



# State Senator **Jane Earll** 49th Senatorial District

## Capitol REPORT

SUMMER 2008

### Greetings

As it is that time of year again for my annual newsletter, I am pleased to share with you some updates on issues we've been working on in Harrisburg. I'd also like to remind you of a few areas where my district office might be of help.

#### *DISTRICT OFFICE SERVICES*

My office can assist you with:

- Problems you may encounter with state agencies
- Obtaining copies of House and Senate Bills and state laws and regulations
- Status reports on legislation and regulations
- Processing motor vehicle gift titles, registrations, and driver's licenses
- Free notary service
- Providing you with informational brochures and forms such as:
  - Guide to benefits and rights for seniors
  - Property Tax and Rent Rebate forms and PACE/PACENET applications for seniors
  - Absentee ballot applications and voter registration forms
  - Official transportation maps of Pennsylvania from PennDOT
  - ...and much more!

### Gaming Task Force

I convened this hearing on May 14, 2008 to address the procedures for issuing casino licenses.

### H2O PA (Act 2008-63)

Senate Bill 2, now Act 2008-63, is the H2O PA Act providing for the allocation of unassigned amounts in the Pennsylvania Gaming Economic Development and Tourism Fund to address debt service for an \$800-million bond issue. I introduced this legislation to establish a new program that will fund grants for municipalities or municipal authorities to accomplish water, sewer, storm water, flood control, and high-hazard dam projects. The debt service will be covered by anticipated revenues deposited into the

Pennsylvania Gaming Economic Development and Tourism Fund from casino operations. The grant monies will be used for dam repair in the 65 eligible counties, as well as the construction or repair of water and sewer lines and for storm water and flood control projects. Consultation with the state Department of Environmental Protection would determine which projects are ultimately funded. Currently, the slots-funded economic development account contains about \$78.6 million from the seven open casinos of the 14 authorized under Act 2004-71.

### Property Tax/Rent Rebate: There's Still Time to Apply!

I am happy to report that the deadline for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended to December 31, 2008. To qualify, you must be a Pennsylvania resident age 65 or older, a widow or widower age 50 or older, or age 18 to 64 and permanently disabled, with a qualifying

household income of \$35,000 for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters (which excludes half of your Social Security income). Rebates range from \$250.00 to \$650.00. If you need an application or more information about the program, please contact my district office. My staff can assist you with completing the forms.





The Governor signs Senator Earll's tax measure, Senate Bill 1063, into law on July 2, 2008.

## SB 1063 (Act 2008-32)

Pennsylvania's quagmire of local earned income tax collectors is unparalleled by any other state in the nation. In fact, the Commonwealth has more local tax collectors (560) than all other states combined. I introduced Senate Bill 1063 to reduce the number of tax collectors and to effect administrative reforms which address the system's lack of standardized practices,

coordination, reporting, and accountability, which are equally important. Approval of Act 32 is a positive and much needed step toward modernizing Pennsylvania's local earned income tax collection system. It will bring clarity, fairness, and uniformity to this otherwise chaotic, inefficient system. Implementation will be phased in over the next three years.

## The State May Have Money for You!

The Pennsylvania Treasury Department receives millions of dollars in unclaimed property each year. These funds come from forgotten stocks, uncashed checks, life insurance policies, abandoned bank accounts, and various other sources. The Treasury Department holds the property until its proper owner can claim it.

Some of you may have received a letter from me advising you to contact my office to verify your ownership of money being held by the Treasury. My office has always assisted constituents with the claim process, but I have begun working closely with the Treasury to assist them in finding the owners of these properties. Since March, we have returned over \$61,000 to rightful owners.

If you saw your name listed in the newspaper, received a letter, or believe you may have money in unclaimed property, please contact my office. My staff can help you with the paperwork involved and expedite the processing of your claim.

## Protect the Place You Call Home

There is nothing more important than the safety of your family. That is why I helped the Erie Fire Department and Safe Kids Erie Coalition secure a grant through DCED. The grant money will help the "Protect the Place You Call Home" program distribute and install free smoke alarms, as well as provide fire safety education to Erie County residents. Applications are available through the City of Erie Fire Department by calling 870-1402.



Erie firefighters and staff of the Safe Kids Coalition

## Great Lakes Compact

I am delighted to say that the Great Lakes Compact has finally been enacted. It was signed by both the House and the Senate on July 3, 2008, and then approved by the Governor on July 4th as Act 2008-43. The Act authorizes the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to join the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, which initiates a necessary protocol that will be uniformly enforced by all eight Great Lakes states and the two Canadian provinces (Ontario and Quebec) which share the lakes' shoreline. Now that the Compact has been approved in Pennsylvania, the U.S. Congress and the Canadian Parliament can adopt it. As water quality and supply issues continue to plague the U.S. south and west, it is crucial that protections be put into place to preserve an irreplaceable natural wonder and source of sustenance to the 42 million people who dwell in the Great Lakes' watersheds.

## New Train at the Erie Zoo

If you want to take a trip down memory lane this summer, or would like to create some lasting memories for the young ones, why not take a drive over to the Erie Zoo and climb aboard the all new train? I remember riding the train as a little girl



and it is one of my favorite childhood memories, which is why I helped the zoo to acquire the \$50,000 Department of Community and Economic Development grant that went towards the purchase of the new locomotive. The train is an iconic part of the zoo that we will now be able to share with generations to come.

**Senator Earll riding the train on its inaugural run.**

## Every Month is Motorcycle Awareness Month

With gas prices on the rise this summer, many citizens are opting for more cost-efficient modes of transportation such as motorcycles and bicycles. Whether you are the driver of a car, truck, motorcycle, or bike, please keep a watchful eye while driving, remain alert, and remember to share the road. Statistics show that motorcycle crash fatalities rise each year,

but with your help, I believe that we can bring the number of motorcycle-related deaths and injuries down.

