

Rep. ^{Rob} MATZIE

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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THE 16TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT SERVING BEAVER AND ALLEGHENY COUNTIES
Beaver County: City of Aliquippa; Boroughs of Ambridge, Baden, Conway, East Rochester, Economy, Freedom, Monaca, Rochester and South Heights; and the Townships of Harmony and Hopewell.
Allegheny County: Leetsdale Borough and Leet Township.

Matzie bill continues efforts to protect nursing home residents

Would impose care and reporting requirements when registered sex offenders are admitted

A hidden danger is lurking in Pennsylvania nursing homes: Registered sexual offenders are being admitted as residents, but facilities are not required to disclose this to other residents or staff or develop special plans to ensure their safety.

The situation has resulted in attacks on residents, including the December 2020 attack on a patient with dementia at Brighton Rehabilitation and Wellness Center, who wandered into the room of a registered sex offender. He began sexually assaulting her before a nurse discovered the incident and intervened.

According to recent investigative reports by the Tribune-Review and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, there are at least 68 registered sex offenders living in long-term care facilities in Western Pennsylvania, and that number is likely to grow. With more than 900,000 U.S. registered sex offenders who will be aging and requiring medical care, the issue of patient and staff safety is one that demands solutions now.

To address the growing threat, I have introduced a bill that would require all Pennsylvania nursing homes to check the sex offender registry before admitting a new resident; develop a care plan to protect other residents and staff when a registered offender is admitted; and notify staff and other residents in close proximity (or their families) about the plan.

Facilities would also be required to report the information to the state Department of Health, to create a centralized registry that would function as a Megan's Law for nursing homes. Currently, there is no such list, so officials have no way of tracking how many registered sex offenders are living in nursing homes or where they are located.

My bill is similar to a law already in effect in Ohio – one of at least 10 states that impose protections when a registered sex offender is admitted to a nursing home. Now, it's our turn to join them. Pennsylvania's most vulnerable residents deserve no less.



Rep. Matzie supporting nursing home residents and workers.



Rep. Matzie tours LECOM Senior Living Center, a state-of-the-art nursing home facility in Erie.

Rep. Matzie leads effort for historic broadband legislation

Affordable, reliable broadband isn't a luxury – it's an essential connection to a world of resources, from job opportunities, telemedicine and education to online shopping and entertainment.

But for years, those connections have not reached more than 800,000 Pennsylvanians in underserved or rural communities, which have lacked the means to add the necessary infrastructure.

This year, for the first time, we will finally start to close that digital divide, thanks to a historic new law that will expand reliable, high-speed Internet access throughout the commonwealth.

Signed by the governor in December, the law establishes the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority, which will oversee federal grant administration and infrastructure deployment – including construction of new towers, lines and other equipment – to ensure those efforts are properly funded and coordinated.

As chairman of the House Consumer Affairs Committee and bill co-sponsor, I inserted an amendment that shaped the new law to ensure that local governments, small businesses and nonprofits can apply for grant funding, that guidelines are in place to assist low-income areas, and that broadband expands in a way that best benefits the areas needing it most.

Earlier this year, I also helped lay the groundwork for the new law by introducing additional legislation with state Rep. Jim Marshall, R-Beaver/Butler, to put a reliable framework in place for broadband deployment.

Our legislation increases access to 5G technology through deployment of small, wireless facilities that can be attached to existing utility poles. Signed into law last July, the new legislation became a model for other efforts throughout the country.

With the new framework and broadband authority in place, reliable, high-speed connections are finally on the horizon for *all* Pennsylvanians, regardless of their ZIP code.

Honoring a hometown hero

Last spring, I was honored and humbled to be asked to present a “Quilt of Honor” to Korean War combat veteran and hero James Thompson. Quilts of Honor is a nonprofit organization that provides handmade quilts to veterans and active military members. I also presented James a House of Representatives Citation to honor his service.

While a U.S. Army Sergeant and member of the 140th tank battalion, 40th Division, James displayed heroic

leadership in coordinating a strike on an approaching enemy convoy. He was wounded in the incident and received the Purple Heart for his valor. His heroism was later the subject of an article appearing in the publication Stars and Stripes.

Since his honorable discharge, James has continued giving back to his community, serving as commander of his local V.F.W. and participating and marching in community parades, where he has carried the American flag with pride.

Beaver County is so fortunate to have selfless, dedicated veterans like James to inspire our next generation to military and community service. And I felt fortunate, as well, to have had the special opportunity to spend some time with him and his family.



