

GREG VITALI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE — 166TH DISTRICT

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LEGISLATIVE REPORT

MAY 2016

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Property Tax/Rent Rebate deadline approaches

The official application deadline for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is June 30. 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 individuals 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. The maximum standard rebate is \$650.

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 an application in my office or download the form online by going to www.revenue.state.pa.us, then clicking on “Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program” under Popular Services.

My office can help residents apply. If you have already applied, the state will begin mailing rebate checks July 1.

New law legalizes medical marijuana

A new state law will allow for use of medical marijuana by patients diagnosed with one of 17 conditions, including cancer, HIV, AIDS, ALS, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis, among others. Medical marijuana will only be dispensed as a pill, oil, topical or in a form appropriate for nebulization; not in a smokeable form.

To obtain medical marijuana, patients will need to receive a certification from their physician and have a valid identification card issued by the Department of Health. They will then go to a licensed dispensary to get the medical marijuana. It will not be available at pharmacies even with a prescription because marijuana is still illegal under federal law.

The state plans to eventually license up to 25 growers

and processors, and as many as 150 dispensaries. Growers, processors and dispensaries would have to meet local zoning laws. Patients will not be allowed to legally grow their own marijuana.

The Department of Health expects to take approximately 18 months to get the medical marijuana industry up and running in Pennsylvania. Before then, the new law provides that a parent who legally obtains medical marijuana from another state and brings it back to Pennsylvania for the benefit of a minor child will not be prosecuted by state authorities.

For more information, visit the state Department of Health's website at www.health.pa.gov or call my office.

State to eliminate vehicle registration stickers

The state Department of Transportation is eliminating the use of vehicle registration stickers on license plates beginning Jan. 1, 2017. PennDOT will issue the last registration sticker Dec. 30 of this year.

Drivers will still need to have their vehicles registered and inspected, but they won't need to display a registration sticker after Dec. 31, 2016.

Law enforcement officers will use Automated License Plate Reader technology to check the status of vehicle registrations and insurance instead of looking for the stickers. The new system will

permit officers to have real-time electronic access to PennDOT's database. PennDOT officials said the new technology is an improvement over the visual inspection of vehicle registration stickers, which can be counterfeited, sold, affixed to dead plates or applied to plates for which they were not intended.

Also starting Jan. 1, 2017, drivers who renew their vehicle registrations online will be permitted to save a copy of and print a permanent registration card.

More information can be found on PennDOT's website at www.dmv.pa.gov.

New SEPTA fare payment system coming soon

SEPTA will soon be introducing its SEPTA Key program, a new electronic fare payment and collection system.

SEPTA will offer contactless cards that can be purchased at station fare kiosks, SEPTA sales locations, the SEPTA website or the SEPTA Key Customer Call Center. The cards will be good for up to three years.

The new Key cards will have contactless chips, so all you have to do is pass it across the face of the validator to pay for your ride.

This new system will begin with limited rollout on June 13 in Philadelphia on subways, buses and trolleys. It will not be implemented on Regional Rail lines for another year to 18 months.

During the conversion, all current forms of payment – cash, tickets, tokens and monthly passes – will still be accepted.

This new system will not affect senior service on SEPTA, as seniors will still ride for free on transit service and for \$1 on Regional Rail. Seniors can use their valid Pennsylvania driver's license or state-issued ID card to ride on SEPTA transit.

Seniors can also continue to use their SEPTA-issued Senior Citizen Transit ID card or Medicare card for travel on both SEPTA transit and Regional Rail service.

Seniors also have a new option to apply for a SEPTA-issued photo card. They can register and get their picture taken for the free SEPTA Key Senior ID card at SEPTA headquarters, 1234 Market St. or Suburban Station, 16th Street and JFK Boulevard, Philadelphia.

For more information, visit www.SEPTA.org or call my office.

New law allows for limited criminal record expungement

A new law would allow criminal record expungements of nonviolent misdemeanors for individuals who have completed their sentence and remained free of arrest or prosecution for seven to 10 years, depending on the crime.

Those individuals will be able to petition the court for their record to be sealed from public view. As a result, potential employers or landlords will no longer be able to see the record when conducting a background check. However, criminal justice and government agencies would not be subject to the order, so they would still be able to see a person's entire criminal record information.

Nonviolent misdemeanors subject to expungement include false swearing in official matters, theft and impersonating a public servant, disorderly conduct, loitering and prowling at night, and open lewdness, among other crimes.

All violent offenses punishable by imprisonment of more than two years, and many others of a serious nature, would not qualify for expungement.

If you believe you qualify for criminal record expungement, I recommend that you contact an attorney to assist you with the process.

Is the state holding your property?

