

Winter 2014

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Making progress on Pennsylvania's 911 Emergency Telephone Act revisions

The House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee continues to hold public hearings on a plan to overhaul Pennsylvania's 911 Emergency Telephone Act to keep pace with rapidly evolving technology and the costs of maintaining the emergency system.

Pennsylvania's laws pertaining to emergency preparedness and response contained in Title 35 are in desperate need of modernization. The last time a comprehensive update of Title 35 was made was in 1996, before the broad use of cell phones and before the Internet became a primary method of communication for many of us.

The committee held a hearing in Elizabeth, Allegheny County, where we heard input from local governments, first responders and other stakeholders. We will use this testimony, along with that of previous hearings, as we continue to meet and revise language to be included in legislation to update the 911 Emergency Telephone Act, found in Title 35.

I am hopeful that the final details of the bill will be worked out in the near future and we can begin to move it through the legislative process.

Updating Title 35 remains one of my top priorities, as our emergency preparedness and response law



The House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee toured the Pittsburgh Fire Bureau Training Academy.

should reflect the needs of our modern times.

In addition to the committee hearing in Elizabeth, the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee members had the opportunity to tour Allegheny County's 911 Communication Center and the Pittsburgh Fire Bureau Training Academy.

Support veterans with your state income tax refund

As taxpayers throughout the Commonwealth are preparing their state income tax returns, I want to make you aware of a special line on the PA-40 form, which allows you to donate all or a portion of your state refund to support the Military Family Relief Assistance Program.

By entering an amount on line 33, you will be making a gift to a program which provides assistance

to those with a direct and immediate financial need as a result of military service. The Pennsylvania Military Family Relief Assistance Program (PA MFRAP) provides financial assistance, in the form of grants, to eligible Pennsylvania service members and their eligible family members. The amount of a grant is based on documented financial need up to a maximum of \$3,500.

Participation in the donation is voluntary. Other charities eligible for donations through your state tax return include the Wild Resource Conservation Fund, Governor Robert P. Casey Memorial Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Trust Fund, Juvenile (Type 1) Diabetes Cure Research Fund, and PA Breast Cancer Coalition's Refunds for Breast and Cervical Cancer Research Fund.

Exclude portion of veterans' compensation benefits from income calculations

In October, I, along with the rest of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, voted favorably for House Bill 1742, which would exclude 50% of a veteran's benefit payment from being considered as income for any Commonwealth program. The committee also unanimously adopted an amendment to the bill, that I offered, which would extend this

exclusion to an unmarried surviving spouse of a deceased veteran.

Through the years, various benefits, such as service-connected disability payments and pensions, have been authorized by the legislature to thank and honor veterans for their service and sacrifice on behalf of our country. Unfortunately, these benefits sometimes result in disqualifying veterans for other state programs

because they put them over the income eligibility limit.

Currently, Pennsylvania does not have a law to exempt a veteran's income from income eligibility requirements. However, there are similar exemptions, such as the Commonwealth's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program, which exempts 50% of an applicant's Social Security income.

Eintracht Singing Society performs at Capitol

On April 8th, 2013, I welcomed New Castle's very own Eintracht Singing Society to Harrisburg. This prestigious singing group shared their love of German/Saxon folk music with a performance on the steps of the Capitol's Main Rotunda. I also had the pleasure of introducing them as they were recognized by House Speaker Sam Smith in the House chamber.



The Eintracht Singing Society is an all-male choir that practices Gemutlichkeit (geh moot lick height), which means a situation that induces a cheerful mood, peace of mind, with the feeling of belonging, social acceptance, coziness and unhurry.

Founded in 1894 from a love for German culture and singing, the Eintracht Singing Society of New Castle is one of the oldest Transylvania Saxon Societies in the United States. Based on clubs and societies in their homeland, the original choir was composed of immigrants from Saxony and Transylvania. Today, the Eintracht Singing Society serves as a meeting place where cherished Saxon and German traditions survive.

Their bilingual repertoire contains both German Saxon folk songs and English songs, performed in acappella style. The Eintracht Singers gave a spine-tingling performance on the steps of the Main Rotunda with their rendition of our National Anthem and "God Bless America", as well as several other German/Saxon folk songs.



It was my honor to participate in Memorial Day ceremonies at Greer House.



YMCA's Healthy Kids Day is the Y's national initiative to improve the health and well-being of families and to help them get a jump on a healthier summer. YMCA's Healthy Kids Day is celebrated at nearly 1,900 Ys across the country with more than 1.2 million parents and kids in attendance.

