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Dear Friends,

In my ongoing efforts to keep the lines of communication open with the citizens I am honored to represent in the state Senate, this newsletter is designed to keep you informed of policy issues taking place in the state Capitol, as well as activities in the district.

As of this writing, the state budget for the 2017-2018 fiscal year is still being negotiated, and many bills affecting our health, our economy, our region, and our hard-working citizens remain on the agenda.

Please know what a pleasure it is to work with you to make this area an even better place to live, work and raise a family for current and future generations. As always, I love meeting with local residents and discussing the topics at hand at the state level, and I encourage you to share your thoughts, opinions and suggestions about state government with me. My door is always open to you.

Respectfully,

Michele Brooks
State Senator Michele Brooks

Olympian Honored by Pennsylvania Senate

It was a humbling and inspiring experience for Senator Brooks to kick off the 2017-2018 session by introducing Olympic gold medalist Trevon Jenifer on the Senate floor. Trevon is a western Pennsylvanian who exhibited the strength, grit and perseverance to become an international champion.

During the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro this past September, Trevon and his fellow Team USA players defeated Spain by a score of 68 to 52 to capture this nation's first gold medal in basketball since 1988 –almost 30 years ago.

Trevon graduated from Edinboro University in 2011, and that following year, he and his fellow Team USA basketball players won a bronze medal at the 2012 Paralympics in London. Determined to turn bronze into gold, they continued to work hard and came back four years later to capture the gold in 2016.

In that fateful championship game in Brazil, the scoreboard became a seesaw affair as each team traded the lead. It was not until the seven-minute mark of the fourth quarter that Team USA essentially clinched the game, fueled by Trevon's execution of two bold back-to-back steals. With that successful maneuver, Team USA won the gold!

Trevon is the first Edinboro University graduate to earn a

gold medal. In true Olympic spirit, he continues to give back by teaching others, as assistant coach on Edinboro University's wheelchair basketball team.

Trevon is a glowing testament to the values of a strong work ethic, sacrifice, passion, and love of family while serving as a shining example for those who aspire to greatness.

Joining him on the Senate floor were Edinboro University Head Coach Jim Glatch, Trevon's fiancée Laura Klass, and their 15-month-old daughter.



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Prison Closure Averted After Fight

In January, the governor proposed the closure of two state correctional facilities from a list of five, which included SCI Mercer.

Fortunately, after a passionate fight from Senator Brooks, Senate and House colleagues, the community and area correctional officers, SCI Mercer escaped the chopping block. Its record of cost-effectiveness and its success in rehabilitation were among the factors that saved the prison from closure.

She is now taking steps to ensure that sudden closure decisions do not occur again, without proper notice, consideration, transparency and community input.

Senator Brooks has cosponsored a new bill with other Senate colleagues that would outline a clear process for possible closure actions of law enforcement facilities, including state prisons and state police barracks.



Representatives from Mercer County appeared at the Senate hearing, testifying before Senator Brooks and other committee members about the impact of SCI Mercer on public safety and the economy.

Opioid Crisis Demands Community-Wide Response

Working together, we can address the opioid crisis. One of the important things we need to do is identify changes in behavior that reflect a need for treatment. If we see something that departs from the norm, we cannot ignore it.

To help, the Good Samaritan law now ensures that those who give help at the scene of a medical overdose no longer have to worry about penalties.

One of the other proactive things we are doing is partnering with our communities to provide drop-off points for unused or outdated medication.

In **Crawford County**, these sites include:

- Cambridge Springs Police Dept.

- Conneaut Lake Regional Police Dept.
- Linesville Borough Police Dept.
- Crawford Co. Sheriff's Dept.
- Meadville Medical Center
- West Mead Twp. Police Dept.
- Titusville Police Dept.

In **Erie County**:

- Albion Borough Police Dept.
- Corry City Police Dept.
- Edinboro Borough Police Dept.
- Edinboro University Campus Police

And in **Mercer County**:

- Greenville-West Salem Police Dept.
- Borough of Grove City Police Dept.
- City of Hermitage Police Dept.
- Mercer County Sheriff's Office.

