

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**Office of Democratic Legislative Information**  
G-01, South Office Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0028

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT: Angelia L. Halaja (717) 787-7895**

HARRISBURG, March 7 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, has lent his support to the papermaking industry in appealing to the federal Environmental Protection Agency to reconsider proposed regulations that could lead to the loss of thousands of jobs.

"The National Council on Air and Stream Improvements estimates that this rule will force approximately 33 mill closings, resulting in the direct loss of more than 21,500 jobs," Scrimenti said in a letter to the agency. "In addition, the cluster rule will impose \$11 billion in capital costs on the industry. In this year of economic uncertainty, these costs may cause irreparable harm on this already troubled industry."

The proposed "cluster rule" aims to control both air and water emissions from about 350 paper mills across the country. A major provision of the proposal focuses on the papermaking industry's use of chlorine, a toxic chemical, in bleaching paper. The EPA expects the rule to become final in late 1995.

"In the Erie region, we're faced with losing a major employer, International Paper, whose Erie mill employs hundreds of people. But we also must consider the health of our environment. We desperately need the jobs, but we can't continue to risk the ecosystem we're very much a part of," said Scrimenti. "Tensions between environmentalists and the papermaking industry have been escalating. I've heard arguments from both sides of the issue -- that the EPA rule is too stringent and that International Paper refuses to accept more environmentally friendly policies -- and I believe that both parties need to be more accommodating."

Scrimenti believes, however, that the industry has valid concerns about the proposed rule and that the EPA has been less than cooperative in considering the industry's own proposals.

"As you may know," Scrimenti said in his letter, "the industry has proposed an alternative which would save more than \$3.8 billion while offering the same protection as the proposed cluster rule. The industry alternative proposed substituting the chlorine dioxide for elemental chlorine in the bleaching process. However, I have been informed that the EPA did not evaluate this alternative.

"I certainly hope that the EPA will use the public comment period to review the industry's proposal as well as to reach a mutually beneficial solution," he concluded.

The public can submit comments until March 17 to Marion Thompson, Engineering and Analysis Division (4303), EPA, 401 M St. SW, Washington, D.C. 20460. Additionally, the EPA plans to schedule public hearings to gather testimony.

Scrimenti said he will continue to follow the issue and do whatever he can to help find a solution to the controversy.

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HARRISBURG, April 27 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, has asked the Social Security Administration to maintain the two monthly visits administration officials make to the Corry Senior Center.

The administration cut the visits to only once a month beginning this April.

In a letter to Michael Tordoff, Social Security Administration district manager, Scrimenti said that he was "concerned over this reduction, particularly with regard to the negative effect such limitations will pose to senior citizens.

"As you know, there is a 34-mile distance to the nearest Social Security Office and the lack of public transportation in Corry will create a tremendous hardship upon those individuals in the most need.

"I am sure you share my commitment to serving our senior citizens to our utmost ability. In doing so, we recognize that our elderly population is often void of transportation that we often take for granted. Therefore, I would appreciate any assistance you might provide in reinstating the previous schedule," Scrimenti continued in his letter.

Scrimenti said he has enlisted the help of U.S. Sen. Harris L. Wofford, D-Pa., and added that he is hoping to see the full number of visits restored as soon as possible.

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-- D R A F T --

HARRISBURG, May 24 -- The state House recently passed a measure that would allow certain licensed farm wineries to help attract more tourists with signs along roadways.

"I think this is an important piece of legislation for the Erie area, given the significance of wineries of our region," said Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie. "I voted in favor of the bill because it supports our top two industries: agriculture and tourism."

The bill would authorize the designation of a farm winery as a tourist attraction if it owns or manages at least five acres of vineyards or 3,000 vines within the state, is open to the public at least 1,500 hours a year, is licensed by the Liquor Control Board and provides an educational format for winery visitors about wine and wine processing. The winery must maintain a wine-producing facility in the Commonwealth. Costs of the signs would be paid by the farm winery.

Scrimenti noted that Pennsylvania produces in excess of 70,000 tons of grapes annually on 14,000 acres of vineyards, cared for by 460 growers, adding more than \$100 million annually to the state's economy.

"Our wineries are very much a part of the tourism industry," Scrimenti added. "Pennsylvania's wine festivals attract droves of tourists, and the character of the industry itself really adds to the richness of Pennsylvania's history and culture."

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JUL 29 1994

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HARRISBURG, July 27 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, will host a hearing of the House Business and Economic Development Committee at 9 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 2 at the Erie City Council Chamber in the Erie City Building, 626 State St.

