are: Marilyn Miller, Andrea Olechowicz and Nancy Heckmann.

If you have any questions, concerns or issues, feel free to visit my office at 1917 Brownsville Road, Pittsburgh, or call at (412) 881-4208.

Sincerely,

Harry A. Readshaw  
State Representative  
36th Legislative District



## Local emergency responders receive state grants

The following first responder groups received state grants from the 2014-15 budget:

|   |           |              |          |
|---|-----------|--------------|----------|
| Baldwin Emergency Medical Services Inc. | Baldwin   | Fire Company | \$14,007 |
| Baldwin Emergency Medical Services Inc. | Baldwin   | EMS          | \$14,884 |
| Baldwin Independent Fire Co. No. 1      | Baldwin   | Fire Company | \$13,453 |
| Brentwood Emergency Medical Services    | Brentwood | EMS          | \$7,440  |
| Brentwood Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1      | Brentwood | Fire Company | \$12,899 |

## Are you paying too much for electricity?

The Pennsylvania Office of Consumer Advocate recommends that you regularly check your monthly utility bill to ensure you're getting the best price for electricity.

As a result of a 1996 law, you are free to choose which company generates your home's electricity. You can buy electricity from Duquesne Light at a default rate called the "price to compare," or you can choose from competing suppliers. However, you might be paying more from the suppliers than from Duquesne Light.

The experience in some other states shows that many people who have switched their electric suppliers are paying more for their electricity. This is often because customers do not closely monitor their monthly bills and the electric market. While your rate may at first be lower than the price to compare, the terms of many contracts include special offers of fixed-rate deals that expire after a certain time period, resulting in a high rate.

Energy rates fluctuate regularly. If you have already switched energy suppliers, you should check for updated rates frequently to ensure you are getting the best price. You can do this by comparing the price per kilowatt hour you currently pay with Duquesne Light's price to compare, both of which can be found on your electric bill, and the comprehensive list of energy rates for your area. Competing energy suppliers' rates can be found on [www.papowerswitch.com](http://www.papowerswitch.com).

Alternative suppliers may provide benefits such as renewable power sources or variable rates.

For more information regarding electricity choice, visit [www.papowerswitch.com](http://www.papowerswitch.com) or the Office of Consumer Advocate at [www.oqa.state.pa.us](http://www.oqa.state.pa.us).

## Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program now accepting applications

The state has begun accepting applications for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

This program provides a state rebate on 2015 property taxes or rent to income-eligible residents who are 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older.

To be eligible, your household income must be \$35,000 or less if you are a homeowner, or \$15,000 or less if you are a renter.

When applying, you only have to count half of your Social Security or federal railroad retirement Tier I benefits toward your total income.

You can obtain information about the program, an application and free help applying through my district office or on the state Department of Revenue's website at [www.revenue.pa.gov](http://www.revenue.pa.gov).

There is no charge to apply. If you receive an offer to apply for a fee, please disregard it.

The state will begin mailing rebate checks on July 1.

# Background checks required for those who work with junior firefighters

I wanted to remind you of a new state law that requires background checks for volunteers and employees who work with children. This includes those who work with junior firefighters and other junior first responders.

EMS-specific information on the state's background check law is available online at the Office of the State Fire Commissioner: [www.osfc.pa.gov](http://www.osfc.pa.gov) under the items of interest.

If you are a new, approved volunteer and starting your assignment, you must have your clearances before you begin. If you have already been approved and have been acting as a volunteer, you must have the clearances before July 1.

Volunteers and employees who work with children need up to three separate background checks:

## **Pennsylvania State Police criminal report.**

The police report can be ordered online at <https://epatch.state.pa.us>.

## **Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services.**

To order the Child Abuse History Clearance, you need to create an account through the Department of Human Services at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us).

## **An FBI criminal history report is also required if:**

The volunteer position is paid and the volunteer has lived outside of Pennsylvania sometime during the previous 10 years. That report can be ordered at [https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index\\_dpw.htm](https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index_dpw.htm).

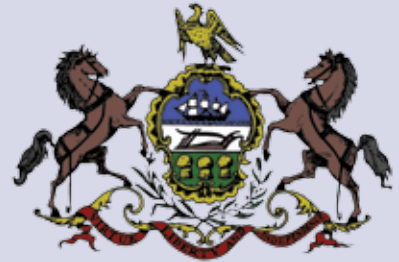
The clearances must then be renewed every five years.

State background check fees have been waived for volunteers. Those whose employment requires the checks also had their state fees reduced from \$10 to \$8. Unfortunately, the state has no control over the cost of the FBI background check, which is currently \$27.50. If your department is a paid department, any paid staff who have oversight of children must purchase their background checks.

More information is available at the website [www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov).