More than two tons of unwanted drugs have been collected for disposal in Pennsylvania since the program started in late 2014.

Disposing of excess medication safely can keep many dangerous pills out of the wrong hands.

A complete list of take-back boxes across the state can be found at:

<https://apps.ddap.pa.gov/gethelpnow/PillDrop.aspx>

Measure to Help EMTs and Firefighters Approved

Our volunteer firefighters unselfishly devote their time and energy to the protection of property and lives, but their ranks have dropped to dangerously low levels. Senator Brooks believes our firefighters have too many requirements placed on them while they balance family and career.

A measure calling for a comprehensive review of how we can assist Pennsylvania's volunteer fire departments and EMS organizations received final legislative approval recently.

SR 6, as amended, calls for a 39-member commission made up of legislators, first responders and representatives from municipalities to study issues currently affecting first responders. The commission would then provide its recommendations to the Majority and Minority Chairmen of the Senate and

House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committees by June 30, 2018.

Thank you to the men and women who respond day and night when we need them. We thank their families as well.



Senator Brooks and Representative Tedd Nesbit spoke at the annual 79-80 Interstate Development Corporation meeting regarding economic development. She continues to work with local organizations to help expand job growth opportunities.

Brooks Resolution Introduced to Identify Over-Reaching Regulations that Stifle Growth

Senator Brooks introduced a resolution that will direct the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study to analyze and identify which over-reaching laws and regulations in this Commonwealth have more stringent standards than federal law, which impact our families, farmers and

businesses. The findings will be presented to the General Assembly by November 30, 2017.

While Pennsylvanians understand the importance of our environment, this resolution is intended to balance practical laws and regulations with economic growth, job creation and family living.

This resolution would be a first step in pinpointing over-reaching current laws and regulations that impact hard-working citizens and businesses, in a sweeping effort to make Pennsylvania more competitive in attracting new business.

Lyme Disease Cases on the Rise

Pennsylvania once again leads the nation in Lyme disease, with more than 12,000 cases of the tick-borne disease reported last year. Here are several key things you should know.

1. Although deer are often blamed as the primary Lyme disease carrier, published research has shown that mice and other rodents are far more effective hosts for the tick, carrying the bacteria that causes Lyme.

2. Scientists have developed tick traps, now available from many pest control companies, that are similar to "bait boxes" used by exterminators to catch mice and other rodents. Mice enter these tick traps, come in contact with an insecticide, and then become a

fatal weapon for ticks when a tick clings to them. The insecticide is similar to anti-tick medications used for the family dog.

3. If you spot a tick on you, don't panic. Not all ticks are infected with the disease, but removing a tick promptly can reduce the odds that bacteria may spread to you. Your risk of getting an infection such as Lyme disease is lower if you remove a tick within 36 hours.

4. The disease is very difficult to diagnose, and false negatives are common. (You are told you do not have Lyme disease when, in fact, you do.) Lyme disease imitates many other illnesses, and many people do not seek treatment until symptoms surface.

Untreated Lyme disease can cause heart, liver, mobility issues and more.

5. Twisting or yanking a tick too quickly can cause some of its mouth parts to remain in your skin. Fine-tipped tweezers are better than a match, nail polish or Vaseline at making a tick detach from your skin. Never crush the tick with your fingers after removing it, because this may transmit the disease. Saving the tick in a jar or plastic bag, soaked with rubbing alcohol, will help in case you need the tick later for testing.

6. Many insurance policies do not cover long-term antibiotic treatment when recommended for Lyme disease. Senator Brooks is working to change this.

New Oral Chemotherapy Law Helps Cancer Patients

Thanks to a new law, cancer patients will now be able to access the form of chemotherapy drug that works best for them without having to worry about major discrepancies in insurance reimbursement rates.

The law, often referred to as the "oral chemo" bill, bars insurers from allowing patients to be charged more for pill-based cancer treatments than traditional chemotherapy.

Chemotherapy treatments are typically covered as medical services. In contrast, oral chemotherapy treatments, which are often far more expensive, are typically covered as prescription drugs, for which patients can be charged 20 percent or more out-of-pocket.

