



State Representative

MARK LONGIETTI

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2018-19 state budget adopted

I was pleased to support a bipartisan state budget that was adopted on time, without a tax increase and which made strategic investments in education, career training and services to our most vulnerable citizens. Also, for the first time in years, we begin to set aside money in the state's Rainy Day Fund.

As co-chairman of the House/Senate Early Education Caucus, I was pleased that the budget includes \$25 million in new funding for high-quality early childhood education programs like Pre-K Counts and Head Start. These funds will open high-quality Pre-K to another 2,722 children across Pennsylvania, including many here in Mercer County. The budget also includes a 1.9 percent increase in K-12 basic education funding and a 1.3 percent increase in special education funding for our schools. Also, a new \$60 million fund for school safety guarantees funding for every school district for a wide variety of measures, including safety assessments, equipment, school resource officers and counseling services.

A \$40 million commitment to "PA Smart" means that students and workers in career and technical fields

can access education and training that lead to good-paying careers and jobs. This translates into a 16.7 percent increase for schools, such as the Mercer County Career Center, that provide vocational-tech education for our high school students, as well as funding for apprenticeships for high school graduates, training programs for current workers, and a focus on computer science offerings and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education.

As for higher education increases, the budget provides a 3 percent increase to community colleges and state universities and a 3.3 percent increase to the state-related universities Penn State, Pitt, Temple and Lincoln. This funding is designed to help keep tuition rates down for in-state students.

Finally, the budget provides funding for our most vulnerable citizens. Additional support will allow thousands of seniors to remain home and age in-place through home and community based programs, and it will remove thousands of disabled individuals from waiting lists and into needed services.



Thiel College \$1 million grant

Thiel College was awarded a \$1 million grant from the state's "capital budget" program to renovate its Academic Center. The renovations will address high-demand job opportunities, including an environmental center to support the emerging oil and gas industry, and new facilities for speech pathology programs. I was pleased to support the awarding of this important grant, which will be matched by nearly \$5 million in private funds to complete the project.

The grant will target improvements to laboratories, classrooms and common areas in the college's largest facility. The project will include expanded STEM

(Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) training, which will fortify our manufacturing sector and allow it to keep pace with changes in the global market. Additionally, it will provide opportunities for local high school students to remain in Mercer County as they pursue higher education and career opportunities.

The new Academic Center will supplement private investments made by Thiel in recent years, including construction of a new, state-of-the-art communications center, a new Science Connector and a new outdoor track. These public and private investments will strengthen Thiel College as a driving force in our local economy and region.

Time to prepare for PA's new driver's license and photo ID



The federal law called "REAL ID" requires Pennsylvania and other states to produce secure driver's licenses and photo ID cards for use to board a commercial airline flight or to enter federal facilities, at least by 2020. PennDOT intends to produce these new licenses and ID cards by March 2019, and citizens will have the option to obtain the secure license or ID or remain with the standard license. The new, secure license or ID will require a one-time additional fee of \$30 to cover costs, in addition to the renewal fee, but the expiration date will include the remaining time on your current ID plus four years. Without the secure ID, a passport will be required to board an airplane.

REAL ID will require citizens to produce a number of documents to prove their identity before the new, secure license or ID can be issued. Beginning Sept. 4, you may bring these documents to the local photo driver's license center to be scanned in. Citizens will need to produce a non-laminated Social Security card. Also, proof of citizenship is required, which may come from a valid U.S. passport, a state birth

certificate with a raised seal, or official U.S. citizenship papers.

Two forms of proof of residency will also be required, which may include a current, unexpired PA driver's license or photo ID card, a computer-generated utility bill showing your name and address, a W-2 form, tax records, mortgage documents, lease agreements and loan documents. Finally, proof of legal name change is also required. In this regard, documents such as marriage certificates, divorce decrees and court orders may be used.

Individuals who first obtained a PA driver's license or photo ID after September 2003, may have already produced many of these documents and may not need to do so again. These folks may check with PennDOT to see which documents are still needed by visiting PennDOT's driver and vehicle services website (www.dmv.pa.gov/REALID/pages/Real-ID-Pre-Verification.aspx) or by calling PennDOT at 717-412-5300. Of course, my office will assist you in getting questions answered, as well.

County gets green light on funding for traffic signal upgrades

I'm pleased that Mercer County residents will benefit from upgrades to area traffic signals, thanks to two grants totaling \$520,701 awarded under the state's Green Light-Go program.

The grants are part of a \$31 million funding package to 70 municipalities statewide for signal upgrades. The Green Light-Go program is administered by the state Department of Transportation.

The grants will fund these projects:

- Hermitage: \$204,640 to upgrade the intersection of Keel Ridge Road and East State Street, including installation of new signal heads, mast arms, controller assembly, wiring and traffic congestion detection.
- Sharon: \$316,061 to complete modernization of a traffic signal at South Sharpsville Avenue, East Connelly Boulevard (U.S. Route 62) and Shenango Valley Freeway.

