



State Representative

MARK LONGIETTI

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New budget invests sensibly on behalf of state's taxpayers

One of my top priorities as your state representative is ensuring that your hard-earned tax dollars are spent wisely. This is particularly true when it comes to passing a responsible state budget, when wise stewardship of public funds requires balancing multiple competing interests.

A successful budget replenishes the essential programs and services residents need to thrive, while at the same time investing the resources needed to ensure that the commonwealth grows and prospers.

Although no budget is perfect, I believe the \$34 billion spending plan my colleagues and I passed in June does just that, as it invests taxpayer dollars strategically, where they will accomplish the most good for Mercer County and the commonwealth.

Importantly, the new budget does not impose any new taxes, holds overall spending to an inflationary increase of 1.8% and deposits \$300 million into the state's Rainy Day Fund to help with any future emergencies.

Investing in our future

A key feature of the new budget is that it invests in our most important resource for the future – our people. The budget makes a substantial investment in public education, including \$160 million more for basic education funding, \$50 million more for special education funding, and \$30 million more for early childhood education.

I'm optimistic about the increase for early childhood education, as it will provide access to high-quality pre-K services for an additional 2,220 3- and 4-year-olds. More work remains, however, as nearly 60% of children in this group still lack access. Additionally, a rate increase for high-quality providers will allow them to maintain the highest-quality programs for children.

In terms of keeping our students safe, the budget renews last year's investment of \$60 million for the School Safety and Security Grant Program.



I was honored to receive the Thiel College Founders' Day Award in February.

College students will benefit from a 2% increase in higher education funding – which has led to a tuition freeze by the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education – while career and technical education students will benefit from a \$10 million increase in funding to those programs.

Funding present-day needs

As the new budget invests in the commonwealth's future through education and career funding, it also addresses residents' present-day needs. For example, the new spending plan funds programs and services that enrich the lives of our veterans and seniors – directing \$1.3 billion in Lottery Funds to programs for senior citizens.

To help protect those most vulnerable in our community, the budget also allocates additional funding for those with intellectual disabilities and autism. The increase will provide services to 865 individuals currently on the emergency waiting list.

To be sure, any budget is a compromise, but I was comfortable casting my vote in support of this year's plan because I'm confident that it spends our resources responsibly and will accomplish a lot of good – starting right here in Mercer County.

Get ready for REAL ID

Enforcement starts October 2020. Here's what you need to know.

Card-based enforcement of the REAL ID Act will begin Oct. 1, 2020. What does that mean for you?

REAL ID will come into play if you are taking a commercial flight or visiting a military base or other federal facility that requires you to show identification.

Once card-based enforcement of the act begins in October 2020, you'll no longer be able to simply show your regular PA driver's license to board a domestic flight, visit a military base or enter high-security federal facilities. Instead, you'll need either a REAL-ID compliant driver's license or photo ID card or some other form of federally acceptable identification, such as a passport or military ID.

Therefore, if you anticipate flying or visiting a military base or secure federal facility in the future, you should consider getting a REAL ID now. Since obtaining a REAL ID can take some time, waiting until the need arises may be too late.

Note that getting a REAL ID is optional. You don't need one to drive, vote, access hospitals, apply for or receive federal benefits or visit the post office or a federal court.

There is a one-time \$30 fee, plus applicable renewal fees. The expiration date of your first REAL ID license or ID card will include any time remaining on your current license or ID card, plus an additional four years.

