



FALL 2021

Capitol Office:

326 Main Capitol Building • P.O. Box 202009 • Harrisburg, PA 17120-2009 • (717) 772-2436

District Office:

Z-Penn Building • 20 S. Mercer St. • New Castle, PA 16101 • (724) 656-1112 • Toll free: 1-800-866-2215

Website: www.RepSainato.com • Email: csainato@pahouse.net

New bill would make it easier for veterans to obtain professional licenses

Veterans often leave the service with highly marketable skills, but many still face obstacles in becoming licensed for civilian jobs – in part because of licensing boards that fail to properly account for military skills, training, and experience. House Bill 1868 – which I recently introduced with several colleagues – would change that by ensuring that the licensing process is more veteran-friendly.

Among other things, the new bill would provide for:

- Increased presence of veterans and military spouses on licensing boards and commissions.
- Expedited application review for veterans and military spouses, and initial licensure fee waiver for military spouses traveling to Pennsylvania.
- Consideration of military experience when determining if an applicant meets qualifications.
- Use of specific guidelines showing how to translate military experience into civilian licensure requirements.
- Early submission for licensure renewals for military being deployed to allow them to immediately return to employment upon return.



The bill would also help improve the process for military spouses who often face difficulties with licenses because of frequent relocations.

The House Professional Licensure Committee unanimously approved the bill, which is being considered by the full House as of this writing.

Greater support for veterans facing mental health challenges

The price of service can be a heavy one, and some veterans live with post-traumatic stress, depression, and other mental health issues long after their discharge.

The sad truth is that veterans are 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than people who never served. In fact, a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs study showed that approximately 20 active-duty service members, nonactivated Guard or Reserve members, and veterans die by suicide each day.

Funding for veterans' home

Local veterans facing mental health issues will see greater support, thanks

to a recent grant of \$250,000 to New Castle's Human Services Center. The center will use the funds to renovate the former Red Cross building at 222 N. Mercer St. in New Castle into The Fairweather Lodge – a home to help veterans successfully transition back to the community.

I'm also working with my colleagues in Harrisburg to expand mental health supports for veterans. In spring, we adopted a resolution urging Congress to pass legislation that would expand access to "Stellate Ganglion Block" – an important treatment for post-traumatic stress. But much more work remains to be done to improve services and supports for veterans

and their families facing mental health issues.

The PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs urges any veterans or service members in crisis to call the toll-free Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1. Veterans can also send a text message to 838255.

The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is available to everyone, including veterans, all service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and their family members and friends. All calls are confidential.

Honoring EMS workers who made the ultimate sacrifice



At a somber September gathering in Harrisburg, my colleagues and I honored Pennsylvania's emergency medical services workers who lost their lives in the line of duty – including eight who died in the year leading up to the ceremony. Their precious legacy is the gift of life they gave to others.



Our deepest gratitude to them and their families, and our profound appreciation to all PA's fearless first responders – including EMS workers, firefighters, law enforcement officers and others who continue their lifesaving work despite the dangers of the job.

Pushing to expand the disabled veterans' property tax exemption

Service-related injuries – whether they result in disability or death – have a profound impact on military spouses, and PA state law does not do enough to recognize that sacrifice. For example, although state law provides a property tax exemption for veterans who suffered disabling injuries in combat, the state constitution limits that exemption to the veteran service members themselves.

That limitation creates an unfair result: it deprives the spouse of a military member who died from their injuries an important benefit they would have been guaranteed had their service member spouse survived, but with disabling injuries.

I recently reintroduced a bill that would correct that inequity. House Bill 1953 would make the property tax exemption available to survivors whose service member spouses were killed in action (or missing and presumed dead) or who received a disability rating of 100% and later died.

As of this writing, the bill is with the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Bills to bolster services for veterans pass House, advance to state Senate

As Democratic chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I have a chance to review bills from the ground level up and work with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to push measures that will help Pennsylvania's veterans and first responders.

Here's a brief look at some bills that started life in the VAEP Committee, passed the PA House, and are now awaiting action in the Senate.

- **H.B. 995** would create a veterans' outreach and support network to help veterans transition from military service to civilian life.
- **H.B. 941** would ensure military families are guaranteed the in-state tuition rate as soon as a student enrolls or registers at a community college or submits an enrollment deposit to a four-year public college or university, even if their military parent is later reassigned to another state.
- **H.B. 1220** would increase payments from the Blind Veterans and the Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans pension programs from \$150 to \$200 per month.
- **H.B. 1055** would protect access to a veteran's discharge papers kept by the county by keeping the records confidential for 85 years after discharge.
- **H.B. 1057** would add the Navy Club of the United States of America to the list of veterans' organizations represented on the State Veterans' Commission.
- **H.B. 490** would allow PA to enter into reciprocal agreements in which active duty and disabled veteran hunting and fishing licenses would be recognized as resident licenses by other participating states.
- **H.B. 164** would help ensure family of a deceased veteran have timely information about burial benefits.
- **H.B. 1421** would increase and expand veterans' burial benefits.
- **H.B. 1091** would designate all of U.S. Route 20 in PA as the Pennsylvania Medal of Honor Highway.
- **H.B. 491** would exclude 100% of a federal veterans' disability compensation or pension payment from income calculation for any state program or benefit.
- **H.B. 803** would strengthen funding for the Keystone State Challenge Academy, a program that leads, trains, and mentors 16- to 18-year-old high school dropouts so they can become productive citizens.

