

State Representative | 1st Legislative District

PATRICK J. HARKINS

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Thank you, Erie, for working so hard to flatten the curve. Please keep fighting the spread of COVID-19 by donning a mask when you go out. We need to do everything we can to keep our businesses open and our residents healthy!



SAFETY AT THE FRONT LINES: SUPPORTING OUR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

When the pandemic struck, our frontline workers were suddenly asked to take on health risks most never imagined.

My colleagues and I scrambled to come up with new protections. In April, I introduced legislation calling for employers to institute specific safety measures, including employee-customer distancing, barriers, store-cleaning practices, employee access to hygiene stations, paid sick leave and protocols for workers exposed to the virus.

My bill – together with several others in the House and Senate – provided the blueprint for Gov. Tom Wolf's April workplace safety directive mandating COVID-19 protections in all open businesses.

At a July Policy Committee meeting on essential workers, we discussed my bill to provide public employees with the same OSHA protections already enjoyed by private workers. I will continue fighting to pass this legislation, which will address a critical safety issue PA's public employees have faced long before the pandemic arrived.

HAZARD PAY PROGRAM

Despite our efforts to keep them safe, frontline workers still face very real dangers on a daily basis. A new hazard pay program is helping employers compensate them for these risks.

Under the program -- funded by \$50 million in federal CARES Act dollars – hazard pay is available to full-time and part-time employees in life-sustaining industries who earn less than \$20/hour, excluding fringe benefits and overtime.

The pay is designed to compensate those employees facing the greatest risks, including frontline workers in health care, social assistance, food retail and manufacturing, public transit and ground passenger transportation, security services and janitorial services.

Funds are for the 10-week period from Aug. 16 to Oct. 24 and will be paid to eligible employees as a \$3/hour hazard pay increase to their regular pay rate.

I'm urging all eligible employers to apply – it's the least we can do for those who keep our community connected to essential goods and services.

MY OFFICE IS OPEN BY APPOINTMENT

My staff and I are here to help, but please note that we are asking residents to call ahead at (814) 459-1949 to make an appointment. You can also email me at pharkins@pahouse.net.



Joining me for last year's meeting with the Flagship Niagara League were (from left): USS Niagara Commander Captain Chris Cusson, Niagara League Executive Director Billy Sabatini, Gov. Tom Wolf, Rep. Bob Merski, Sen. Dan Laughlin and Rep. Ryan Bizzarro.

NEW LAW WILL IMPROVE POLICE HIRING, TRAINING

A pair of bills I supported – signed by the governor in July after unanimous, bipartisan passage in the House – will help make policing in PA more effective by enhancing officer training and providing law enforcement agencies greater access to information when making hiring decisions.

The new laws will require employers to disclose employment information to law enforcement agencies conducting background checks and also create a database to track officer disciplinary actions so that agencies will be aware of potential red flags before hiring an officer who has separated from another agency.

The laws will also require mandatory training for officers on interacting with people of diverse racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds and on the use of force and de-escalation methods. And, it will require officers to be evaluated for post-traumatic stress after a lethal use-of-force incident.



Enjoying the Farm Show in January with my wife, Michelle.

Above: At a press conference following last August's tragic daycare fire. I am working with my colleague Rep. Bob Merski to develop legislation that will prevent a repeat of this tragedy.



At the Oct. 2019 ribbon-cutting for the Allegheny Health Network Cancer Institute at St. Vincent Hospital, with fellow attendee Paula Bruno.



Dave Kosobucki isn't just a fellow Teamster - he also helps run my Erie office!



Discussing education issues with the governor last summer, with (from left): Blue Coats founder Daryl Craig, Erie Public Schools Superintendent Brian Polito, Gov. Tom Wolf, Blue Coats member Roscoe Carroll and Rep. Bob Merski.



In front of the famous mural on Larry's Central Market in Erie's diverse Little Italy with (from left): Larry Adiatori Jr., Joe Salvia, Father John Detisch and Larry Adiatori III.

REAL ID ENFORCEMENT POSTPONED: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU?

Many of you have been asking how postponement of the REAL ID enforcement deadline to Oct. 1, 2021, will affect you.

It simply means that after Oct. 1, 2021, you won't be able to show your regular state-issued driver's license or ID card as proof of identity for boarding a domestic commercial flight or visiting certain high-security federal facilities. Instead, you will have to show either a REAL-ID compliant driver's license or photo ID, a passport, or some other federally accepted form of identification.

Getting a REAL ID is purely optional. You do not need one to drive, vote, apply for or receive federal benefits, gain access to hospitals and health clinics or visit regular-security federal buildings like the post office. In short: you are completely free to continue using your regular state-issued license or ID card after Oct. 1, 2021.

You can learn more by visiting www.dmv.pa.gov and scrolling down to the REAL ID icon with the star. Residents should also feel free to call my office at (814) 459-1949 or email me at pharkins@pahouse.net with any questions or for help applying.

PENNDOT EXTENDS EXPIRATION DATES FOR LICENSES, LEARNER'S PERMITS

Dates for driver licenses, photo ID cards and learner's permits scheduled to expire during the period March 16, 2020 through Aug. 31, 2020, have been extended until Aug. 31, 2020.

DO YOU QUALIFY FOR A PROPERTY TAX OR RENT REBATE?

Are you eligible for a rebate on property tax or rent paid in 2019?

The popular Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program – supported by the state lottery – benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older, widows and widowers 50 or older, and people with disabilities 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 annually for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters, and half of Social Security is excluded.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650, but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975.