What documents you'll need

If you decide to purchase a REAL ID, be sure to bring all the necessary documents to a PennDOT Driver License Center. They include:

- **Proof of identity.** A certified copy of your birth certificate filed with the State Office of Vital Statistics with a raised/embossed seal or a valid, unexpired U.S. Passport or Passport Card. To see other acceptable proof of identity, visit www.penndot.gov/REALID and click on the "REAL ID document checklist" under Resources.
- **Proof of Social Security number.** Your Social Security card. Please be sure to bring the actual card, not just the paperwork stub surrounding it.
- **Two proofs of your current, physical PA address.** Examples include a current, unexpired PA driver's license or photo ID card; PA vehicle registration card; auto insurance card; computer-generated utility bill (cellphone, cable, electric, gas) showing your name and address; W-2 form/pay stub; lease agreement or mortgage documents; or post-marked mail/package label sent through USPS, UPS, FedEx or a similar service.
- **Proof of legal name change, if applicable.** If your current legal name is different from the name on your birth certificate, you will need to show a certified copy of a marriage certificate issued by the county court in which you were married or a court order approving a change of legal name. For more on name, birthdate or gender designation changes, visit the document checklist at www.penndot.gov/REALID.

Note that if you received your first PA driver's license after September 1, 2003, PennDOT may already have your REAL ID documentation on file. Visit www.penndot.gov/REALID and scroll down to the section titled "Apply for pre-verification." If PennDOT confirms that your documents are on file, you can order your REAL ID online and won't need to visit a driver license center.



Visit my REAL ID info sessions!

On Friday, Nov. 8, I'll be hosting two information sessions to help residents learn more about REAL ID, including whether they should get one and how to obtain one from PennDOT. Each session is about one-and-a-half hours long and will be held at the following times and locations:

- 10 a.m. • Greenville Knights of Columbus Hall
170 Clarksville St.
Greenville, PA 16125.
- 1 p.m. • Hermitage Municipal Building
800 N. Hermitage Road
Hermitage PA, 16148.

You can also learn more about REAL ID by visiting www.pennDOT.gov and clicking on the REAL ID star in the center of the page.



In March, I presented a House of Representatives citation to Harry Kloss, of Hermitage, on his 100th Birthday. His wife, Ruth, joined us for the ceremony.

More than \$2.3 million will bring safer roads and sidewalks to Mercer County

Motorists, cyclists and pedestrians will enjoy safer travel thanks to four state grants totaling more than \$2.3 million that will fund road, intersection and sidewalk improvements in Hermitage, Sharon and South Pymatuning Township.

Three state grants totaling more than \$1.9 million – announced in February of this year – will provide funding to the following projects:

- Nearly \$1.3 million to Sharon to fund phase 3 of the city's Neighborhood Revitalization Project, including repaving and improving multiple streets, completing ADA-compliant cutouts and sidewalks and making the streets more accessible for commerce.
- Nearly \$350,000 to Hermitage to fund construction of additional walkways connecting the commercial district and residential neighborhoods adjacent to the Route 18 corridor to the LindenPointe Innovative

Business Campus. The grant will also fund intersection improvements at Armstrong, Emilie and Morefield roads.

- Nearly \$262,000 to South Pymatuning for safety improvements to Wynnewood Drive, Kane Road and Orangeville Road, including removal and replacement of the current road surface; grinding, leveling, and repaving; replacement of the culverts, ditch and berm areas of the roadway; and installation of new aggregate base to meet desired elevation on Wynnewood Drive.

In March, South Pymatuning received an additional \$450,000 in state grant money to fund ongoing safety improvements to Wynnewood Drive at the intersection of Route 18 and to complete work on both Kane and Orangeville roads.

All four grants were approved through the Commonwealth Financing Authority's Multimodal Transportation Fund.

Investing in infrastructure



This year, I hosted Gov. Tom Wolf for walking tours in Sharon and Greenville to discuss the need for investments throughout the Shenango Valley and Mercer County to rebuild infrastructure, remedy blight and improve internet connectivity.

Funding will launch new community connections

Great news for residents of Greenville and West Salem Township: A \$75,000 grant will allow the Mercer County Trails Association to launch the first stages of a project that will connect Greenville, the commercial downtown, Thiel College and Riverside Park with the athletic fields in West Salem. The grant – awarded by the Commonwealth Financing Authority under the state's Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program – will expand residents' access to recreational opportunities while bringing our communities closer.

