



Senator Pat Browne



REPORTS to SENIORS

16TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT • FALL 2008

Senator Browne to Host Senior Fair October 2 at Country Meadows



Senator Pat Browne will host his annual **Senior Fair at Country Meadows of Allentown on Thursday, October 2, 2008.**

The fair will run from **10 a.m. to 1 p.m.** at the Country Meadows Retirement Community at 410 Krocks Road, Building 3 in Allentown. It is free of charge and open to the public. The fair is intended for seniors and their families and provides information on health care issues and leisure activities as well as other government programs available to them.

Exhibitors scheduled for the Fair include representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of

Transportation and the Department of Aging. These representatives will have information on a number of state programs including reduced rates for vehicle registrations, property tax and rent rebates and free and reduced rates for public transportation.

Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network will again provide an estimated 400 complimentary flu shots subject to availability and barring unforeseen circumstances.

For more information, please visit Senator Browne's website at www.senatorbrowne.com or contact Doris Stearns at 610-821-8468.

Dear Friends,

We are fortunate to have a large number of senior citizens in my district. Our area benefits from your wisdom and experience. As your state Senator, I hope to provide you with news that can help you in your daily life.

I would also like to invite you to my annual **Senior Fair set for October 2 at Country Meadows of Allentown.** The Fair is set up to give you an opportunity to find out what programs are available to you. Pennsylvania has one of the highest percentages of senior citizens in the nation and we also have some of the finest programs available for them. My Fair showcases state programs and those offered by county and community agencies as well.

As always, if you have questions about any state issue, call my Allentown District Office at (610) 821-8468, my Western Lehigh County office at (610) 366-2327, my East Allentown Office at (610) 821-6813, 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.

You may also email me at pbrowne@pasen.gov.

Regards,

Pat Browne

Pat Browne



Left: Senator Browne's 2007 Senior Fair provided local residents with many valuable services and information, including showing seniors how to use the new voting machines for Lehigh County.



Right: Senator Pat Browne discusses issues important to seniors with a local resident during his 2007 Senior Fair.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Deadline Extended until the End of 2008

SEE PAGE 3 FOR DETAILS.

Senator Browne Expands Senior Outreach

Senator Browne is now offering an exciting new and free 45-minute outreach program entitled *Issues Important to Seniors*.

This program is presented by Senator Browne's staff and designed for individuals 55 years and over, those who are disabled ages 18-64, widows and widowers age 50 and older, and professionals and agencies serving this population.

The presentation outlines the programs and services available through Senator Browne's offices, as well as other Pennsylvania state departments such as Transportation, Health, and Aging. In addition, presenters will provide handout materials and conduct a question and answer session. Senator Browne's staff members will stay on site after the presentation to assist in completing applications for

various state-related programs.

Senator Browne hopes that organizations take advantage of this free seminar.

Please contact Doris Stearns, Director of Constituent Services for Senator Browne, at (610) 821-8468 to reserve a date and time to have this valuable service provided to your organization.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Pennsylvania

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, one in ten grandparents has been the primary caregiver and support of a grandchild at some time in their lives. Nationally, 4.5 million children are living in grandparent-headed households (6.3% of all children under age 18). This represents a 30% increase from 1990 to 2000. Pennsylvania ranks seventh among the states in terms of the number of children living in grandparent-headed households, with over 164,000 children fitting into this category.

Kinship caregivers, particularly grandparents, face a variety of emotional, legal and daily living challenges as they unexpectedly find themselves in the position of raising a second family. Many factors contribute to the dramatic increase in the number of kinship care families, including: drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, incarceration and divorce.

If you are over 60, access to helpful resources begins with calling your

local **Area Agency on Aging** (**Lehigh County 610-782-3034; Monroe County 570-420-3735; Northampton County 610-559-3245**). Caregivers of all ages can contact these toll-free numbers.

Healthy Baby – 1-800-986-BABY (2229): The statewide Healthy Baby help line refers callers to programs that offer free or low-cost health care services, based on income.