Matzie: Governor's proposed budget plan just the start

The governor's budget address serves as a blueprint, a working framework to be debated and negotiated moving forward. The end product can sometimes look much different than what the governor presents.

At first glance, there are several areas that I can fully support. More money for education at all levels, funding for technology improvements for public safety, increasing opportunities for workers, and investments to make healthcare more affordable are priorities that I share. It also calls for the implementation of new programs and funding to support veterans and active military, which is long overdue.

Most importantly, it holds the line on taxes and actually decreases some business taxes.

As always, I'll work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and ultimately support what best serves Beaver County and the residents of my district.

Matzie stands up for Aliquippa — but fight is not over

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association's recent reversal of a decision that would have forced Aliquippa High School football to compete at the Class 5A category was welcome news – although more is needed to level the playing field.



Rep. Matzie meeting with Aliquippa School District Superintendent Dr. Phillip Woods.

At the time the association granted the school district's appeal in late January, the Quips had already spent two years competing at the 4A level – and due to sheer talent, they clinched the championship.

But both the 4A and 5A designations – based on PIAA's administration of the "competitive balance" rule – are unfair and inappropriate.

The PIAA classifies high school football into six categories based on grades 9-11 enrollment, with 1A being the smallest and 6A the largest. With 118 players enrolled, Aliquippa falls within 1A – although the team voluntarily competed at 3A.

Designed to prevent open transfer recruiting by private high school factories, the competitive balance rule uses a program's number of transfers combined with "success points" to determine if it should automatically be elevated a classification level. But the rule has a fundamental flaw – it fails to consider the reason a student athlete might change schools.

In communities like Aliquippa, kids come and go based on their families' economic situations – people aren't moving there to play football. The rule punishes Aliquippa and similar communities for not having a lot of money but being good at football – and it pushes student athletes into an unfair situation.

Doesn't sound particularly balanced, does it? It didn't to me when I questioned the PIAA last May 3rd during a hearing in front of the Pennsylvania Athletic Oversight Committee, of which I am a member. Nor did it sound balanced when I wrote to the PIAA on December 13th of last year, requesting their decision be reversed.

So, while the decision was made not to force the Quips up to yet another classification, I believe the rule regarding competitive balance should use actual enrollment numbers. Furthermore, the PIAA should take into consideration – on an individual basis – the circumstances involved when a student transfers schools.

I stand ready to assist Aliquippa as they continue to explore their options.

Protecting Big Sewickley Creek

For those of us who grew up around it, Big Sewickley Creek provided hours of enjoyment, whether we were swimming, fishing, or just skipping rocks from the bank. Residents still love and enjoy the creek, which is stocked with trout by the Fish and Boat Commission and has provided decades of quality fishing.

In summer months, portions of the creek tend to dry up. So, when residents learned that Penn Energy had petitioned the state Department of Environmental Protection for a permit to withdraw 3 million gallons of water per day for energy extraction, they were justifiably alarmed that this would escalate the existing draught danger and damage the surrounding habitat.

I wrote to DEP urging it to deny the petition. I explained that while I am on record as supporting natural gas extraction – and I believe we can have that extraction and still maintain a clean, healthy environment – this was not one of those cases. The agency denied Penn Energy's petition.

While I applaud that ruling, I hope Penn Energy does the right thing and abandons any further attempts to tap into the creek. That would be a responsible decision for our community and would ensure that future generations have a chance to enjoy this unique and beautiful natural resource as much as we have.



Rep. Matzie discussing organ donation at the Center for Organ Recovery & Education.

Matzie protecting consumers

Protecting consumers should never be a partisan issue, especially when it comes to safeguarding seniors. As Democratic chairman of the House Consumer Affairs Committee, I have worked closely with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to strengthen those protections, and I'm happy to report that two of my consumer protection bills have recently become law.

The first – which I introduced with state Rep. Doyle Heffley, R-Carbon – addresses predatory practices by some pharmacy benefit managers. Those companies, which decide what drugs will be covered by insurance and how much to reimburse pharmacies that fill those prescriptions, wield tremendous power yet have operated with little or no oversight.

This new law will bring much-needed transparency and accountability for pricing practices that are gouging patients, wasting taxpayer dollars and driving mom-and-pop pharmacies out of business.

A second law updates and strengthens protections against pyramid schemes and clarifies the distinction between legitimate direct-sale companies and fly-by-night schemes designed to scam consumers.