Grant will bring popular sport to Buhl Park

Six new outdoor pickleball courts are coming to Buhl Park, thanks to a \$106,000 grant awarded through the Community Conservation Partnership Program. This paddle sport – a combination of tennis, badminton and ping pong – is growing in popularity and is a great form of exercise, with proven benefits to muscular strength, endurance and cardiovascular health.

The new courts are in response to community demand and add one more feature to the mix of amenities the park offers residents who frequent the park for fishing, biking, hiking, exploring nature and playing disc golf.

In addition to the courts, the projects will add handicap-accessible restrooms and parking, fencing, landscaping and related improvements.

Grant gives green light to 'town center' development planning

A comprehensive plan to transform the Shenango Valley Mall area into a "town center" style development will move forward with \$2.5 million in grant funding from the Redevelopment Capital Assistance Program.

I'm truly excited that we were able to help secure this competitive grant, which will launch the planning stages of this unique development. The town center model – combining retail, commercial, residential and recreational opportunities – has proven extremely popular in Pittsburgh and other cities because it offers residents the convenience of living, shopping and "playing" all in one place.

The funding will focus on providing public amenities – such as a possible park, walking trails and a stream feature – that allow residents to exercise, socialize and enjoy leisure time in the community.

As it generates new jobs and attracts a wide variety of businesses, the project – which will be financed by a combination of public and private funding – promises to breathe new life into our local economy and help us compete with our neighbors in eastern Ohio. The public commitment will leverage tens of millions of dollars in private development on the property.

Although we're still in the initial stages, I'm certain that Mercer County will be seeing exciting changes to our landscape as the Hermitage 2030 Comprehensive Plan moves from vision to blueprint to reality.



I joined members of the Hermitage Volunteer Fire Department for the June Superkids Parade.

More than \$181,000 to fund vital resources for firefighters

State grants totaling \$181,457 will ensure that 14 fire companies around our district have the equipment, training and other resources they need to continue their life-saving work. The grants including the following:

Clark Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,667
Farrell Volunteer Fire Department Inc.	\$13,326
Greenville Fire Department	\$13,656
Greenville Volunteer Fire Company	\$12,172
Hermitage Volunteer Fire Department Inc.	\$14,811
Patagonia Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,502
Sharon Fire Department	\$14,481
Sharpsville Volunteer Fire Department	\$13,656
Shenango Township Volunteer Fire Department	\$12,172
South Pymatuning Township Volunteer Fire Association ...	\$11,677
Transfer Volunteer Fire Department	\$13,491
West Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department	\$13,162
West Salem Fire Department	\$12,007
Wheatland Volunteer Fire Department	\$11,677

The grants are provided by Pennsylvania's Fire Company and Emergency Medical Service Grant Program – administered by the Office of the State Fire Commissioner – and may also be used for repairing, building or renovating facilities and repaying equipment or building-related debt.

Working for more meaningful special education funding

There was a time when funding for special education students was based on bare assumptions and general estimates that often failed to reflect the real-world needs of school districts. All that changed several years ago with the creation of the House Special Education Funding Commission.

I was honored to work on the commission as we devised a formula for determining special education funding based on concrete numbers and proven needs. The new formula dramatically changed how special education dollars were

distributed to schools by matching state resources with the greatest local needs.

I'm excited to have been reappointed to the commission this year as it meets to ensure that the formula still reflects the needs and challenges facing school districts throughout the state. Along the way, we'll be gathering input from teachers, parents and other community stakeholders.

Our kids deserve the best possible start in life, and with thousands of our students benefiting from special education, it's important we do this right.

Funding will bolster STEM learning, provide after-school opportunities

The year is getting off to a great start for our local students, with two grants totaling more than \$700,000 to promote computer science and STEM learning and allow expansion of a popular after-school program.

First, a state grant of \$327,000 will allow United Way of Mercer County to administer the "4C Catalyst program" – a partnership of schools, businesses, workforce partners and community organizations that will bring computer science learning and an enhanced STEM curriculum to 1,500 fifth- through ninth-graders.

As the modern workplace becomes increasingly tech-oriented, it's more important than ever to ensure that students have a solid grasp of science, technology, engineering and math concepts so they can step into good-paying, family-sustaining jobs.