*I joined some other Allegheny County legislators to ensure that volunteer first responders would not have to pay for required background checks. Shortly after this news conference in May, the governor announced fees for all volunteers under the Child Protection Act would be waived.*



# New vehicle registration fee took effect Jan. 1

I wanted to let you know that on Jan. 1, Allegheny County became one of only four counties in Pennsylvania that is now charging a \$5 fee on vehicles registered in the county. This new fee is permitted under the gas tax that passed with support from former Gov. Tom Corbett in 2013. In addition to raising state gas taxes we pay at the pump to among the highest in the country, that law gave each county the choice to add an additional \$5 annual fee on each vehicle,

with the funds to be used for road and bridge construction and repair. While I don't disagree with the need to fix our crumbling roads, adding more taxes to our residents when other funding sources, such as taxing the extraction of Marcellus Shale gas, were not even considered was the wrong choice.

I opposed the bill in 2013 and I still do, as the true costs on Pennsylvania residents are becoming more apparent.





# Children's Health Insurance Program extended

A new law extends the state's Children's Health Insurance Program, CHIP, through the end of 2017.

CHIP covers immunizations, wellness checkups, prescriptions, dental, vision and hearing services, diagnostic testing, emergency care, mental health benefits and hospitalizations, as well as substance abuse rehabilitation and other services.

CHIP coverage is available to any child in Pennsylvania whose family earns too much to qualify for Medical Assistance but can't afford to purchase private insurance or isn't covered by an employer.

For an average four-person family, CHIP is free if household income is between \$32,253 and \$50,440, low cost if household income is between \$50,440 and \$76,145, or full cost if household income exceeds \$76,145. Premiums vary, depending on the carrier.

If your child doesn't have health insurance, or if you know of a child who isn't covered, you can find out more about CHIP, including providers in your area, and how to enroll at [www.chipcoverspakids.com](http://www.chipcoverspakids.com) or by contacting my office.



## New law provides jury duty exemptions

A new law permits people 75 or older and breastfeeding mothers to opt out of jury duty.

Pennsylvania is now one of 27 states that exempt the elderly from serving on juries.

If you are selected for jury duty and do not wish to serve because you are 75 or older or a breastfeeding mother, you may note that in the appropriate section of the jury questionnaire.

For more information about this new law, or jury duty in general, contact the Allegheny County Office of Jury Management at 412-350-5336 or online at [www.alleghenycourts.us](http://www.alleghenycourts.us).



*Rep. Readshaw welcomed a foreign delegation of political leaders to the House chamber last year when they visited the Capitol.*



In July 2014, the governor signed a bill that authorized PennDOT to produce a special Gettysburg Monument license plate.

Since the plates began being issued in November 2014, I am happy to report that more than 500 vehicle owners have purchased the plate for their cars. Proceeds from the sale of the plate have been designated to support maintenance and repair of Pennsylvania unit monuments and markers on the Gettysburg Battlefield

You can order one through PennDOT's website <http://bit.ly/gettysburgplate> or through my constituent service office, 1917 Brownsville Road, Pittsburgh.

# Online voter registration now available in Pennsylvania

Gov. Tom Wolf launched a website to make it easier for you to register to vote and participate in elections. You can access it by visiting: [www.register.votespa.com](http://www.register.votespa.com).

The new website allows you to make updates to your voter record, such as change of name, address or party affiliation. You can also request assistance at a polling place.

This online system is more secure because the form will be transmitted directly to the proper county voter registration office for processing, compared with the traditional paper application containing personal information that might pass through several hands before you are officially registered.



The site is directly linked to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, so if you have a driver's license or PennDOT ID card, your signature on file can immediately be linked to your voter record.

If you will be unavailable on Election Day or otherwise unable to visit your polling place, you should request an absentee ballot. You must request the ballot before 5 p.m. Tuesday, April 19 and the ballot must be returned to the board of elections before 5 p.m. Friday, April 22.

You can learn more about absentee voting and download the application at <http://bit.ly/AlleghenyCoabsenteeballot> and mail the request to Mr. Mark Wolosik, Division Manager, Allegheny County Elections Division, 542 Forbes Ave., Suite 604, Pittsburgh, PA 15219-2953. Once you receive your ballot, you must return it to the same address before the April 22 deadline.

**The latest Census Bureau data shows that \$53,657 is the U.S. median household income. Americans who make \$206,568 or more are categorized in the highest 5 percent of U.S. income distribution. Between 1967 and 2014, median household income went up by \$9,400, while the top 5 percent increased \$88,800 (all adjusted for inflation). Income inequality is growing.**

## Primary election is April 26



Tuesday, April 26 is Pennsylvania's primary election. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m.

The last day to register to vote in the primary is March 28, and you can do that online at [www.register.votespa.com](http://www.register.votespa.com).

In this primary election, registered Democrats and Republicans can select nominees from their respective parties to represent them in the November general election.

Voters will cast ballots for president of the United States, U.S. senator, U.S. representative, state attorney general, state auditor general, state treasurer, state senator and state representative, and delegates to the national conventions.

Your polling place may have changed since the last election. Voters can verify their polling location at [www.votespa.com](http://www.votespa.com).

