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INSIDE THE SENATE

A special report from
State Senator Pat Browne

September 2005 • 16th Senatorial District

Dear Friend,

As I mentioned in my last newsletter, the Senate recently approved a number of other important bills in addition to the state budget and the Growing Greener program expansion. In this edition of *Inside the Senate*, we will look at those issues.

As always, if you have questions about any state issue, call my Allentown District Office at (610) 821-8468, my Northampton County Office at (610) 502-1567, or my Monroe County District Office at (570) 402-1499. Or, visit my website at www.senatorbrowne.com.

Regards,

Pat Browne
Pat Browne

Senate Approves ID Theft Bill

Reported cases of identity theft in Pennsylvania have risen from about 5,000 in 2002 to more than 7,500 last year.

In an effort to address the growing problem of identity theft, the Senate approved Senate Bill 712, legislation that would require notification to consumers of any breach of security systems that might result in unauthorized viewing of the consumer's personal information. The legislation would prevent consumers from having the security or confidentiality of personal information compromised without their knowledge.

In addition, I hope you will be

able to join me at one of the two identity theft forums I have scheduled for this fall.

MONROE COUNTY SESSION

Wednesday, September 21, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Chestnuthill Township Park Building, Route 715, Brodheadsville.

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY SESSION

Thursday, September 29, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Hanover Township Municipal Building, 3630 Jacksonville Road, Bethlehem.

Although these sessions are offered free-of-charge, please reserve your seat by calling the District Office at (610)-821-8468.

Health Savings Accounts Law Enacted

Pennsylvania recently enacted a measure designed to give Pennsylvanians more control of their health care options.

Act 48 of 2005 allows residents to set up Health Savings Accounts under provisions similar to those used by the federal government under the Internal Revenue Service Code.

The new measure lets people make personal decisions on the best way to provide for their health care expenses. Act 48 applies to taxable years beginning after December 31, 2004.

Senate Adopts Call for Study of Veterans' Programs

The Senate recently adopted a measure calling for a comprehensive review of all state, county and local veterans' programs and services. Senate Resolution 131 directs the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) to conduct the review and provide a report of its findings to the General Assembly by Dec. 15, 2006.

Currently, most of the veterans' programs offered in Pennsylvania fall under the direction of the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; the Governors

Veterans Outreach and Assistance Centers; or county-level veterans' affairs offices.

SR 131 directs LBFC to look at all of these operations and the services and benefits they offer with the goal of streamlining and improving the way the Commonwealth assists veterans and their families.

The study includes the proposal



to establish a separate Department of Veterans Affairs, but it goes well beyond that. SR 131 directs the LBFC to explore a broad range of options of how

best to organize, fund, staff, and operate veterans' programs in order to provide the best possible services in the most cost effective and efficient manner.

ACRE Provides for Review of Farming Regulations

The General Assembly recently approved legislation that will help settle disputes between farmers and their host communities by establishing a review process for local farming regulations.

Act 38 of 2005, also known as the ACRE (Agriculture, Communities and Rural Environment) initiative, directs the state Attorney General's office to review disputes over local farming ordinances. The Attorney General will then decide whether to send the case to Commonwealth Court. The legislation provides a less expensive avenue to resolve disputes between farmers and local governments.

The Act strikes a balance between the interests of farmers and the communities in which they operate. One of the agricultural community's biggest concerns is local ordinances that place unfair restrictions on the ability to farm. This legislation defends the rights of farmers without limiting the ability of local governments to protect the health and safety of their citizens.

The bill also requires new or expanding livestock and manure-importing farms to develop an odor management plan, making Pennsylvania one of the first states to regulate odor. It also includes strong provisions to protect water quality.

Protecting At-Risk Children

The Senate recently approved Senate Bill 63, also known as Kristen's Law, a measure that would require county child welfare agencies to include an annually updated photo in each child's file. Files transferred between county agencies would have to include any photographic identification and an annual photo of a child.

The bill is named for a tragic case involving a child from Western Pennsylvania who died from malnutrition while in the care of protective services because her parents continually presented a healthy child to unknowing caseworkers.

SB 63 is now before the House Judiciary Committee for consideration.

Senate OK's School Tax Installment Plan

Recognizing the burden that school tax bills can place on a household budget, the Senate approved a measure that would require districts to establish installment plans for those payments.

Senate Bill 709 would amend the Local Tax Collection Act to require

school districts to provide, by ordinance or resolution, for the collection and payment of real property taxes by residents and businesses in four, six, or twelve equal installments.

The change would have to be made by July 1, 2006 so that resi-

dents and businesses could start making installment payments beginning with the 2006-2007 school year.

The measure was sent to the House of Representatives, where it is currently before the House Finance Committee.

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