

PATRICK J. HARKINS



DEAR NEIGHBORS,

I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on the exciting happenings of our region! Erie is on an incredible upward trajectory, and I look forward to continuing this positive momentum throughout 2024 and beyond.

We recently finalized a new state budget for 2023-24. The \$45.5 billion spending plan includes a historic investment in our public schools that increased the Erie City School District's basic and special education funding by \$15.4 million. The Iroquois School District received an additional \$1 million in total education funding, while career and technical education also received a \$14 million increase statewide.

Other highlights of the new state budget include a \$46.5 million investment to provide universal free breakfast to Pennsylvania's 1.7 million public school students regardless of income.

Additionally, we passed legislation that invests \$175 million statewide to help fix up our commonwealth's schools. The type of environment a child learns in has a direct impact on their ability to become the best version of themselves, and this additional funding addresses critical deficiencies in our school's facilities.

You'll find more about the new budget and additional news affecting our district in the pages to follow. Please remember: if you need help with any state-related matter, my talented staff and I are here for you. Stop by my office at 460 E. 26th St. or call (814) 459-1949 to schedule an appointment. On the back page, you'll find a list of some of the many ways we can help.

INCREASING PENNSYLVANIA'S CHILD AND DEPENDENT CARE TAX CREDIT

When I am out and about in the district discussing the financial burdens that families face, the most overwhelming answer is the rising cost of child care. Child care has become so expensive that parents are having serious discussions about only one parent returning to the workforce because, given the exponential cost of dependable, high-quality child care, it doesn't make sense financially for both of them to be working.

The cost of quality child care should never be a barrier to parents or guardians entering the workforce. That's why we made it a priority to more than triple a crucial state tax credit aimed at reducing the cost of essential child and dependent care that will help create more breathing room in a growing family's budget.

Nearly a quarter million working families will see a threefold increase in their state tax credits, helping to alleviate one of the biggest financial burdens families face. This is yet another example of key initiatives and investments brought to the forefront that will continue putting Erie on the pathway to success.

NEW IN 2024
CHILD & DEPENDENT CARE TAX CREDIT

	Income Under \$43,000		Earning Above \$43,000	
	Prior to Change	Expanded Tax Credit	Prior to Change	Expanded Tax Credit
Max Credit for One Eligible Dependent	\$315	\$1,050	\$180	\$600
Max Credit for Two+ Eligible Dependents	\$630	\$2,100	\$360	\$1,200

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District Office:

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EXPANSION OF THE PROPERTY TAX/RENT REBATE PROGRAM

The expansion of the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program was a critical aspect of budget negotiations. The expansion of the PTRR Program will allow an additional 175,000 Pennsylvanians to qualify for rebates by raising the income-eligibility limit to \$45,000 for both homeowners and renters. This is vital in our collective fight to keep seniors and those with disabilities in the homes and neighborhoods they love.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older.

To learn more, visit www.revenue.pa.gov and enter "Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program" into the search bar. You can also call the department at 1-888-222-9190 or contact my office at (814) 459-1949 for more information and help applying.

KEEPING MORE MONEY IN THE POCKETS OF SENIORS BY PROTECTING PRESCRIPTION ASSISTANCE

From utility bills to groceries, rising prices on life's essentials continue to pinch everyone's pockets. For seniors living on a fixed income, these additional costs can be overwhelming and may result in having to make tough financial decisions. Fortunately, my colleagues and I voted to pass legislation that will ensure continued access to prescription drug benefits for older adults through the state's prescription assistance programs -- PACE and PACENET.

By extending the Social Security COLA moratorium through the end of 2025, we were able to create more breathing room for seniors who rely upon these essential programs, allowing them to continue their prescription drug regimen that increases their overall quality of life.

In late 2023, PACE/PACENET celebrated its 40th anniversary. Since its inception in 1983, PACE has been offering low-cost prescription medication to qualified Pennsylvanians 65 and older and has served more than 1.6 million older adults!

Learn more about PACE and PACENET at www.aging.pa.gov/prescriptions.




Property Tax / Rent Rebate 2024 Program Expansion

MORE people eligible, **MORE** money back!

Homeowner & Renter Income	Max Rebate
Up to \$8K	\$1,000
Up to \$15K	\$770
Up to \$18K	\$460
Up to \$45K	\$380

Questions? Contact my office for help receiving your refund!

PRESCRIPTION ASSISTANCE		
ELIGIBILITY 		
Call: 800-225-7223	PACE	PACENET
Age 65+	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PA Resident for at least 90 days	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Individual Income	under 14,500	between 14,501-33,500
Married Income	under 17,700	between 17,701-41,500

INVESTING IN OUR COMMONWEALTH'S 911 CALL CENTERS

To prioritize public safety, we were able to direct critical resources to ensure adequate funding for all of Pennsylvania's 61 county-based 911 call centers. These critical resources will assist the more than 2,500 telecommunicators to continue implementing the Next Generation 911 system, allowing them to respond to emergency situations more effectively and efficiently.

In 2022 alone, these call centers answered approximately 15.2 million requests for emergency assistance.

RICHARD S. WASIELEWSKI WATER TREATMENT PLANT RENOVATIONS COMPLETE

Over the last several years, Erie has made tremendous progress in bolstering its infrastructure. Since the initial planning stage in 2005, the Richard S. Wasielewski Water Treatment Plant has been receiving major upgrades. Those renovations are now complete, and the \$100 million project will now be the Erie Water Works main plant. This has been years in the making, and I am so happy to see all of the work, planning, and patience finally culminate in last October's ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Additionally, the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority has approved \$38 million in funding to allow the Erie Water Authority to perform major projects, including replacement of corroded, outdated lead piping for customers and construction of a new pumping station. This will deliver the high-quality water service that Erie County residents expect and deserve.