The deadline to apply has been extended to Dec. 31, and my office can help you apply! Please call my office at **(814) 459-1949** to set up an appointment – and remember to bring identification, proof of age and income, and a copy of your 2019 rent statement or receipt of property taxes paid.

A STOPGAP SPENDING PLAN

Unprecedented revenue shortfalls due to economic shutdowns and postponed tax filing deadlines left lawmakers with more questions than answers this budget period, and no predictable patterns on which to base spending.

To keep the state operating, the legislature passed an interim \$25.8 billion spending plan. Signed by the governor in late May, the stopgap budget funds most agencies for five months. Public education – the exception – received flat funding for a full year.

I opposed the initial plan, in part because it failed to address the loss of casino revenue normally available to fund property tax relief. With that \$300 million hole, I feared residents would be left to plug the gap through higher property taxes.

We were able to solve that problem by transferring up to \$300 million in emergency funding to the Property Tax Relief Fund to make the full property tax relief payment to school districts and homeowners.

When we return to the budget table later this year to pass the remaining budget for FY 2020-21, we hope to have more signs that economic growth is returning to the commonwealth.

ALLOCATING CARES ACT DOLLARS

Despite the budget uncertainty, my colleagues and I were able to take some concrete steps to address the impact of COVID-19 on our residents, communities and services.

A major step was passage of a spending plan allocating \$2.6 billion in federal CARES Act funding. One highlight of the plan is \$692 million to address conditions in our long-term care programs and nursing homes, which have been hit so hard by the pandemic.

The CARES Act spending plan also allocates millions for housing and food assistance; critical healthcare resources; support for small businesses; schools and first responders; and a wide range of other essential state programs and services.

DOLLARS BACK TO THE DISTRICT

I have been working hard to bring funding back to Erie to help us deal with the pandemic. Over the past several months, our district and region have received the following in federal funding under the CARES Act:

- More than \$24.3 million to help Erie County cope with the pandemic.
- \$13.6 million to address COVID-19 in our long-term care facilities.
- Nearly \$8.7 million to ensure students have the resources they need to continue learning during the pandemic.
- More than \$1 million to help Erie childcare providers reopen safely.
- Nearly \$220,000 to help area food banks serve the greater numbers of residents impacted by food insecurity because of the pandemic.



My team for the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania's legislative challenge (from left): my wife, Michelle, Chamere Henderson, and Mike and Maureen Trott.



It's always an honor to visit with James P. Hoffa, president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Joining me for their annual convention last year in Hershey was my wife, Michelle, and our son Pat – a proud Teamster like his dad.



Attending a labor dinner in Pittsburgh last September with Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO.



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NEWS FROM UNDER THE DOME

Throughout the pandemic, I have been working with my colleagues to help our community meet ongoing challenges.

I worked to help pass measures to authorize school closures, postpone tax filing deadlines, suspend certain requirements for filing unemployment compensation claims, transfer up to \$50 million in state funds to aid healthcare providers such as hospitals and nursing homes, and extend medical marijuana regulations scheduled to expire until late 2021.

More recently, I supported a measure – approved by the governor in mid-July – that will require the state to develop and fund a comprehensive COVID-19 testing plan.

I am also supporting bills – passed by the House and currently in the state Senate – that would bring greater transparency regarding COVID-19 cases and isolation procedures in long-term care facilities; prevent state and local taxation of federal stimulus checks; and freeze cost-of-living increases for public officials.

Of course, not every piece of legislation is related to the pandemic. I recently signed onto a bill that would give municipalities the ability to regulate fireworks use and prohibit their use during certain hours.

In other news, a new law – based on a bill I introduced with state Rep. Parke Wentling – will allow proceeds from the sale of Lake Erie fishing permits to be used for a greater range of fishing-related projects, such as marina improvements, installing additional fish cleaning stations and other projects.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Erie City Hall
(814) 870-1111

Erie County Courthouse
(814) 451-6000

Erie Waterworks
(814) 870-8000
Emergency # (814) 870-8087

Erie County Library
(814) 451-6900

Erie School District
(814) 874-6000

Iroquois School District
(814) 899-7643

Emergicare
(814) 870-1010

TROUBLE MEETING HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES? THESE PROGRAMS CAN HELP

If the pandemic is making it impossible to pay for basic living expenses, please remember that the following programs are available.

Housing assistance. If you are at least 30 days overdue on your rent or mortgage, the CARES Rent Relief and Mortgage Assistance programs can help. Homeowners may qualify for up to \$1,000 per month for a maximum of six months of assistance for the period between March 1 and Nov. 30. Renters may qualify for up to \$750 per month for a maximum of six months' assistance for the same period.

To qualify, you must have become unemployed or suffered a 30% or more reduction in income after March 1 due to COVID-19 and must meet certain income and other requirements. Visit www.phfa.org to read program guidelines and apply. You can also call PHFA toll free at 1-855-U-Are-Home.

Also, please be aware that a recent order by the governor protects homeowners and renters from eviction or foreclosure until Aug. 31 if they have not received assistance

under the PHFA program or a foreclosure program or court order.

Energy assistance. The LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program provides up to \$800 for households that have had their utility service shut off or are in danger of losing service. The program runs until Aug. 31 or until funds are exhausted. To learn more, visit www.dhs.pa.gov and enter "LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program" in the search bar.

Food assistance. Renewal dates for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program have been automatically extended, and participants can now shop online. For more information, visit www.dhs.pa.gov and scroll down mid-page to the link titled "SNAP."

For more information to help you navigate the pandemic, visit www.RepHarkins.com and click on the "COVID-19 Resources" link at the top of the page.