Since some oral medications can cost as much as \$10,000 a month, even a 20 percent co-pay can cost a patient a formidable \$2,000 per month. An intravenous chemotherapy treatment, by contrast, may cost a patient \$25 to \$50 per visit.

In addition, oral medications have been linked to a reduction of side effects such as nausea and hair loss.

Advocates for cancer patients feared that the high costs of the pills - which are even required, not just preferred, in some instances - may force some patients to abandon their treatments or cut their dose in half. They also note that oral medications are considered the future for treatment of many types of cancer.

Pennsylvania was the 41st state to

enact an oral chemotherapy parity law. This new law subjects the oral chemo drugs to the standard medical service rates, in order to achieve price parity.

It is Senator Brooks' sincere hope that this law helps give patients the option to choose their best course of chemotherapy treatment.

Cub Scout Jacob Hackworth spent quality time chatting with Senator Brooks at the annual Blue and Gold Banquet at the Kiononia Center.



Conneaut Valley Elementary School welcomed Senator Brooks during its "Read Across America" celebration. Senator Brooks loved reading Dr. Seuss's "It's Not Easy Being a Bunny" to first-graders.

Governor Proposes a \$25 Fee for State Police Coverage

Our gratitude and respect for our State Police protection runs deep. To keep State Police funds flowing, the governor, in his February budget address, proposed a \$25 per capita fee, to be levied in communities without their own local police force. The fee, expected to raise \$63 million, would affect 1,287 of 2,560 municipalities, eight rural counties that rely entirely on state troopers, and 2.5 million residents representing about 20 percent of the state's population.

In recent hearings, testifiers have pointed out that this fee is a first-time-ever move by the state to charge service fees to its own municipalities. This State Police fee would be a breakthrough "double tax," and may be the start of a slippery slope. It would also not purchase any new added protection for these communities protected by the State Police.

The residents of small municipalities without local police already pay for the State Police through sales and income taxes, gas taxes, licensing and registration fees and more. Those who say these resi-

dents are getting "free" police service do not account for the many revenue sources that fund the State Police.

The proposed per capita fee would also be levied on residents in long-term care facilities and other facilities.

The State Police was formed in 1905 in the wake of the Great Anthracite Strike to patrol farms, protect wildlife, track down criminals and control mob violence. Highway patrol duties were added much later, ultimately becoming the in-demand force that it is today.

Extension of Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program Application Deadline

The deadline for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate program, which helps many older adults and residents with permanent disabilities to pay their rent and property taxes, has been extended from June 30 to Dec. 31, 2017.

Last year, nearly 600,000 seniors and people with disabilities benefitted from this program.

With this six-month extension, it is hoped that more eligible senior citizens

and citizens with disabilities will apply. Applying is free, and assistance is available for those who need help with the forms at Senator Brooks' offices and many local senior centers.

The application window applies to taxes and rent paid in 2016.

Claimants who have already applied for rebates may check the status of claims online at Senator Brooks' office or at www.revenue.pa.gov or by calling, toll-free, 1-888-PATAXES.

ABLE Accounts Protect People with Disabilities and their Families

The Pennsylvania ABLE Savings Program is now open for enrollment. PA ABLE gives people with disabilities and their families a way to plan for a more financially secure future without affecting important program benefits.

PA ABLE accounts provide people with disabilities a way to be more financially independent.

The accounts may be used to pay for a wide range of disability expenses, including basic living, housing, education, health, transportation, legal expenses and more. Families can then save on taxes, as accounts grow tax-free and, when used for qualified disability expenses, are tax-exempt.

They also help people to remain eligible for means-tested federal benefits and state disability, medical assistance, health, and student aid benefits. Others who wish to give funds to the eligible individual, such as a grandparent or aunt, can also do so without adversely impacting benefits.

The PA ABLE Savings Program website (PAABLE.gov) is a great resource where you can find more information and enroll in the program.



Senator Brooks and other area legislators helped to cut the ribbon on the new location of the Living Independence for the Elderly (LIFE) NWPA in downtown Sharon.



Congratulations to the Reynolds High School Wrestling Team for winning the state championship. Senator Brooks honored them on the Senate floor.



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