

# LOU'S NEWS

State Rep. LOU SCHMITT

79<sup>th</sup> Legislative District | Vol. 7 | Winter 2024



## *Improving Safety on Pennsylvania's Rails*

To protect residents and train crews from derailments, I introduced two pieces of legislation to improve safety on Pennsylvania's railroads.

Every single day, multiple trains with hazardous materials onboard move through the heart of the city of Altoona and other communities across Pennsylvania. About a month ago, train cars derailed at a Norfolk Southern railyard in Altoona. Fortunately, no one was injured and there were no lasting effects like we saw with the major derailment in Ohio last year. Nevertheless, safety is paramount, and my bills aim to increase safety on the rails.

While the rail industry is largely regulated at the federal level, I believe the state needs to step in and institute enhanced safety measures for freight trains. That is why I introduced two bills to improve safety for railroaders and residents.

**House Bill 1126** would require freight trains to be operated by two people in the cab of the locomotive. It would also grant

authority to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) to levy civil penalties against rail companies that do not comply with the two-person requirement.

**House Bill 1127** would limit the length of trains to 8,500 feet. The length of trains has greatly increased over the years with the average length being well over a mile. A few months ago, the union representing railroaders, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, called on the Federal Railroad Administration to impose a limit on the length of trains citing safety concerns. These are the men and women who work hands on with trains daily. If they call for a length limit, I certainly am going to give serious consideration to what my railroaders have to say on the issue and act accordingly. There are also concerns that longer trains lead to traffic congestion and delayed response by emergency crews waiting at rail crossings.

## *Working to Update PA's Right-to-Know Law*

Pennsylvania's Right-to-Know (RTK) Law, which brings transparency and accountability to government at all levels, is woefully outdated. That is why I reintroduced legislation to enhance the law.

My bill provides numerous needed updates, such as requiring agencies to register open records officer contact information with the state's Office of Open Records; permitting agencies to ask requesters whether records will be used for commercial purposes; creating a new penalty for false certification relating to commercial requests; outlining additional privacy and public safety clarifications; and allowing reasonable, standard fees for commercial requests, with an exception for media requests.

**House Bill 99** clarifies what local agencies are subject to RTK requests. The bill also states that volunteer ambulance, fire and rescue services are not subject to the law. However, records of

the organizations when contracting with a state or local agency to provide governmental functions are public record.

The legislation provides clarification to the existing RTK Law that employees' personal identification information includes employees' immediate family members' names and the number, names and ages of an employee's dependents. It also states that an agency's financial institution account numbers, routing numbers, credit card numbers, personal identification numbers and passwords are not public information.

Guaranteeing residents have access to public records, while also protecting employees' private information is a balancing act. This bill accomplishes that, and I look forward to it advancing through the General Assembly.

## *Bill on the Move!*

Showing that Altoonans have an impact here in Harrisburg and across the state, a bill inspired by the chief of the Altoona Fire Department has cleared the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

The chief told me the Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association didn't have a seat on the 911 Advisory Board. So, I introduced **House Bill 104** to give the chiefs a voice at the table as non-voting members of the board. The chiefs will bring added valuable information to the board with their many years of experience. The bill is now in the full House for consideration.



## *Top Marks for my Voting Record*

I was honored to receive the Charlie Gerow Award as a Defender of Limited Government by the Institute for Legislative Analysis for my conservative voting record. The institute evaluated lawmaker voting across the full spectrum of policy and rated each lawmaker.



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***District Office Services***

My district office is here to assist you. Services my staff and I provide include:

- Assistance with PennDOT paperwork (lost cards, changes, corrections, special registration plates, vanity plates and temporary placards for persons with disabilities).
- Property Tax and Rent Rebate applications.
- Voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications.
- State tax forms.

If you need help with any of the above or with any other state-related matter, please do not hesitate to call my district office.

***Let's Stay in Touch!***

There are numerous ways for us to stay connected about all the news coming out of Harrisburg.

I send email updates about important legislation, events in the district and other information you will find helpful. It's simple to receive these updates by signing up at **RepLouSchmitt.com**.

I also post updates to social media platforms. To stay updated, follow my Facebook and Instagram accounts. Find me at **facebook.com/RepSchmitt** on Facebook and at **instagram.com/RepSchmitt** on Instagram.



It was truly a pleasure to celebrate Commander Lloyd Peck! Lloyd left high school early to join the armed forces and served in combat during the Korean War. He recently returned to Altoona High School to receive his overdue high school diploma.



I held my annual Shredding with Schmitt free paper shredding event a few months ago and I want to thank everyone who took advantage of the service. Look for another event in the coming months.



It was great helping out at an appliance and tire recycling drive in Tunnelhill. Thanks to the borough for holding the event! I'm pictured with Tunnelhill Borough Councilman Allen Lego and my colleague, Rep. Jim Rigby.



My wife, Helen, and I, along with two little elves – our grandsons Ted and Sebastian – had a wonderful time taking part in the Altoona Spirit of Christmas Parade. I always enjoy this holiday tradition and it was particularly great experiencing it with our grandsons.