It is estimated that roughly one in 10 Pennsylvanians has unclaimed property. The state treasurer is currently holding more than \$2.3 billion worth of that unclaimed property – such as closed bank accounts, uncashed checks, lost stocks and bonds, contents of safe deposit boxes, and unexpired gift certificates and gift cards.

You can search for and claim any property the treasurer is holding for you – it's easy and it's free! Simply visit the treasurer's website at www.patreasury.gov and click on the "Unclaimed Property" box on the left side of the page or call Treasury's Unclaimed Property Program at 1-800-222-2046.

Villanova project to affect Lancaster Avenue traffic

Villanova University is currently undertaking a project on its campus along Lancaster Avenue (Route 30) to convert its surface parking lots into new residential housing, a performing arts center and a parking garage. There are also plans to construct a pedestrian bridge. The project began in 2015 and is scheduled to take four years to complete.

The project is expected to reduce student commuter traffic and improve traffic flow along Lancaster Avenue.

Lancaster Avenue is being widened east of Ithan Avenue to accommodate a right-turn-only lane into the new parking garage. Ithan Avenue will be widened to accommodate a much longer turn lane for cars turning left onto Lancaster Avenue. Left turn lanes on Lancaster Avenue at Ithan Avenue, in both directions, are being doubled in length.

In addition, traffic signals at the intersection of Lancaster and Ithan avenues will be updated, and federally compliant pedestrian ramps and push

buttons for pedestrian crossing will be installed.

Road construction is expected to begin in early summer.

The project is expected to involve intermittent off-peak lane closures along Lancaster Avenue and will affect traffic flow in the area. This work will mostly take place Monday through Friday but may include weekends, if necessary.

Construction of the pedestrian bridge, which is expected to begin next spring, will likely result in the shutdown of Lancaster Avenue for a few days from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., which will require local detours onto other state roads. Signs will be posted in the area at least two weeks before any traffic changes are made.

For the latest information on this project, visit Villanova's project website at www.designconceptforlancasteravenue.com. As construction progresses, you can get more information about traffic in the area at PennDOT's traffic website, www.pa511.com.

Upcoming household hazardous waste collections

There will be several household hazardous waste collections in southeastern Pennsylvania through the end of the year. All events will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., rain or shine.

- Saturday, June 11 at the Emergency Services Training Center, 1700 Calcon Hook Road, Sharon Hill.
- Saturday, July 16 at Marple Transfer Station, 895 Sussex Blvd., Broomall.
- Sunday, Sept. 18 at Penn State University – Brandywine Campus, 25 Yearsley Mill Road, Media. Use the main entrance at the traffic light on Route 352.
- Sunday, Oct. 16 at the Lower Merion Transfer Station, 1300 N. Woodbine Ave., Penn Valley.
- Saturday, Oct. 22 at the Emergency Services Training Center, 1700 Calcon Hook Road, Sharon Hill.

Household hazardous waste includes products labeled poisonous, toxic, flammable, caustic, corrosive, reactive or explosive. *Items containing Freon and electronic waste will not be accepted.*

For more information about collections in Delaware County, you may call the Delaware County Solid Waste Authority at 610-892-9627 or visit www.co.delaware.pa.us/SWA.

For more information about collections in Montgomery County, you may call the Montgomery County recycling hotline at 610-278-3618 or visit www.montcopa.org/recycling.

For a complete listing of collections in the five-county southeastern Pennsylvania region, visit my website, www.pahouse.com/Vitali/.

New law creates tax-free savings accounts for people with disabilities

A new state law called the Pennsylvania Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (PA ABLE) creates tax-exempt savings accounts specifically for people with qualified disabilities and their families. The goal is to offer the program by the end of 2016.

These accounts, similar to 529 College Savings plans, allow tax-free growth for savings up to \$14,000 each year. Withdrawals from the accounts will be federal and state income tax-free when used for qualified disability expenses, including health care, housing and transportation, without jeopardizing eligibility for important benefit programs. ABLE accounts are also exempt from Pennsylvania inheritance tax.

ABLE savings are excluded from eligibility determinations for many government programs, including Medical Assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), disability and health benefits, and other means-tested programs.

Eligible disabilities include intellectual and developmental disabilities like autism, blindness and long-term physical impairments that preclude someone from working.

For more information, visit the state Treasury Department's ABLE website at www.pa529.com/able.

Free notary service at district office

Residents can have most official documents notarized for free in my district office. Please call ahead to make sure the notary is in the office and can accommodate your type of document.

Notary work is done most weekdays between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. The person whose signature is to be notarized must sign the document in person, in the presence of the notary, and provide proof of identity such as a valid driver's license, photo

ID card or passport. Please let my staff know if witnesses are needed, in addition to the notary, for your documents. My office has a limit of five notarizations per person.

My office is on the second floor. If you are unable to climb stairs, please let us know when you call, and we can arrange to have the notary meet you on the ground floor.