



State Representative

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New budget boosts education, holds the line on taxes

After months of shuttered storefronts and stunted economic growth, Pennsylvania’s fiscal year ended on a positive note, when state revenues finished stronger than expected.

With a surplus and new infusion of federal rescue dollars, we passed a 2021-22 state budget that holds the line on taxes while continuing critical recovery programs for families and small businesses.

The new budget invests strongly in education, increasing funding by \$300

million for basic programs, \$50 million for special education, \$30 million for early childhood education, and \$11 million for early intervention.

As part of the basic increase, the budget allocates \$100 million in “level up” funding to the state’s most grossly underfunded school districts – including those in Sharon, Farrell and Greenville.

The new spending plan also commits more than \$700 million in American Rescue Plan dollars to ensure parents have safe, reliable childcare, and another

\$3 million to the State Food Purchase Program to ensure families do not face food insecurity.

Finally, the new budget deposits more than \$2 billion into the state Rainy Day Fund to ensure we can deal with future emergencies without shifting the burden to taxpayers.

While it’s not perfect (no state budget is), I believe the new spending plan strikes a good balance between building our reserves, meeting existing needs and investing in our future to keep us growing.

District schools see across-the-board increases

Schools in our area will see funding increases across the board. Below is a look at additional state funding for basic and special education, plus the amount each district received in federal recovery funding for learning loss, summer enrichment, and afterschool programs.

- **Farrell Area** – \$564,100 (6.5% increase); plus \$503,200 in federal funding.
- **Greenville Area** – \$356,300 (4.4% increase); plus \$330,400 in federal funding.
- **Hermitage** – \$336,700 (4.5% increase); plus \$251,700 in federal funding.
- **Reynolds** – \$141,400 (1.6% increase); plus \$264,300 in federal funding.
- **Sharon City** – \$1.6 million (9.5% increase); plus \$828,700 in federal funding.
- **Sharpville Area** – \$130,700 (1.8% increase); plus \$188,000 in federal funding.
- **West Middlesex Area** – \$29,600 (0.5% increase); plus \$176,600 in federal funding.



I had the special privilege of delivering the keynote address at the Sharon Memorial Day ceremony held at Oakwood Cemetery.

A lifeline for drug rehab patients at risk

New law mandates emergency contact notification when patient leaves against medical advice

When a drug rehab patient leaves an inpatient treatment facility against medical advice, their loved ones may have just a narrow window of opportunity to intervene and try to get them to safety.

Until recently, facilities were not required to notify a designated emergency contact when a patient left against medical advice. By the time the loved one or family member learned of their departure, that critical window had often closed, resulting in overdose deaths, patient victimization and other tragic outcomes.

To change that dynamic, I drafted legislation with state Rep. Eric Nelson, R-Westmoreland, requiring rehab facilities to notify a designated emergency contact when the patient leaves against medical advice. The bill – which became law this summer – requires facilities to act immediately (and at the very latest, no more than 12 hours after a patient's departure).

The new law does not affect patient confidentiality, and it contains exceptions for cases where a patient previously revoked consent to notify their emergency contact or where the facility knew or had reason to know about domestic violence allegations against the emergency contact.

Requiring rehab facilities to notify an emergency contact when a patient leaves against medical advice might not guarantee a successful outcome, but it does give their loved ones a new window of opportunity – and a chance to throw down a lifeline of hope.



It was a pleasure helping Mary Sobey, of Hermitage, celebrate her 100th birthday in May with presentation of a PA House of Representatives citation.

Law will help meet growing demand for nurses

With Pennsylvania's rapidly expanding elderly population creating a growing demand for qualified nurses, a new law I supported will make it easier to recruit and retain those key frontline medical professionals.

When the governor signed Act 68 of 2021 this summer, Pennsylvania became a member of the Nurse Licensure Compact. The compact permits nurses who reside in member states to have one multistate license that enables them to practice in every state in the compact.

Once the law is fully implemented, Pennsylvania's 230,000 registered nurses and 50,000 licensed practical nurses will have the flexibility to treat patients across state lines – in person or via telehealth – without having to shoulder the considerable expense and burden of obtaining additional licenses, fees, and renewals.

In addition to providing a powerful recruitment and retention tool, the new law will enhance public health by creating greater nurse mobility and easier access to care, including the ability of nurses to cross state lines and respond quickly in the event of a health emergency like the pandemic.