Proposal would boost in-home care for seniors

A House bill that I co-sponsored would allow qualifying seniors to receive in-home care at an accelerated rate through Medicaid.

Currently, senior citizens who qualify for Medicaid but opt for in-home care are ineligible for those services until their application is fully reviewed, which could take months, while those who select nursing home care receive access to those facilities immediately.

This obstacle leaves families seeking in-home care financially strained and forces the individual into a nursing home. However, H.B. 1829 would eradicate those worries by expediting the approval process and ensuring senior citizens receive the care they need – regardless of their desired service.

This bill is in the best interest of senior citizens and the commonwealth. It allows the individual to receive quality care while in the comfort of their own home, alleviates financial strain and saves the commonwealth money over nursing home costs. The bill passed the House unanimously and was referred to the Senate's Health and Human Services Committee.

I want to thank the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association for their commitment to library education and for awarding me the PSLA Presidential Award.



Childhood education grants awarded to the 7th District

Three Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance programs within the 7th Legislative District have been awarded early childhood education grants.

Children's Center of Mercer County, Zion Education Center and the Community Action Partnership of Mercer County are among the 2018-19 recipients of the grants, which will help to expand the number of available Pre-K and Head Start slots.

Research shows that children who receive high-quality Pre-K education are more likely to graduate high school and less likely to need special education services or become juvenile delinquents. That is why I am so pleased that expanded Pre-K opportunities are available in Mercer County to reach more young children.

The Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program provides state funding to Head Start programs to serve families at or below 130 percent of the poverty level, or a family of four earning approximately \$32,630 annually. Additionally, families who

have children ages 3 and 4, and living in up to 300 percent of the poverty level, or a family of four earning \$75,300 annually, are eligible to apply to the Pre-K Counts program.



In May, I read to Pre-K students at Zion's Family Services Education Center in Sharon.



I joined Ruth Ann Taylor of Sharon for her 100th birthday celebration and presented her with a Pennsylvania House of Representatives citation.

New Castle Division of Vital Records open

Earlier this year, state Rep. Chris Sainato and I pushed to restore walk-in counter service for Birth and Death Certificates at the Vital Records office in New Castle.

By advocating on behalf of those in the 7th Legislative District and through talks with the Pennsylvania Department of Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine, I'm happy that the walk-in service has been restored. The new office is located at 105 Nesbit Road in New Castle and is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays. Otherwise, people would have had to travel to Pittsburgh, Erie or Scranton for walk-in service.

Citizens may now receive both birth and death certificates and can even pick them up on the same day if the request is made by 11:30 a.m. I'm thankful that the Department of Health chose to reopen the center in March, because it allows area residents to personally obtain important documents. I want to remind you that birth and death certificate copies are \$20 each and must be paid with check or money order. The offices do not accept cash or credit cards.

For more information on obtaining Birth or Death Certificates, contact my office at 724-981-4655.

2018 Senior Fair a success



I want to thank everyone who attended my 12th Annual Senior Fair on July 19 at the Sharon American Legion. Hundreds of area seniors came out for health screenings, farmers' market vouchers, and general assistance.

If you were unable to attend, please do not hesitate to contact my district office at (724) 981-4655 with any questions about how state government can help you. We're able to assist with Property Tax/ Rent Rebates, PACENET questions, unclaimed property, disability plates and placards, and multiple other state issues or programs.

House approves Career Technical Education package

A package of bipartisan bills boosting Career and Technical Education (CTE) was approved by the House and will go toward closing the skills gap and helping students and workers become career-ready.

The bills include H.B. 2155, a measure that would reform certification requirements for CTE teachers by emphasizing work experience in the field over additional course credits. House Bill 2156 would provide tax credits to businesses which invest in schools offering CTE programs to students. Schools may use these funds to purchase relevant equipment and create career training programs. Scholarships would also be made available to post-secondary students pursuing a CTE credential.

And lastly, H.B. 2158 would provide all students in grades 4 through 12 at least one opportunity to receive career information from career presenters and it would open schools to a wide range of educational contributors.

Other bills in the package include:

- **H.B. 2157** that would speed the process for the classification of instructional programs;
- **H.B. 2159** that would expand the database that allows courses, programs, certifications and diplomas to transfer among public schools and colleges;
- **H.B. 2203** that would create an online CTE resource center;
- **H.B. 2204** that would encourage a continuum of career and workforce development;
- **H.B. 2205** that would allow CTE programs to establish occupational advisory committees at the Intermediate Unit level to serve multiple school districts or Career and Technical Centers; and
- **H.B. 2206** that would require Workforce Development Boards to include an administrator of a CTE center.

New database will make it easier to search life insurance policies

Legislation that I co-sponsored to help surviving family members obtain life insurance and annuity proceeds has become law. After a death, many family members often cannot find their loved one's insurance policy or annuity contract, or they are not sure whether it is valid.

House Bill 152, which became Act 48 of 2018, will assist these families by requiring all companies offering these policies and contracts in Pennsylvania to provide contact information to the PA Insurance Department. Additionally, companies are required to participate in a national locator service that has a searchable database. This way, families can contact the company involved and find out whether their loved one had a valid life insurance policy or annuity contract.