The new law – which reflects the complexity of today's criminal fraud and has the necessary teeth to be an effective enforcement tool – will help legitimate direct sale companies understand what constitutes acceptable business practices while also helping law enforcement target the bad actors.



Rep. Matzie joins former classmate, Dr. Anthony Todd Carlisle, at the Laughlin Memorial Library to discuss Carlisle's new book, *The Souls of Clayhatchee*.



Rep. Matzie touring the IBEW #5 training facility in Pittsburgh.

More than \$20.5 million returning to the district

An important part of my work includes bringing your tax dollars home to benefit our district. Here's a brief look at some of the funding we secured in 2021.

More than \$13.4 million to bolster infrastructure, fight blight, expand affordable housing, and address food insecurity.

Nearly \$5.7 million to improve the investigation and prosecution of domestic violence and child abuse, expand treatment and support for victims, strengthen probation services, and fund opioid abuse education and overdose prevention programs.

More than \$1 million for projects to preserve and rehabilitate historic sites in Beaver and Allegheny counties and help fund area historic foundations, centers, and museums.

Nearly \$220,000 to enhance resources for students. (This is in addition to more than \$37.8 million in federal CARES Act funding to support local schools and students.)

Nearly \$200,000 in grant funding to district fire and EMS companies to address a wide range of needs, from equipment, building repairs and training to replenishing pandemic-related expenses.

Nearly \$45,000 to help local senior centers with operations and **\$12,000** to help Beaver County's oldest operating synagogue meet security needs.



Rep. Matzie, Gov. Tom Wolf and Mayor Dwan Walker discussing state investments secured for Aliquippa.

New programs can help with water, Internet services

Two new programs can assist eligible households with the costs of water and broadband services.

The **Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program** can help households in danger of losing water service by providing crisis grants – which do not need to be repaid – directly to the provider. Eligible households can receive up to two \$2,500 grants – one for water service and one for wastewater service. To learn more about the program, visit <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/LIHWAP.aspx>

A second program – **the Affordable Connectivity Program** – can help low-income households that are having difficulty paying for Internet service by providing monthly discounts of up to \$30 per month.

Households may be able to qualify for several different programs, and those already enrolled in the Federal Communication Commission's **Lifeline** program do not have to apply again for the Affordable Connectivity Program but can reach out to their Internet company directly to enroll in the ACP.

More about the Affordable Connectivity Program is available at <https://acpbenefit.org/how-to-apply/>; and more about the Lifeline program is available by visiting <https://www.fcc.gov/general/lifeline-program-low-income-consumers>



Mortgage assistance

The **Pennsylvania Homeowner Assistance Fund** can help eligible homeowners who are suffering financial hardship because of the pandemic avoid delinquency, default or foreclosure by assisting with mortgage and housing-related expenses. To learn more, visit <https://pahaf.org/>

Protection from surprise medical bills

The state Insurance Commissioner is reminding Pennsylvanians that a new law protects against surprise medical bills – those patients receive when they unknowingly or unintentionally obtain health care from out-of-network providers. To learn more, visit www.insurance.pa.gov and enter “no surprises act” into the search bar.

Matzie: File now for rebate on property taxes or rent paid in 2021

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is now accepting applications for rebates on property taxes or rent paid in 2021. The 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.

Residents now have the option of filing online. Visit www.mypath.pa.gov and scroll down to the “Rebates” heading.

Please remember that my staff can also help you file for your rebate. Contact my district office at (724) 266-7774 to schedule an appointment. Please bring proof of local (county, borough and school) property taxes or rent paid, and proof of income, such as an IRS Form 1099.



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My office can help you with:

- Assistance in getting state forms of all kinds, like PACE (pharmaceutical assistance for qualified senior citizens), voter registration, Property Tax/Rent Rebate (for qualified seniors), PHEAA (higher education assistance), etc.
- Requests for literature of all kinds — bills, regulations, statutes, Pennsylvania maps, senior citizen information, student aid information, etc.
- Car registrations, special tags, titles and license applications
- Birth and death certificate applications
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, income assistance)
- Questions about utilities or the PUC
- Unemployment compensation, disability, and workers' compensation problems
- Notary services
- Problems or questions about PennDOT
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Problems with Pennsylvania income taxes
- Consumer complaints
- Disability license plates and placards
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding local accomplishments and family milestones
- Any problem with state government!

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