With membership in the compact, Pennsylvania joins about 35 other member states, including neighboring New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware and West Virginia.

New support for caregivers

A new law I supported will expand much-needed assistance for Pennsylvania caregivers.

Act 20 of 2021 updates the Family Caregiver Support Act to provide greater resources and protections for those who care for older adults, grandparents raising grandchildren, and caregivers of adults living with a disability.

Among other things, the new law removes maximum reimbursement rates for out-of-pocket expenses, home modifications and assistive device costs, which should allow more unpaid caregivers to receive higher reimbursements.

Caregivers will also benefit from improved supports and services, including better access to respite services, care management, benefits counseling and caregiver education and training.

Pennsylvanians of any age who care for someone with Alzheimer's Disease or other dementias are also eligible under the expanded program.

The demands of caregiving – even when they involve a loved one – can be physically exhausting and mentally draining. The new law should help lighten the load a bit for thousands of these selfless Pennsylvanians.

'Dolly Parton's Imagination Library' launches in Mercer County

Earlier this year, our community welcomed a unique educational resource when "Dolly Parton's Imagination Library" launched in our district.

As Democratic chairman of the House Education Committee, I worked with United Way of Mercer County and other local organizations to bring the program and its proven literacy benefits to our area.

By delivering a new book in the mail each month (for children up to age 5), the program gets kids excited about reading at an early age, which sets the stage for future academic achievement.

The program negotiates wholesale pricing for the books and then works with local partners to promote the program and secure the costs (just \$2.10 per child per month) so the books are completely free to families.

Investments in a safer, stronger library

The well-loved Greenville Area Public Library received funding for much-needed building repairs and improvements late last year after I secured a \$75,000 grant to help finance a new roof, boiler and upgraded lighting.

The grant from the state Department of Education's Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund will help ensure visitors and staff continue to enjoy a warm, secure and protective environment.

REAL ID: Enforcement postponed – but it's a good time to prepare

The start date for REAL ID enforcement – the date when heightened ID requirements will take effect for boarding commercial flights and entering military bases and certain other high-security federal facilities – has been postponed until May 3, 2023. That means that you can continue using your regular state-issued driver's license for the time being.

If you fly frequently and want to be able to continue using a driver's license for identification at the airport after REAL ID enforcement goes into effect, you may want to consider upgrading to a REAL-ID compliant driver's license.

A good way to prepare now is to start gathering documents you will need. Visit www.penndot.gov/realid to learn more.



I presented a PA House of Representatives citation to James Shafer, of Hermitage, at his Eagle Scout ceremony. His parents, James Shafer Sr. and Jennifer Shafer, also attended.



Honoring Gene Blair, who was recently named Direct Support Professional of the Year, with House and Senate citations. I am pictured with Gene; Melinda Gosser, from state Sen. Michele Brooks' office; and Gene's client, Brian Jordan.

'Lots to Love' about new funding

A \$120,000 grant from the state Housing Finance Agency in June will fully fund Sharon's innovative "Lots to Love" program for repurposing vacant lots. The funding builds on a \$150,000 grant the city received in May to help fund demolition and site-preparation for 38 fire-damaged properties, and an earlier award of \$11,000 in tax credits to leverage projects to repurpose vacant lots.

Funds to fight blight in Greenville

Projects in Greenville also benefited from funding awarded in May. The borough received \$212,220 to fund demolition and rehabilitation of seven downtown buildings and properties along Main and Shenango streets, clearing the way for revitalizing investments and commercial growth.

\$400,000 in tax credits will help fund new mixed-used facility

Tax credit funding of \$400,000 will help finance a project to bring an affordable student housing and multipurpose event facility to downtown Sharon. The award will help fund JCL Development's project to repurpose a vacant warehouse into The Flats Center – a mixed-use facility that would provide affordable apartments and an athletic event center serving the Penn State-Shenango community. The project will help transform the downtown corridor by creating student residences and increasing foot traffic and customers for downtown businesses.



I participated in a groundbreaking ceremony for Phase I of Thiel College's \$16 million renovation and capital improvement project.