A second, federally funded grant of \$375,000 will allow United Way to expand its popular after-school program – currently serving middle school students – to reach grade school students.

The grant – part of a package awarded under the Competitive 21st Century Learning Center program – will benefit students in the Farrell, Hermitage, Sharpville, and Sharon City school districts, including Artman, Farrell, Ionta, Musser, Case, Sharpville and West Hill elementary schools.



In May, I toured Building Blocks Child Center in Hermitage, where I had the opportunity to read a story to some of the children.

Around the District



In July, I presented a House of Representatives citation to Lt. Col. Larry Scheetz, of Sharon, who retired as director of the Mercer County VA. Scheetz, pictured with his wife, Dawnle, has served in the U.S. Army since he was 17, including tours of duty in Iraq.



Sen. Michele Brooks and I welcomed the Farrell Area High School Steelers to the Capitol to celebrate the team's 2018 Class 1A State Championship.



In April, I toured Philadelphia Candies, in Hermitage, and presented a House of Representatives citation to Spyros and John Macris to mark the 100th Anniversary of their business.



It was an honor to present a House of Representatives citation to Sharon High School football coach Jim Wildman to commemorate his 250th career win and his status as the winningest football coach in Mercer County history.



In February, I presented House of Representatives citations to Aaron and Joshua Stephenson at their joint Eagle Scout Ceremony. Their parents, John and Kim, joined us for the ceremony.



Sen. Brooks and I welcomed to the Capitol the Sharon Tiger Techs Robotics Team, which received an overall Champions Award for second place after competing with teams all around the world in the first LEGO League North American Robotics Tournament.



Joining me at the Zem Zem Shrine Parade in July were members of the West Middlesex Boys Baseball team, who captured the PIAA Class 2A State Championship earlier this year.



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New law will make it simpler for patients to manage multiple medications

Legislation I co-sponsored that is now law will reduce pharmacy visits and make it easier for patients to follow medication regimens. Act 46 of 2019 – which takes effect on July 1, 2020 – will allow pharmacies to synchronize monthly medication fill dates so that all of a patient’s prescriptions can be filled on the same day of the month.

Bundling medications has patient benefits beyond the obvious convenience factor of reducing trips to the pharmacy. Multiple studies have shown that patients receiving synchronized medications are more likely to take their medications, leading to better medical outcomes.

The new law will also prohibit insurance plans from denying coverage for a partial fill of a prescription if it is done for the purpose of medication synchronization.



My 2019 Senior Fair was a great success!

Don't miss these LIHEAP workshop events!

With winter approaching, I'll be hosting several workshops to help residents apply for assistance from the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which provides cash grants to help families living on low incomes pay their heating bills. (Crisis grants also are available for households in immediate danger of being without heat.)

In addition to assistance applying for LIHEAP, these workshops will also help residents who have not already done so file for benefits under the 2018 Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

Times and locations are as follows:

Open to the public

- **Friday, Dec. 6** • 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Pymatuning Township Building • 256 Edgewood Drive Ext., Transfer, PA 16154
- **Monday, Dec. 9** • 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Greenville Senior Center • 45 Alan Ave., Greenville, PA 16125

Open to Greenville House residents only

- **Wednesday, Dec. 18** • 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Greenville House • 9 Penn Ave., Greenville, PA 16125



For more information about any of these state programs or events, please contact my district office (open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at 724-981-4655 or my satellite office (open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at 724-588-1005.

Farm-to-School Program will yield healthy benefits

Legislation I co-sponsored that is now law will help educate students about the nutritional benefits that come from our rich Pennsylvania soil. Act 34 of 2019, the Farm-to-School Program, will provide grants to educate pre-K through fifth-grade students and their families about the importance of choosing healthy, locally produced foods.

The new law, which is part of the PA Farm Bill Package, will also increase awareness of Pennsylvania agriculture and help farmers gain access to new markets. It's a great way to help our kids form healthy eating habits early on while ensuring that one of our most important state industries continues to thrive.