Building up our armories

Armories are indispensable to Pennsylvania's National Guard, but the statute governing the State Armory Board – which is responsible for purchasing land and buildings and maintaining armories – is outdated.

I am introducing legislation to modernize the law and make it easier for the board to provide and maintain armories. Among other things, the bill would expand the board's ability to rent or lease buildings, authorize it to oversee use of buildings at Fort Indiantown Gap, and update and clarify language to enhance collaboration between the board and the Adjutant General.

As of this writing, the bill is in the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Sign up for the PA Veterans Registry

If you are a veteran and have not already done so, I recommend signing up for the **Pennsylvania Veterans Registry**, which delivers timely information about veterans benefits, employment opportunities, events in the community and other news.

You don't have to be a veteran to register – family members are also encouraged to sign up. Visit www.register.dmv.pa.gov to learn more and register.

COUNTY OF CHAMPIONS

Our district has some extremely talented young people. I was proud to help them celebrate the following victories!



The New Castle High School Baseball Team won the 2021 PIAA State Class 4A Baseball Championship to become the new State Champions!



The Neshannock High School Girls' Basketball Team won the 2021 WPIAL Class 2A Girls' Basketball Championship and captured second place in the PIAA State Championships!



The Shenango Area High School Baseball Team won the 2021 WPIAL Class 2A Baseball Championship and captured second place in the PIAA State Championships!



The Lawrence County Career and Technical Center Opening and Closing Team won the 2021 Pennsylvania SkillsUSA State Leadership and Skills Conference!



The Mohawk High School Girls' Basketball Team captured the 2021 WPIAL Class 3A Girls' Basketball Championship!



The Mohawk High School Girls' Track and Field Team won the 2021 WPIAL Class 2A Girls' Track and Field Championship!



The Union Area High School Baseball Team (which includes many athletes who also play on the football team) won the 2021 WPIAL Class A Baseball Championship!



The Shenango High School Unified Bocce Team won the 2020-21 Slippery Rock Regional Championship!



STATE REP. CHRIS SAINATO

326 Main Capitol Building
P.O. Box 202009
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2009

lpo.km.1121

PA Guard provides critical help with ‘Operation Vaccinate PA’

Earlier this year, our talented PA National Guard took on a new mission: distributing and administering the COVID-19 vaccine to residents throughout the commonwealth. “Operation Vaccinate PA” began in mid-March, when a team of about 350 Guard members began administering shots.

By the time the mission had ended in late June, Guard members had personally administered more than 80,000 shots and supported sites that had administered more than half a million doses overall.

The successful mission reminded us of how fortunate we are here in Pennsylvania to have one of the largest, best-trained Guards in the country. Our thanks to these dedicated men and women for their work on the front lines.

PA National Guard members gain new employment protections

Legislation I co-sponsored is expanding employment protections for Pennsylvania residents who are members of another state’s National Guard and are called up to serve outside of the commonwealth. Previously, Guard or Reserve members called by another state could be fired by their employer just because they left to carry out duties across the state line.

Thanks to Act 31 – which became law in June – employers may not fire – or refuse to hire – residents who are called to serve an out-of-state unit. Instead, the employer must permit the service member to return to their job at the same pay, status and seniority as before they were deployed.

Local VA department a key resource for veterans, families

Sometimes, accessing veterans’ benefits and other services can be a complicated process. Fortunately, the Lawrence County Department of Veterans Affairs has talented staff who can help veterans and their families with everything from recovering lost paperwork to understanding and navigating the benefits process.

Lawrence County Director of Veterans Affairs Jesse Putnam, who leads the department, is herself a veteran and former veterans service officer, and she understands the issues facing veterans and their families. Putnam said she and her staff can assist with a wide range of services.

For assistance, you can contact Jesse at (724) 656-2172 or e-mail her at jputnam@lawrencecounty.pa.gov.



At Veterans Service Officer Day at the state Capitol.

Recent grants help fire/EMS companies continue their lifesaving work

Last year, the governor signed key legislation incorporating my bill to reauthorize the Fire Company and Emergency Medical Services Grant Programs for four more years. The bill was critical because the state’s fire and EMS workers rely on the grant programs – which lapsed in June – to continue their lifesaving work.

Here’s a look at the latest round of grants to first responders in our district:

- Hickory Township Volunteer Fire Co. – \$11,520.
- Mahoning Township Volunteer Fire Dept. – \$12,411.
- Neshannock Township Volunteer Fire Co. – \$14,193.
- North Beaver Township Volunteer Fire Dept. – \$12,054.
- Pulaski Township Volunteer Fire Co. – \$12,233.
- Pulaski Township Volunteer Fire Co. (EMS) – \$8,993.
- Shenango Township Volunteer Fire Dept. – \$25,159.
- Union Township Volunteer Fire Dept. – \$12,411.