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Are you getting your fresh fruits and vegetables?
As we age, the nutrients and fiber provided by fresh fruits and vegetables are more important than ever. Thanks to Pennsylvania’s Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, seniors of all incomes can afford these diet essentials. The program provides fresh, locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs from approved farmers markets in Pennsylvania. To qualify, seniors must be age 60 or older by Dec. 31 of the program year and must meet income eligibility guidelines. Recipients receive a list of participating farmers and farmers’ markets, where they can redeem checks for fresh fruits and vegetables.

To learn more and find out whether you qualify, call the Department of Agriculture at (717) 772-2693, the Lawrence County Area Agency on Aging at (724) 658-3729 or my office at (724) 656-1112. We can also help you apply!

HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED BEAT THE CHILL
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To learn more visit the Department of Human Services at www.dhs.pa.gov and search “LIHEAP,” or contact my office at (724) 656-1112. My staff can also help you apply!

Income limits raised on some senior prescription assistance programs
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For the PACENET program, however, the upper limits are now higher. Single people can qualify if their income is between $14,500 and $27,500 (up from $23,500), and married couples can qualify if their income is between $17,700 and $35,500 (up from $31,500).

As before, eligibility is determined by the previous calendar year’s income, and Social Security Medicare Part B premiums are excluded. Applicants must be 65 or older, Pennsylvania residents for at least 90 days prior to the date of application, and not enrolled in the Department of Human Services’ Medicaid prescription benefit.

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Working for you at home and in Harrisburg
Ensuring that our seniors have access to the best programs and services is an important part of my job. Equally important, though, is making sure that the laws we pass in Harrisburg reflect their needs and interests.
As you can see from the graphic below, 2019 was a productive year. Some of the bills I’m co-sponsoring would directly benefit our community’s seniors. Here’s a brief look at several of them. (Bear in mind that these proposals are bills and would have to be passed by the legislature before they became laws.)

- Expanded Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program. These bills would expand the income limit for property owners from $35,000 to $40,000 and would allow federal civil service retirees receiving a Social Security substitute pension to deduct 50% of their income for purposes of qualifying.

- Tax credit in exchange for volunteer service. The bill would allow townships, boroughs and municipalities to provide a tax credit for seniors in exchange for volunteer service.

- Exclusion of savings bonds from being counted toward income. This bill would exempt proceeds from the cashing of savings bonds from being counted toward income when seniors 65 or older apply for lottery-funded programs such as prescription drug assistance and Property Tax/Rent Rebate.

- Exclusion of Social Security cost-of-living increase being counted toward Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program. This bill would reinstate a Social Security COLA moratorium so that an increase does not prevent seniors from qualifying for the program.
I’ll continue working to pass these measures and others – including my bill that would extend a property tax exemption for certain disabled veterans to their surviving spouses. It’s going to be a great year!
Don’t assume the name listed on caller ID is legitimate.  Don’t fall prey to fear tactics.  Be alert to genetic testing scams.  Report scams.  Remember that the IRS will never initiate to terrorists.  The callers were then pressured to provide payments to avoid an arrest.

Scammers also attempt to prey on a senior’s fears by calling to claim that their grandchild has been arrested for an offense such as drunken driving and needs money for bail or attorney fees to help get him released.

Be cautious when receiving unsolicited offers – particularly those involving an advance fee.  Common schemes involve the caller requesting an up-front fee for collecting sweepstakes winnings or providing services such as tech support, home improvement, financial advice, mortgage modification, prepaid funerals and other services.

Be alert to genetic testing scams.  Scammers sometimes attempt to gain access to Medicare information by pretending to offer free genetic testing.  Don’t accept any test kits in the mail unless they were ordered by your doctor, and don’t agree to any free testing at community events.  Check your Medicare summary of benefits for the words “gene analysis” or “molecular pathology,” which could indicate questionable genetic testing.

Never give out or confirm personal or financial information in response to a call or contact you did not initiate.  Report scams.  If you fear you’ve been a victim of financial fraud, report it promptly by calling the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Elder Abuse Helpline at 1-866-623-2137 or the Bureau of Consumer Protection at 1-800-441-2555.

On a related note, you can also add yourself to the state’s Do-Not-Call list by calling 1-888-777-3406.  The law in this area was strengthened recently so that phone numbers registered with the state database no longer have to be re-registered every five years.
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Report scams.

According to the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, older Americans lose about $2.9 billion each year to scammers. Although the schemes have grown more sophisticated over time, knowledge and a little vigilance still go a long way in staying safe. Here are some tips to remember:

Don’t assume the name listed on caller ID is legitimate. Scammers commonly use “caller ID spoofing” technology to make it appear that they are calling from a government agency such as the IRS or Social Security Administration, a credit card company or another legitimate organization.

Don’t fall prey to fear tactics. Scammers often attempt to pressure a caller by impersonating agency or law enforcement officials. In a recent scheme, scammers told callers that their Social Security numbers had been compromised and that the information was being used to open credit cards in their names to make payments to terrorists. The callers were then pressured to provide payments to avoid an arrest.

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EACH ADDITIONAL PERSON: ADD $6,630

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