Relaxed PSP recruiting rules benefit veterans

The Pennsylvania State Police has relaxed a nearly two-decade-old recruitment standard to allow military veterans and those with past law enforcement experience to become troopers, even if they do not have college credits or a degree.

Previously, all state police recruits had to have an associate's degree or 60 credit hours at an accredited institution of higher education. But now, applicants with either four years of law enforcement experience or four years of active military duty with an honorable discharge do not need to have a college degree or credits.

Half the credit requirements are waived for applicants with two years of experience or service.

According to the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training, most states require police officers to have only a high school diploma, although many agencies prefer candidates with a college education.



I attended the Veterans Stand Down at Cascade Park.

Some tips to protect you during flooding

It's been a long, cold winter, but thankfully, spring is just around the corner. Unfortunately, as the calendar turns, it brings the danger of flooding.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has some recommendations on how to keep safe in the event of a flood.

If a flood is likely in your area, you should:

- Listen to the radio or television for information;
- Be aware that flash flooding can occur. If there is any possibility of a flash flood, move immediately to higher ground. Do not wait for instructions to move; and

■ Be aware of stream, drainage channels, canyons and other areas known to flood suddenly. Flash floods can occur in these areas with or without typical warnings such as rain clouds or heavy rain.

If you must prepare to evacuate, you should do the following:

- Secure your home. If you have time, bring in outdoor furniture. Move essential items to an upper floor;
- Turn off utilities at the main switches or valves if instructed to do so; and
- Disconnect electrical appliances. Do not touch electrical equipment if you are wet or standing in water.

If you have to leave your home, remember these evacuation tips:

- Do not walk through moving water. Six inches of moving water can make you fall. If you have to walk in water, walk where the water is not moving. Use a stick to check the firmness of the ground in front of you;
- Do not drive into flooded areas. If floodwaters rise around your car, abandon the car and move to higher ground if you can do so safely. You and the vehicle can be swept away quickly; and
- Do not camp or park your vehicle along streams, rivers or creeks, particularly during threatening conditions.



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Local veterans' assistance at my office

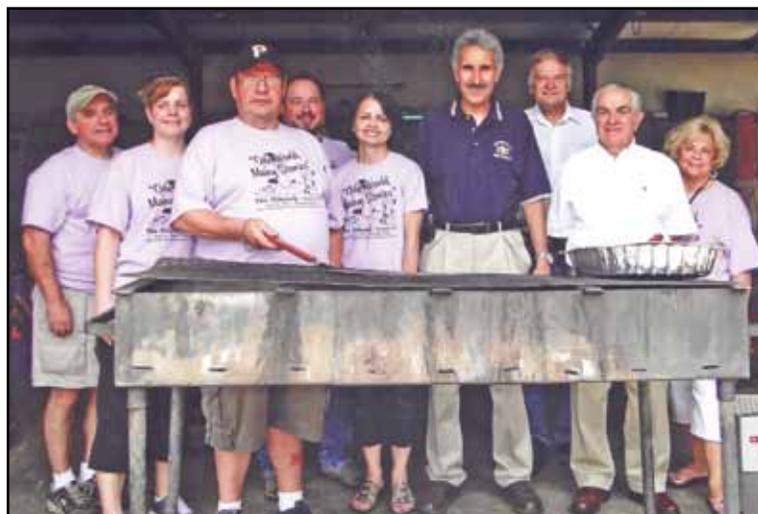
I have arranged to have a representative from the American Legion make regular visits to my local office at 20 S. Mercer St., Z-Penn Building in New Castle, to help veterans with concerns about a variety of issues.

The service is available from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the last Thursday of every month. Meetings are held on a first-come, first-served basis.

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 expressed my gratitude and appreciation for our hard working emergency responders when I met with members of the South New Castle Borough Fire Department.



I met with volunteers who helped make the Odyssey Reading Festival at Cascade Park a success.

Portable fireplace safety

The popularity of portable fuel-burning fireplaces soared recently because it warms homes while creating ambiance. However, if not used properly, the fuel and open flame pose a fire hazard.

If you have a portable fireplace, here are some tips to stay safe:

✓ Check with your local fire marshal before using fuel-fired portable

heaters. Many cities and towns do not permit them;

✓ Get a carbon monoxide alarm if using a portable heater with fuel. Fuel-fired portable heaters produce carbon monoxide;

✓ Take the fuel-fired portable heater outside for refueling;

✓ Do not use fuel-fired portable

heaters in a bedroom or bathroom that is not well vented; and

✓ Don't pour fuel in a device that is lit or not completely cool.

As with all heating equipment, space is important! Create a safe zone around the device by keeping children, pets and anything that can burn at least three feet away.