

NEWS RELEASE

State Senator Jane Clare Orie MAJORITY WHIP

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Harrisburg Happenings

A report on the Legislative Session week of February 1, 2010

by Senator Jane C. Orie, Majority Whip (R-40)

Senate Approves Bill on Community Fundraisers

The Senate unanimously approved common sense legislation last Monday that will allow your local church, volunteer fire company, veterans organization and school booster club to continue with homemade “bake sale” fundraisers. Last year, the Department of Agriculture cited a Beaver County church for selling homemade baked goods prepared by ladies of the church at a Lenten fish fry.

Senate Bill 828 will allow these organizations to sell homemade baked goods so long as they post a notice letting people know they are “homemade” – made at a private residence that is not licensed or inspected by the PA Department of Agriculture. SB 828 is now headed to the State House for consideration.

I am a co-sponsor of this measure eliminating the ability of the Department of Agriculture to cite non-profit community groups such as volunteer fire companies, churches, and school booster clubs for selling home-baked food at fundraisers.

Legislation to impose court costs on defendants clears Senate

Senate Bill 1169, which would require defendants to repay their court costs, was unanimously approved by the Senate last Wednesday.

The basis for the legislation, which I co-sponsored and strongly support, was a recent Commonwealth Court ruling involving Mark Spotz, who is on death row at a state correctional institution for a 1995 multi-county murder spree. Spotz filed suit against the Commonwealth for deducting 20 percent of the money coming into his inmate account to pay the costs of his prosecution. He claimed that the trial court's sentencing order did not include any specific language assessing fines, costs or restitution. Act 84 of 1998 provided for such deductions, but in their ruling on the Spotz case, the Commonwealth Court held that Act 84 required the court to specifically impose these costs through an order. The Commonwealth Court further held that the inmate could potentially seek repayment of money already paid.

SB 1169 would statutorily establish a procedure for the imposition of costs. The bill now heads to the House of Representatives for consideration.

Committee backs bill helping veterans homes

Last Tuesday, the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee approved a bill intended to alleviate the nursing shortage in Pennsylvania's six veterans' homes.

Senate Bill 1076 would exempt direct care positions in veterans' homes operated by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) from the Civil Service Act. This change in Civil Service status of veterans' home nurses would enable the facilities to make faster selections of personnel, place them in positions of service to our veterans more quickly, and hire individuals with the most current training and enthusiasm for new careers.

The DMVA operates the following facilities: the Delaware Valley Veterans Home in Philadelphia, the Hollidaysburg Veterans Home in Hollidaysburg, the Gino J. Merli Veterans Center in Scranton, the Pennsylvania Soldiers and Sailors Home in Erie, the Southeastern Veterans Center in Spring City, and the Southwestern Veterans Center in Pittsburgh.