Healthy Kids – 1-800-986-KIDS (5437): The statewide Healthy Kids help line refers callers to programs that offer free or low-cost health care services based on income.

Special Kids Network – 1-800-986-4550: The Special Kids Network links callers to a broad range of services for children with special health care needs. These include health care products, training, recreation and leisure, social services, counseling, support, advocacy, and therapy.

Lead Information Line – 1-800-440-LEAD (5323): The Lead Information Line offers personal help and written information to parents, physi-



cians, contractors and homeowners about lead poisoning and its prevention and control.

For more informational resources about kinship programs, visit the website www.aging.state.pa.us.

Tips for Charitable Giving "Donor Beware"

In an ongoing effort to provide education to Pennsylvania seniors, the Pennsylvania Department of State established the Bureau of Charitable Organization's toll-free telephone hotline (1-800-732-0999). Pennsylvanians can call the hotline to learn more about a particular charitable organization, or to report a fraudulent or deceptive solicitation practice in Pennsylvania.

Here are some tips that you can use when you are contacted for a donation:

- Never give to a charity you know nothing about.
- Do not hesitate to request written information from the charity regarding its programs

and finances.

- Don't feel pressured into giving on the spot or allowing someone to come to your house to pick up the contribution.
- Hang up the telephone on aggressive and harassing solicitors.
- Never give cash, credit card numbers, or bank account numbers; always write a check payable to the charity so you have a record of your donations.
- Be wary of "guaranteed" sweepstake winnings in exchange for a contribution. Participation in sweepstake offers is voluntary,

and donors are in no better position to win the sweepstake than non-donors.

- Don't make assumptions when you hear words like "police" or "firefighter" in an organization's name. Although an organization claims it has local ties or works with local police or firefighters, it doesn't necessarily mean contributions will be used locally.
- Find out if the charity is registered with the Bureau of Charitable Organizations by searching online at www.dos.state.pa.us or by calling toll-free number: 1-800-732-0999.

Working for Seniors in Harrisburg

The Senate recently passed several measures that are intended to help improve the quality of life and protect the safety of Pennsylvania's older residents, according to Senator Pat Browne.

Assisted Living Facilities Now Must Be Licensed

For the first time, assisted living facilities will be licensed in Pennsylvania and the services that will be offered will be defined.

Act 56 of 2007, co-sponsored by Senator Browne, sets minimal standards for the regulation of the industry by the state Department of Public Welfare and supports the philosophy that individuals should be permitted to remain in a home-like atmosphere of their choice for as long as possible.

Although many personal care homes often refer to themselves as assisted living facilities, there currently is no official licensure category for this type of care. By creating this type of license, senior citizens will be able to determine what kind of services to expect and whether the setting will address their needs.

Cracking Down On Home Repair Fraud

Most home repair companies and contractors are reputable and responsible, but there are scam artists out there who are looking to take advantage of consumers, particularly senior citizens. That's why Senator Browne co-sponsored a bill to provide strengthened protections for consumers against home repair scam artists.

Senate Bill 100, which has passed the Senate, would make it easier to

prosecute disreputable contractors by setting strict criminal penalties for home repair fraud. The bill also includes tougher sanctions if the victim is 60 or older, since many scam artists target older homeowners.

In too many cases, an unethical operator will take a deposit and leave town, or do sub-par work and refuse to fix the job. Homeowners are often left with empty wallets and no recourse. Senator Browne's legislation will more strictly police home improvement contractors and give consumers more information before they hire a home repair operator.

Home improvement contractors would have to register with the Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Protection. The Bureau would also maintain a toll-free number by which consumers could check on the registration status of a contractor.

The bill would also require home improvement contracts for all work that exceeds \$500, and it would set down specific criteria for home improvement contracts to ensure that all parties understand the work to be completed, the time frame for completion and the total costs involved.

Senate Bill 100 gives district attorneys and the Attorney General strong enforcement authority for investigating and prosecuting home improvement scams. Those who violate the law could face a felony conviction and the revocation or suspension of their registration.