The panel is gathering information in its consideration of legislation to make housing more affordable for lower- and middle-income first-time homebuyers. The committee will hear testimony from Erie area experts on housing, economic opportunity and community development.

"The four-bill package could help at least 85,000 families in Pennsylvania that want to purchase their first home by providing assistance with the down payment and closing costs," said Scrimenti. "Real estate experts say these cash requirements are the No. 1 reason many people cannot afford to buy a home, even though they are able to afford the monthly mortgage."

The package includes the proposed Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act (H.B. 2942) which would create a revolving loan program to loan money to first-time homebuyers to help them pay upfront costs or obtain a better interest rate. Funding for the loan program would be provided by a \$10 surcharge on documents registered with the recorder of deeds in each county, eliminating the need for state monies. The surcharge is estimated to raise at least \$22 million annually.

The second major bill in the package, the Home Mortgage Insurance Program, (H.B. 2943) would provide mortgage insurance for 100 percent financing, allowing a homebuyer to not need a down payment by providing for 100 percent financing.

Two other measures (H.B.s 2944 and 2945) would exempt homeowners from the state's 1 percent portion of the 2 percent realty transfer tax under certain conditions.

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HARRISBURG, Aug. 24 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti has written to state Transportation Secretary Howard Yerusolim in opposition to the consolidation of Pennsylvania's driver's license photo and exam sites.

The number of photo centers in the Commonwealth will be cut from 107 to 89, 79 of which also will be driver exam sites. In Erie County, photo centers in Erie and Union City and driver exam centers in Erie and Corry will be consolidated into one facility in Erie by January 1995.

"I fear that the consolidation of sites will erode the quality and availability of service to rural Pennsylvanians," said Scrimenti, D-Erie. "In my own district, residents of Corry could take their exam in Corry and then drive seven miles to the photo center in Union City. Under the new "one-stop shopping" plan, these residents will have to travel 70 miles round trip for these services.

"While this may not seem like much of a distance for some people, it may present difficulty to the elderly and young, first-time drivers."

Scrimenti added that he's willing to work with PennDOT to find "an agreeable solution that is sensitive to the concerns of both the Department of Transportation and rural Pennsylvanians." In the meantime, he's urging PennDOT to maintain the current system.

Yerusolim wrote to members of the General Assembly in July informing them of significant changes in the photo license program, including a new driver's license with a credit card appearance and featuring a digitized image of the driver, and consolidation and renovation of photo and driver exam centers to provide more security and handicap accessibility.

"We must keep Pennsylvania's large rural and elderly populations in mind when we develop plans to provide service to our citizens," Scrimenti added. "Citizens in rural areas deserve the same access to services as their urban counterparts."

Scrimenti also has urged other legislators from rural areas to contact Yerusolim about the hardships this consolidation will create for their constituents.

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HARRISBURG, Sept. 14 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti will recognize several area firefighters during Saturday's Wattsburg Fire Department Awards Banquet.

The evening's activities will begin at 7 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 17, at the Social Hall on North Street in Wattsburg.

The Erie County Democrat will present citations to the following honorees: Fire Police Officer of the Year, Rookie of the Year, Junior Firefighter of the Year and Firefighter of the Year.

"We all recognize the valuable services provided by our emergency personnel. This annual awards banquet allows the Wattsburg department to recognize its own," Scrimenti said. "If it wasn't for these dedicated volunteers, we would not feel safe if an emergency situation developed. All of the members of the department deserve our thanks."

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HARRISBURG, Sept. 23 -- A bill to make more older Pennsylvanians eligible for the state's prescription drug program will be the subject of a House Aging and Youth Committee meeting Tuesday, Sept. 27, according to state Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie.

The measure (H.B. 2733) would increase the income limits for the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly, or PACE, program so that an additional 50,000 senior citizens could receive coverage. The income cap for single people would increase from \$13,000 to \$14,000, while the ceiling for couples would rise from \$16,200 to \$17,000.

"I fully support this bill because it would increase the number of senior citizens who could participate in PACE while implementing two mechanisms to prevent these increased costs from being passed onto taxpayers," said Scrimenti, a member of the committee. "We're hoping to move this bill out of the committee, and I've pledged my vote of support to this bill."

To pay for the increased costs the bill would present to PACE, the measure would increase the rebate the state receives from pharmaceutical companies for use of brand-name drugs from 15 percent to 17 percent. It also would require doctors to document why brand-name drugs are medically necessary when a generic, less-costly equivalent is available. Currently, doctors may require the use of brand-name drugs by merely signing their names to a specific blank on a prescription.