## Mysteries of the Great Lakes

Our very own Presque Isle can currently be seen in the fascinating film "Mysteries of the Great Lakes" on the Big Green Screen at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center. I chose to be a partner in the funding of the film because of its focus on Erie, which it calls "the most progressive city on the Great Lakes." I encourage anyone who is able to attend the film – from it, you will see how the Great Lakes have an impact on the whole world and gain a new appreciation of the Lakes, especially Lake Erie. Call the Tom Ridge Environmental Center at 814-833-6050 for show times.

## High Speed Internet Access

The Internet is now a very significant

part of American life.



I continue to be frustrated at the slow pace at which affordable high-speed Internet is made available in rural communities in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Legislature enacted a law in 2004 (Act 2004-183) requiring Verizon and other telephone companies to make high-speed Internet available to their Pennsylvania customers by 2015; however, that deadline is too far away. One little-known feature of the law that can help speed the process up is the Bona Fide Retail Request (BFRR) Program. Customers of Verizon and other telephone companies can get high-speed Internet more rapidly by submitting a request. When the company receives applications for high-speed Internet service from 50 telephone lines or 25 percent of the lines in a Carrying Service Area, whichever is less, the company must accelerate access.

In most cases, the best way to sign up is to encourage your neighbors to visit Verizon's BFRR website, [www22.verizon.com/ForYourHome/BFRR](http://www22.verizon.com/ForYourHome/BFRR), and complete a BFRR form. You may have to go to the public library to do so. You may also call the toll-free contact number shown on your telephone bill for more information.

## Persian Gulf Conflict Veterans Benefit Program

As of April 3, 2008, rules to implement Act 2006-29 and the voter-approved referendum for a bond issue became final and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs could begin to accept applications for the bonus payable to those who served in the first Gulf war. This one-time benefit of \$75 for each month of active service, up to \$525, is also available to beneficiaries. Survivors of those who lost their lives in combat or died later as a result of service-connected wounds, diseases or injuries, may be eligible for an additional payment of \$5,000.

Eligible veterans are those who served with the U.S. Armed Forces, a reserve component thereof, or the Pennsylvania National Guard, on active duty in the Persian Gulf Theater of Operations between August 2, 1990 and August 31, 1991. The veteran must have received the Southwest Asia Service Medal, and must have been a legal resident of Pennsylvania at the time of active service.

Applications are available online at [www.persiangufbonus.state.pa.us](http://www.persiangufbonus.state.pa.us), by phone at 1-866-458-9182, or from my District Office. Completed applications must be filed by August 2015, and must be sent to the PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Persian Gulf Veterans Benefit Program, P.O. Box 1109, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1109. My staff would also be happy to forward them from my District Office to the program for you.

# Long Term Care Partnership Update

Since the enactment of Act 2007-40, the Pennsylvania Department of Insurance has been preparing to implement the Long Term Care Partnership Program. The new law protects consumers by requiring that all long term care insurance policies sold in Pennsylvania provide comprehensive coverage that handles some or all of the expenses

for nursing home stays, community services such as adult day care, in-home care, assisted living facility care or a combination of these services. Act 2007-40 also gives consumers the ability to exchange existing policies for Partnership Policies. Additionally, the law increases the guarantee fund to protect consumers against loss if an insurance

company becomes insolvent.

A Long Term Care Partnership Policy will be different from those available now, because it will provide the added benefits of offering those who own them a way to protect their assets, dollar-for-dollar, in the amount of policy benefits paid out on their behalf in the event they ever need to apply for long term care benefits under Pennsylvania's Medical Assistance Program. Additionally, a Partnership Policy will receive beneficial tax treatment and includes features that protect younger purchasers from increases in expenses caused by inflation. For most people, the benefits of a Partnership Policy are likely to cover all the care they will ever need. However, because of the unique asset protection feature, you won't have to impoverish yourself if you run out of benefit coverage and still need care.

## Free Seminar for Seniors or their Family Members!

I am partnering with Northwestern Legal Services to present a seminar, "Wills, Probate, and Living Trusts." This informative session will teach you what these important documents are, how they work, and why you need them. Estate planning will also be discussed.

The seminars will be held:

**SEPTEMBER 8, 2008 – 10:00 AM**

**Northwestern Senior Center**

9 Academy Street  
Albion, PA 16401

*Presenter:* Nadia Havard, Esq.  
Knox Law Firm

**SEPTEMBER 9, 2008 – 10:00 AM**

**Tri-Boro Senior Center**

7555 Main Street  
Fairview, PA 16415

*Presenter:* Colleen McCarthy, Esq.  
McCarthy, Martone & Peasley

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2008 – 12:30 PM**

**Edinboro Senior Meeting**

Borough Building  
124 Meadville Street  
Edinboro, PA 16412

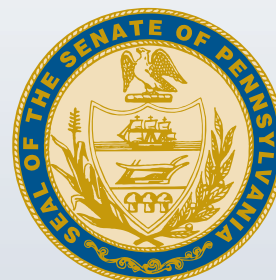
*Presenter:* David R. DeVine  
DeVine & Kuftic

No pre-registration is necessary. If you would like additional information, please contact my District Office.

## News for Seniors

Did you know that you may be eligible to register your vehicle for \$10.00? If you are retired and your annual household income is at or below \$19,200 per

year, you may qualify for a discounted registration. Spouses may use their own income to register one vehicle each. The form is available in my District Office.



## Senator Earll's Legislative Offices

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