Senate Passes Bill Addressing Care Homes Inspection Backlog

The licensure status of facilities caring for the elderly and disabled would be available via the Internet



under legislation approved by the Senate in July.

Although the Department of Public Welfare is working to improve its inspection timetable for personal care homes, it recently disclosed that 73 percent of personal care homes in the state have not been inspected on time.

While it does not automatically mean that a facility lacking a timely inspection is offering compromised care, patients and their guardians have a right to make fully informed decisions. That's why Senator Browne co-sponsored Senate Bill 811, a measure that would require the creation of a website with licensing and certification information on nursing homes, personal care homes and domiciliary care homes.

This data would include information on violations of statute or regulation by the facility and any corrective action taken.

Property Tax/Rent Rebate Deadline Extended until the End of 2008

Property taxes are a concern for all Pennsylvanians, but particularly for senior citizens on a low or fixed income. In 2006, the General Assembly approved a law that provided Pennsylvania's senior citizens with substantial relief from school property taxes by expanding the Property Tax Relief and Rent Rebate Act using gaming revenues.

The program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians age 65 and older; widows and widowers age 50 and older; and people with permanent disabilities age 18 and older who meet the Social Security disability requirements. The deadline to apply for a rebate was recently extended to Dec. 31, 2008.

The homeowner income limits and rebate amounts are:

- \$0 to \$8,000 – \$650 rebate
- \$8,001 to \$15,000 – \$500 rebate
- \$15,001 to \$18,000 – \$300 rebate
- \$18,001 to \$35,000 – \$250 rebate

The renter income limits and rebate amounts are:

- \$0 to \$8,000 – \$650 rebate
- \$8,001 to \$15,000 – \$500 rebate

Applications and information can be obtained through any of Senator Pat Browne's offices or the state Department of Revenue's website, www.revenue.state.pa.us or by calling the Department of Revenue at 1-888-PATAXES.

Home Energy Assistance Program Set to Open Again

Senator Browne reminds low-income homeowners and renters (who pay their own heating bills) that the Pennsylvania Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) will start its enrollment period beginning on November 3, 2008 and ending on March 31, 2009. LIHEAP helps low-income people pay their heating bills through home heating energy assistance grants and crisis grants.

A family of four with an annual income of \$30,975 or less can qualify for LIHEAP. It is not necessary to have an unpaid bill to receive home heating energy assistance, and no lien will be placed on an owner's property for receiving this help.

Also, additional money may be

available for those in an emergency situation and in jeopardy of losing heat. Emergency situations include:

- Broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced
- Lack of fuel
- Termination of utility service
- Danger of being without fuel or of having utility service terminated

For more information on either LIHEAP or home heating crisis situations, please contact either the Lehigh County Assistance Office at 610-821-6509, the Monroe County Assistance Office at 570-424-3030, the Northampton County Assistance

LIHEAP

Office at 610-250-1700, or contact the LIHEAP hotline at 1-866-857-7095, Monday through Friday (individuals with hearing impairments may call the TDD number at 1-800-451-5886).

Home Weatherization Program

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development operates a home weatherization program in each county. Repair and replacement of heating systems are the main focus of the program, but other services include:

- Stopping air infiltration by caulking or weatherizing doors and windows and replacing broken glass
- Ensuring adequate insulation in attics
- Insulating electric hot water heaters

There is no charge for these weatherization services for eligible individuals and families, and no lien is placed on the property. These services are available to both homeowners and renters (renters require permission from the landlord).

An individual or family wishing to find out if their income level meets those specified for the program should contact their County Assistance Office: Lehigh County



(610-821-6509); Monroe County (570-424-3030); or Northampton County (610-250-1700).

For more information, contact the local Area Agency on Aging: Lehigh County (610-782-3034); Monroe County (570-420-3735); or Northampton County (610-559-3245).

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Northampton, PA 18067
(610) 502-1567 • FAX (610) 502-1570

Monroe County Office
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P.O. Box 16
Saylorsburg, PA 18353-0016
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