In September, I held a senior fair that connected more than 600 seniors with information about programs and services that can benefit them.

YOUR TAX DOLLARS COMING BACK TO THE DISTRICT

Throughout 2023, I helped bring more than \$23 million back to our legislative district. Some highlights include:

- ✓ \$7.3 million to help fund multiple transportation and infrastructure projects in Erie.
- ✓ \$3.1 million to electrify Erie's refuse collection fleet.
- ✓ More than \$6 million in grants and low-interest loans to update aging stormwater systems.
- ✓ Nearly \$1 million to expand affordable housing options in Erie County.
- ✓ More than \$400,000 to expand the availability of fresh food options in Erie schools.

Additional funding included \$2 million in federal dollars to help Erie's public schools launch a student health initiative.

Since 2018, my colleagues and I helped bring more than a quarter of a billion dollars (\$263 million+) in funding home to Erie.

ADVOCATING FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEE SAFETY

This past May, the Pennsylvania House passed my bill (H.B. 299) that would extend OSHA protections to Pennsylvania's public sector employees.

For far too long, Pennsylvania's public sector employees – including transit workers, bus mechanics, maintenance workers, equipment operators, and virtually every other employee who works for the state – have not been guaranteed the same basic workplace safety as workers for private companies. This is because Pennsylvania – unlike many other states in the nation – does not require public employers to follow the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

My bill would require worksites to be safely equipped, workers to be thoroughly trained, and workplace incidents to be reported and fully investigated. There's clear evidence that having those protections in place can reduce the incidence of fatalities and serious injuries.

I will be urging my colleagues in the state Senate to support this bill, and I will not stop fighting until it reaches the governor's desk. Will you help me in this fight and contact your state senator and demand this vital bill be brought up for a vote? It's time we gave our public workers the protections they need and deserve.



HELPING SENIORS CHART THEIR OWN COURSE

Recognizing the need for seniors to have the ability to make their own informed decisions regarding their future, we were able to secure \$5 million in funding that will go toward the Help at Home (OPTIONS) program offered through the PA Department of Aging. This funding will be earmarked toward reducing the waitlist of seniors seeking services that will allow them to stay in their homes.

Also, the Greater Erie Community Action Committee's Area Agency on Aging is a wonderful resource for Erie seniors who want to maximize the programs and benefits available to them. To speak directly to a caseworker that will help guide you through the steps, please call Senior Helpline at (814) 459-4581, ext. 400.

CANCER SCREENINGS FOR FIREFIGHTERS WILL SAVE LIVES

Realizing the inherently dangerous nature of being a full-time firefighter, I co-sponsored legislation that would entitle these brave heroes to cancer screenings with no out-of-pocket costs. This legislation would provide cancer screenings for every full-time paid firefighter once within the first three years of employment and every three years thereafter while employed. It is important to note that these screenings would be covered by the health insurance policies provided by the firefighter's employer, with no out-of-pocket costs incurred.

Firefighters are the first line of defense during an emergency, and they deserve the type of health care screenings that can detect irregularities. It is imperative we take proactive measures that promote the well-being of firefighters, and covering screenings for life-altering diseases such as cancer is an initiative that everyone can agree upon.

SERVING ON GREAT LAKES COMMISSION

Over the last several years, I have had the honor of serving on the Great Lakes Commission, advocating for the health and protection of Lake Erie. Erie County is blessed with abundant natural resources and remains a premier destination for recreational and outdoor activities. Lake Erie is a vital resource for our commonwealth, and we must continue to be diligent in protecting it from existential threats.



High-quality child care is essential to a strong, growing, and diverse economy. Workers in the child care sector deserve fair wages and benefits for their dedication to such a demanding career. I was proud to stand with advocates to request more support and a better work-life balance for our child care workers.



State Representative
PATRICK J. HARKINS

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Last year, a talented and energetic group of artists painted a mural on the side of my district office. The mural encapsulates the spirit of Erie, drawing attention to our area's beautiful aesthetic and paying homage to the diversity of our community.



The Pennsylvania House of Representatives made history this year by electing the first female Black Speaker of the House. Speaker Joanna McClinton has been instrumental in propelling initiatives that will have positive ripple effects for every resident of our great commonwealth.

HOW MY OFFICE CAN HELP

My office can help you with:

- ✓ Obtaining and completing state forms, including PACE (senior prescription help), home heating/water assistance, Property Tax/Rent Rebate (for qualified applicants), PHEAA (higher education assistance) and others.
- ✓ Car registrations; special tags, titles and license applications; disability placards; other problems or questions involving PennDOT.
- ✓ Birth and death certificate applications/notarization of state documents.
- ✓ Unemployment compensation issues.
- ✓ Questions or problems regarding utilities and other consumer services.
- ✓ Fish and boat registration renewals/ATV registrations.
- ✓ Special occasion permits.
- ✓ State professional licensing assistance (barbers, etc.).
- ✓ Any problem or question involving state government!

The office is open Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

SIGN UP FOR EMAIL UPDATES!

Visit my webpage at www.RepHarkins.com to sign up for my email updates about programs, services, events and news involving our district!