Hermitage photo center benefits area motorists

Shenango Valley motorists now have easier access to license photo services, thanks to the new PennDOT Photo License Center that opened earlier this year in the AAA office at 1749 E. State Street. I want to thank PennDOT Deputy Secretary Kurt Myers for working with us to help make the new center possible.



At a 25th anniversary celebration for Gibbs Family Day Care, in Hermitage, I presented Joette Gibbs with a PA House of Representatives citation.

\$1 million in grants to improve Irvine Avenue corridor, restore Buhl Park wetlands

In April, I secured nearly \$1 million from the Commonwealth Financing Authority to fund urban renewal and environmental preservation projects in Sharon and Hermitage.

The CFA grant includes \$730,000 to allow the city of Sharon to make critical repairs and improvements to the Irvine Avenue corridor and \$205,000 to fund wetland preservation at Buhl Park.

The grant to Buhl Park builds on prior funding of more than \$100,000 awarded last year to help restore the park's wetlands and add multiple pedestrian improvements.

Wetland restoration improves water quality in the lower Shenango River Watershed, reduces algae in Lake Julia, and provides a safer habitat for fish and wildlife.

The boardwalk and other improvements will help visitors enjoy more of the park's natural beauty and expand field trip opportunities for students.



Presenting a PA House of Representatives citation to the Good Shepherd Center of Greenville at their 30th anniversary banquet. I am pictured with longtime staffer Marj Stubert, Executive Director Janet Smith and Diane Helbig, from state Sen. Michele Brooks' office.

New funding boosts improvements to South Pymatuning Softball Complex

A \$70,000 grant from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is funding major improvements to South Pymatuning's Regional Community Softball Complex.

Improvements in the lineup include ballfield renovations; construction of a parking area, pedestrian walkway, dugouts, bleachers, and fencing; installation of playground equipment with safety surfacing, ADA access, and landscaping; and storm water management measures and other improvements.



I was proud to honor the Hickory Hornets Boys Basketball Team for their runner-up finish at the 2021 Class 4A State Championship. The Hornets made up a 19-point deficit to come within 1 point of a state title.



Honoring Jeanette Whitehead, who served as head coach of the Hickory Hornets Girls Basketball Team from 1996-2016 and is the third winningest girls' basketball coach in Mercer County history.



In July, I presented a PA House of Representatives citation to Michael Calla on his retirement as superintendent of the Sharon City School District.

Presenting a PA House of Representatives citation to Louie Gill for his state championship in wrestling in the 106-pound weight class, and a certificate of recognition to Carter Gill for his 7th place finish in the 145-pound class. Both are members of the Hickory Hornets Class AA Wrestling Team.



The Reynolds Raiders Wrestling Team commemorated their fifth consecutive Class AA Team State Championship in the Dual Meets. They overcame a 22-3 deficit to defeat Southern Columbia for the title.



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Funding our frontline heroes

Fire and EMS companies in our district are receiving nearly \$200,000 in grants to fund critical resources such as equipment upgrades, training, building repairs and other essential needs. The grants include the following:

- **Clark Volunteer Fire Department** – \$12,767.
- **Farrell Volunteer Fire Department Inc.** – \$11,876.
- **Greenville Fire Department** – \$13,302.
- **Greenville Fire Department (EMS)** – \$8,993.
- **Greenville Volunteer Fire Company** – \$11,698.
- **Hermitage Volunteer Fire Department Inc.** – \$15,000.
- **Patagonia Volunteer Fire Department** – \$12,411.
- **Sharon Fire Department** – \$15,000.
- **Sharpsville Volunteer Fire Department** – \$13,837.
- **Shenango Township Volunteer Fire Department** – \$12,411.
- **South Pymatuning Township Volunteer Fire Association** – \$11,698.
- **Transfer Volunteer Fire Department** – \$13,837.
- **West Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department** – \$13,302.
- **West Salem Fire Department** – \$12,233.
- **Wheatland Volunteer Fire Department** – \$11,698.



I presented a PA House of Representatives citation to Lori Weston, executive director of the Community Food Warehouse of Mercer County, who retired after 36 years of service. I also presented certificates to the staff members for their dedication in helping those in need during the pandemic.

Heating assistance, Property Tax/ Rent Rebate workshops coming!

This is a heads up that I will be hosting workshops this fall to help residents apply for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program. Please keep an eye out for details – including times, dates and locations – which will be announced soon!