Unless you are a first-time voter or voting at a new precinct, photo ID is not required.

All voters will be asked to consider two ballot questions. The first asks whether to increase the mandatory age, from 70 to 75, at which judges must retire. The second asks whether the Philadelphia Traffic Court should be abolished. You do not have to be a registered member of a political party in order to vote on these questions.

For more information and a complete list of candidates, visit the Allegheny County Election Division website at [www.county.allegheny.pa.us/elections/index.aspx](http://www.county.allegheny.pa.us/elections/index.aspx) or call 412-350-4500.

### Important 2016 Primary Election Dates

**March 28** .... Last day to register to vote.

**April 19** ..... Last day to apply for an absentee ballot.

**April 22** ..... Last day for county election offices to receive absentee ballots.

**April 26** ..... Election Day, polls open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.



# Heating assistance program accepting applications



Pennsylvania's Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program – LIHEAP – is now accepting applications. The program is expected to close April 1. LIHEAP helps low-income families pay their heating bills.

LIHEAP provides two types of grants – a cash grant sent directly to utility companies to pay a portion of the resident's fuel bill, and a crisis grant for households in immediate danger of being without heat due to a furnace failure or an unexpected fuel shortage.

LIHEAP cash grants – based on household income, family size, type of heating fuel and region – will range from \$100 to \$1,000 in 2015-16. LIHEAP crisis grants will range from \$25 to \$500.

To qualify for either a cash grant or a crisis grant, the income limit for a one-person household is \$17,655. This income limit increases by \$6,240 for each additional person in the household.

Residents who received a LIHEAP grant last season should have already received a postcard or a 2015-16 LIHEAP application with a registration number.

Those who did not receive LIHEAP last season may obtain an application by contacting my office, calling LIHEAP directly at 1-866-857-7095, or applying online at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us).



## Naloxone availability expanded

Naloxone is a drug that can reverse an overdose caused by an opioid drug, such as heroin, oxycodone or Percocet. Naloxone is now available to all Pennsylvanians through a standing order issued by the state physician general.

This standing order is a prescription that applies to all Pennsylvanians. It entitles family members and friends to access the medication without obtaining a prescription from their family doctor.

Although the standing order is kept on file at most large-chain pharmacies, it is best to call your pharmacy to see if they have the standing order on file and have Naloxone in stock. Should you need to download a copy of the standing order, it is

available at the state Department of Health's website at [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov) under the Hot Topic "Opioid Abuse."

Naloxone is administered by nasal spray or auto-injector. Not all pharmacies stock both forms, and insurance coverage may vary depending on the form of Naloxone being purchased and individual insurance plan. You can call your benefits manager to determine if the medication is covered by your particular plan or if your purchase of the medication will be an out-of-pocket cost.

For more information about Naloxone and how to administer it, please visit the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs' webpage at [www.ddap.pa.gov](http://www.ddap.pa.gov) and click on the link for the Naloxone & Reverse Overdose Toolkit.

lpo.kl.0216



Harry stands up for my friends!

This doggie wishes he had human treats to give Harry.

He has signed on as a key sponsor to a bill that would increase the penalty for animal abuse.

Most first-time offenders are charged with a summary offense, which is not much more than a traffic ticket with a fine.

House Bill 113 would classify this crime against animals as a misdemeanor and increase the penalties for repeat offenders.

Harry told me that the bill is very similar to one he introduced, H.B. 351, but he is happy to be the second co-sponsor of the first bill, which was introduced by another local lawmaker, Rep. Dom Costa. Harry wants a law that will protect us, regardless of who gets the credit!

Like the canary in a mine, we animals can be an early warning system for future violent behavior.

Many studies have shown that people who grow up to become violent criminals, from domestic violence abusers to mass murders like Jeffrey Dahmer, got their start by abusing animals.

Studies have found that animal abusers are five times more likely than the average person to commit a violent crime against a human, three times more likely to be charged with a drug crime, and even three times as likely to get a traffic ticket.

I am counting on this bill becoming law so that you humans can realize how serious animal abuse really is. Not only would this bill protect my animal friends, it would also wave red flags as to possible future violent criminals and could lead to ways to help these potentially violent people before it is too late.

Well, since I don't have any human treats for Harry, maybe I can scrounge up a doggie treat for me!

Woof!

 **Buster**

## Stay in the Know

I want to alert you about Pennsylvania House rules that prohibit when I can contact you leading up to a state House election.

Though you might already be receiving my email alerts, there will be a 60-day period preceding the upcoming April 2016 primary election when I will be prohibited from sending legislative emails to you unless you have opted in to continue receiving them.

Please visit my website, [www.pahouse.com/Readshaw](http://www.pahouse.com/Readshaw), to sign up for email alerts on important information, including legislation being considered in Harrisburg. On my website, click on the "Contacts" tab on the top bar and then click on the "Sign Up for Emails" link and fill in your information.

