



Senator Joe Scarnati



REPORTS TO YOU

25TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT • SUMMER 2016

Bringing Greater Equity to Education Funding

Ensuring that our schools receive adequate funding is one of the most important functions of state government. But just as important in funding public education is making sure that tax dollars are distributed fairly.

I recently voted for a new law that will bring greater fairness to school funding throughout Pennsylvania – ensuring all our students in rural counties have access to a quality education.

The law makes permanent a fair funding formula established by a bipartisan Basic Education Funding Commission. The commission held 15 hearings over 11 months and heard from more than 110 individuals including superintendents, school board presidents, business leaders, nonprofit organizations and parents before making their recommendations.

The new formula will provide a more consistent and predictable in-

duction of the amount of state funding a school district will receive each year based on a funding ratio, determined by a transparent set of factors.

This will remove politics from state school funding decisions, directing money to school districts based on objective and transparent factors, such as student enrollment, the needs of the student population, school district wealth

and the capacity to raise local revenue.

In addition to funding education adequately, the law makes Pennsylvania accountable for the way those tax dollars are spent. We want to ensure that the money Pennsylvanians pay is distributed fairly throughout the state – based on hard data. This is a major education reform that will help our rural schools and students succeed.



Fair and Responsible Budget Top Priority

Last year's nine month budget impasse created a needless crisis across our state. Governor Wolf's continual refusal to sign the complete budgets presented to him by the General Assembly left schools, hospitals and vital programs without needed state support. Earlier this year in March, the crisis was finally ended when the governor allowed House Bill 1801 to become law. I am proud that as a result of HB1801 becoming law we increased basic education funding by \$200 million for

2015-16 without any broad-based tax increases.

Governor Wolf and I have very different philosophies of how to govern. While the governor looks at raising taxes as the first course of action to close the budget deficit, I believe we must look at

reforms as a first course of action. Before asking for more of our constituents' hard earned dollars, we should be sure that government is doing all that we can to operate efficiently.

As the 2016-17 budget has been discussed and negotiated over the last few months my goal has been to work productively with my colleagues and continue to be mindful of taxpayers while making decisions that will help put Pennsylvania on a fiscally stable path forward.



Liquor Reforms Bring Greater Customer Convenience

The Legislature recently approved a new law that takes a good first step towards privatizing Pennsylvania's liquor system. It will increase consumer choice and convenience for all areas of the state, while protecting

our small business owners who have invested so much in their communities. As a result of the new law:

- Grocery stores with a restaurant license will be permitted to sell wine.

- Consumers will be able to have wine shipped directly to their homes from private wine wholesalers.
- Certain convenience stores will be permitted to sell beer.
- State stores will have more flexibility on hours and days of operation.

For years constituents have asked for much needed reform to our Commonwealth's liquor system. It is long past time for Pennsylvania to move away from our current antiquated system and listen to what our residents want. I am pleased that we have worked together to bring many of the changes for which my constituents advocated.



Legislature Works to Address Heroin Epidemic

Every area of Pennsylvania has seen the tragic impact of the heroin crisis. In rural Pennsylvania we know all too well the devastation that this epidemic has caused. Over the past five years, more than 3,000 heroin-related overdose deaths have been identified in Pennsylvania.

One reason for this increase in heroin use is that addicts are shifting from more costly prescription opioids to cheaper alternatives. Recent reports indicate that approximately 80 percent of heroin addicts traced their addiction back to prescription opioids.

In July 2014, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a bipartisan legislative agency, began a series of statewide public hearings to

examine the increasing heroin and opioid abuse in rural Pennsylvania.

Over the last few years and as a result of more than 500 pages of testimony, one thing was made crystal clear – addiction is a disease and should be treated as such.

The hearings have resulted in action by the Senate to address this issue and additional legislative measures will be introduced in the near future.

Last year my legislation to create the Non-narcotic Medication Assisted Substance Abuse Treatment Grant Pilot Program within the Department of Corrections (DOC) was signed into law. The DOC was charged with administering the program and is also required to issue a report evaluating the pilot program's effectiveness to

the House and Senate Judiciary and Appropriations Committees.

In addition, last year legislation was passed to provide legal protection for witnesses, or Good Samaritans providing medical help at the scene of an overdose and to allow naloxone, a synthetic drug that blocks opiate receptors in the nervous system and known as the brand name Narcan, to be prescribed to a third party, such as a friend or family member, and administered by law enforcement and firefighters.

Currently the Legislature is also considering the following bills that would:

- Require continuing medical education training as a way to stem the tide of opioid and prescription drug abuse in the state.
- Require that ER doctors cannot prescribe an opioid for more than seven days.
- Offer easier access to abuse-deterrent opioids, and require mandated naloxone reporting following an overdose or overdose death.