"I support the measure because it's generous to older Pennsylvanians but at the same time fiscally responsible," Scrimenti added. "As it stands, I guarantee my vote for this bill next Tuesday."

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HARRISBURG, Sept. 30 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti will hold a news conference at 10 a.m., Tuesday, Oct. 4 in the Main Capitol rotunda, Harrisburg, to unveil a proposal to help police officers statewide retrieve information on suspects in minutes instead of weeks.

"With the equipment they now use, our police officers can wait up to three weeks for a fingerprint comparison and criminal record check on suspects," said Scrimenti, D-Erie. "Because of this delay, suspects can give officers an alias and be set free into our communities to commit more crimes.

"I plan to introduce legislation to provide funding to the Pennsylvania State Police to purchase newly developed technology to link their high-tech fingerprint scanners with their computers so that municipal police departments can gain access to that information within minutes instead of weeks."

The fingerprint scanners now in use by the state police use Xerox technology to copy the fingerprints, a much more accurate system than inking. After prints are taken, they are compared to existing prints and a criminal background check is processed. Because Pennsylvania lacks the equipment necessary to link these scanners with the computers, this procedure can take two to three weeks to complete and the information is available only for criminal investigations. The new equipment would expedite the process and make that vital information available to local police departments.

Scrimenti will be joined by other members of the House of Representatives, including Rep. Thomas Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, who also has introduced crime-related bills.

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HARRISBURG, Oct. 4 -- The state House unanimously adopted a resolution Monday declaring October 1994 "Pennsylvania Grape Month," announced Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, sponsor of the measure.

"Pennsylvania's grape growers and wineries generate a significant amount of revenue every year," said Scrimenti. "The passage of the resolution occurs at the height of Pennsylvania's wine and grape festivals, which celebrate the history and importance of the trade. I'm very pleased with the unanimous approval."

The resolution (H.R. 391) noted the following statistics:

- ▶ Pennsylvania produces more than 70,000 tons of grapes annually on 14,000 acres of vineyards, cared for by 460 growers, enriching the state's economy by more than \$100 million annually.

- ▶ Pennsylvania is the fourth largest producer of grapes in the United States.

- ▶ The largest Concord Grape processing plant in the country is located in Pennsylvania.

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HARRISBURG, Oct. 5 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, has introduced legislation that would require the Public Utility Commission to consider the affordability of rate increases.

The bill (H.B. 3114) would require public utilities to prove that any rate increase request is affordable. Current law already requires that the increase be proved "just and reasonable."

"Considering the profits that utilities have seen in past years, I have a hard time believing their claims of increased costs and industry restructuring," said Scrimenti. "In my eyes, it is unreasonable and unjust to force consumers to accept utility rate increases that are unaffordable. What are consumers supposed to do? Choose between eating or paying utility bills? Choose between paying their mortgage or paying utility bills?"

The measure would define affordable as "allowing customers to pay their utility bills while maintaining an acceptable standard of living, taking into consideration the financial circumstances of customers and the community as indicated by factors such as household income, age, family size, climate and other factors bearing upon the cost of living in that particular community."

"Although consumers have a say in rate increases, I don't think the PUC really considers what some consumers face in light of constant rate increases," said Scrimenti. "If public utilities can't deal with this problem, then the legislature must take steps."

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HARRISBURG, Oct. 12 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti is monitoring progress on the Route 17 expansion project in northern Erie County and today issued a status report.

Scrimenti, D-Erie, said work crews are grubbing and clearing the Route 17 right-of-way this year, with grading scheduled to occur next year.

"Public hearings are a major part of this process," said Scrimenti. "These hearings are slated for next spring and will focus on funding aspects of the construction phase of the project. I encourage everyone to attend. I'll be sure to announce hearing dates as soon as I'm notified."

PennDOT will begin an 18-month reevaluation next month of the area's 10-year-old Environmental Impact Statement. The final design process, expected to begin in spring 1996, should take six months to one year to complete. Expansion of Route 17 to a four-lane highway should occur in 1997.

"Better roads are one of the key factors in economic development for our area. Interstate 90 is a major east-west route, but it needs connecting highways with sufficient capacity to support business expansion in nearby areas," Scrimenti said.

"Improving Erie County's connection to New York's Southern Tier Expressway, by way of Route 17, will be a major boost to our transportation network."

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