Many times, life insurance and annuity proceeds are needed for immediate expenses such as burial. This law will help families locate these funds quickly.

Fourteen fire and EMS grants awarded in the 7th District

Funding was awarded through the Fire Company and Emergency Medical Service Grant Program, from the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, to the following companies in the 7th Legislative District:

- Clark Volunteer Fire Department \$12,649
- Farrell Volunteer Fire Department Inc. \$12,649
- Greenville Fire Department \$13,939
- Greenville Volunteer Fire Company \$12,280
- Hermitage Volunteer Fire Department \$15,000
- Patagonia Volunteer Fire Department \$12,464
- Sharon Fire Department \$14,307
- Sharpsville Volunteer Fire Department \$13,754
- Shenango Township Volunteer Fire Department \$12,096
- South Pymatuning Township Volunteer Fire Association \$11,543
- Transfer Volunteer Fire Department \$14,123
- West Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department \$13,386
- West Salem Fire Department \$12,096
- Wheatland Volunteer Fire Department \$11,727

Shenango Township awarded \$9.3 million for sewer project

The Shenango Township Municipal Authority was approved for a \$4.8 million loan and a \$4.4 million grant through the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority, to construct gravity sewers and install pumps.

I was eager to support this funding, as it will help contain sewer rates at a more manageable rate level for residents. The project consists of the construction of a new sewage collection system, with the waste then treated at the authority's existing wastewater treatment plant.

The project will have three phases and this funding will fund the first part. A consent order was entered into between the township and the Department of Environmental Protection to proceed with the upgrades.

PennDOT awards \$820,441 for Sharon Road maintenance

A Multimodal Transportation Fund grant of \$820,441, which I supported, will help the City of Sharon repair and improve 13 neighborhood roads. Without this critical funding, Sharon would be unable to make these local road improvements due to limited resources.

This is a much-needed grant to repair and renovate several roads in Sharon. The project will include “mill and overlay” work, which involves milling the road surface and laying new asphalt, including work to curbs and ramps.

These vital improvements to our roadways will aid road safety and efficiency for residents traveling across the Shenango Valley. The Multimodal Transportation Fund benefits a wide range of projects, from sidewalks and pedestrian safety enhancements to repair and renovation of roadways, as well as investments to the state’s public transit systems.

City of Farrell receives \$500,000 state grant

A \$500,000 Keystone Communities grant that I supported was awarded to the City of Farrell to demolish four blighted buildings and construct a new shopping plaza on a half-acre site directly across from the municipal building.

This financial backing will also assist the ongoing transformation of Farrell, removing blighted and vacant properties from the landscape, and paving the way for the new retail construction in the city’s main commercial corridor.

Administered by the Department of Community and Economic Development, the Keystone Communities program is designed to encourage the creation of partnerships between the public and private sectors in the community, and supporting local initiatives that grow and stabilize neighborhoods and communities.

Around the District



I want to congratulate the Sharon High School football team on being the 2017 Class 3A District 10 champions.



Congratulations to the Farrell Area High School football team on winning the 2017 Class 1A District 10 championship.

I joined parents James and Angela Reda at an Eagle Scout Ceremony for their son James C., and a Girl Scouts Gold Award Ceremony for their daughter Jenna.



Greenville basketball all-time scoring leader Joe Batt with his father and coach, Mark Batt.



The Reynolds wrestling team won both the 2018 Class AA Dual Meets and team championship.

Congratulations to the Sharon basketball team, the 2018 Western Conference champions.



The West Middlesex Ms. Reds basketball team are the 2018 Class 2A District 10 champions.



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Changing graduation requirements

I have teamed up with state Rep. Mike Tobash, R-Dauphin/Schuylkill, to offer bipartisan legislation that would give high school students more options to meet graduation requirements. A few years ago, the State Board of Education put in a requirement for high school students to pass end-of-course “Keystone Exams” in Algebra I, Biology and Language Arts in order to graduate.

However, many students have difficulty passing a single, high-stakes, standardized test and need alternative ways to show their understanding and mastery of these subjects. While the legislature has been able to delay this graduation requirement, the postponement will soon expire, so our legislation is timely. It would offer students multiple pathways to show they are college or career ready by considering a student’s strengths, interests and career goals, while requiring the student to meet or exceed locally established grade-based prerequisites.

We must provide our students with the opportunity to succeed, but not base success on the results of a single, standardized test.



Pennsylvania Education Secretary Pedro Rivera joined me on a visit to Greenville Junior/Senior High School to mark its selection as a National Blue Ribbon School.



I was pleased to present a certificate to Elizabeth Lampkins, director of the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program at the Shenango Valley Urban League, to mark their 40th anniversary of serving clients in Mercer, Venango and Forest counties.



The Mercer Memorial Day 500 celebrated our veterans. I was honored to present citations to Lt. Col. Larry Scheetz, Claire “Butch” Blair and Debra Thomas, who were honored for their military and community service.