It is clear that we need to continue to work together to tackle this deadly epidemic head on. We can hopefully stop this epidemic from continuing to spread by helping those who are addicted get the treatment that they need.

During a Senate committee meeting, Senator Scarnati hears testimony on how to fight the growing heroin epidemic in Pennsylvania, which has caused more than 3,000 deaths in PA in the last five years.



Reforming Pensions Key to Controlling Costs

Controlling state spending and holding the line on taxes must remain a top priority in Pennsylvania. In order to do that, we need to address one of the top cost-drivers – public pensions.

Skyrocketing pension costs are the number one reason for increases in school property taxes and cuts to school programs. They threaten to increase state taxes. By changing Pennsylvania's pension systems, employees will be given a fair retirement plan and school districts will find themselves with additional resources to direct toward the classrooms, instead of con-

stantly raising property taxes.

Over the past two years I have voted for two different pension reform measures that would modernize the Commonwealth's retirement systems and bring significant updates to the funding, sustainability and fiscal responsibility of the state's two main pension funds.

I continue to believe that all new state and public school employees should be enrolled in a mandatory, and fair 401k-type Defined Contribution Plan, that mirrors benefits that are generally offered in the private sector. As legislation and discussions of ways

to balance the state's pension systems continue to progress, I remain committed to legislation that makes no changes to current retirees' benefits and makes no changes to current employees' previously earned benefits.

Clearly, it is also vital that lawmakers would be placed into the same 401k-style system upon reelection, ensuring that we are not asking new employees to participate in a system that we are not willing to participate in ourselves. Taxpayers expect and deserve that their Senators and Representatives lead by example.



I was recently presented with the Rural Health Recognition Award from the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH) for my efforts to advance rural health issues in Pennsylvania, specifically by supporting the state's fourteen Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs). I was nominated for the award by Ed Pitchford, President and CEO of Cole Memorial Hospital in Coudersport, and was presented with the award by him and Lisa Davis, Director of PORH.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program Deadline Extended

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate program deadline for older adults and residents with disabilities to apply for rebates of rent and property taxes paid in 2015 has been extended to December 31, 2016.

The rebate program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians age 65 and older; widows and widowers age 50 and older; and people with disabilities age 18 and older. The income limit is \$35,000 a year for homeowners and \$15,000 annually for renters, and half of Social Security income is excluded.

Forms and other information are available online at www.revenue.pa.gov or by calling, toll-free, (888) 222-9190. Claimants may check the status of their claims online at www.revenue.pa.gov or by calling, toll-free, 1-888-PATAXES.

There are no fees to apply for a rebate and free application assistance is available through Department of Revenue district offices, local Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers and by contacting my district offices.

Since the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program's 1971 inception, older and disabled adults have received more than \$5.9 billion in property tax and rent relief. The program is funded by the Pennsylvania Lottery and revenue from slots gaming.





PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
HARRISBURG, PA
PERMIT NO. 603

STATE SENATOR
Joe Scarnati
Senate Box 203025
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3025



Printed on Recycled Paper



This Spring I was honored to once again receive the American Conservative Union (ACU) Foundation Conservative Award for leadership in supporting economic growth, limited government and individual freedoms. Charlie Gerow presented me with the award for my support of conservative principles on a wide range of issues during the 2015 legislative session.

Capitol Hunger Garden Opens for 7th Season

In May, the Capitol Hunger Garden opened for the 7th season. I'm pleased to serve as a co-chair of the Pennsylvania Legislative Hunger Caucus, whose 85 members work together in a bipartisan manner to raise awareness for hunger. The Hunger Garden is the largest project of the Hunger

Caucus and serves as a valuable tool to spotlight hunger issues and provide healthy food to help those in need. For additional information regarding the Capitol Hunger Garden, please visit:
www.senatorscarnati.com/palegislativehungercaucus.



Stay Connected with Me

I deeply appreciate the opportunity to serve you. Please call or stop by my district offices listed below to stay connected with me regarding state government issues. My staff is also happy to provide assistance with questions regarding legislation, government programs, agencies and services.

In addition, my Website: www.senatorscarnati.com, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/senatorscarnati and Twitter page: www.twitter.com/senatorscarnati can serve as great resources for information.



SENATOR SCARNATI'S LEGISLATIVE OFFICES



Senate Box 203025, Harrisburg, PA 17120-3025 • (717) 787-7084 • FAX (717) 772-2755
410 Main Street, Brockway, PA 15824 • (814) 265-2030 • FAX (814) 265-2040
21A Field Street, Kane, PA 16735 • (814) 837-1026 • FAX (814) 837-1029
5 Main Street, Wellsboro, PA 16901 • (570) 724-5231 • FAX (570) 723-5119
Website: senatorscarnati.com