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Auditor General DePasquale Outlines Plans to Tackle Challenges Facing Residents, Government to Improve Accountability, Transparency

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today outlined his major audit initiatives and special reports for 2018 that will help tackle many of the challenges facing Pennsylvania government and residents while improving accountability and transparency.

“In the past five years my audits have touched the lives of every single Pennsylvanian and identified more than half a billion dollars in misspent or potentially recoverable state funds,” DePasquale said.

“Just last month my audit of the Red Lion School District found that the district is owed \$456,211 in transportation funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. That half a million dollars means a lot to students, teachers and taxpayers.

“My office does thousands of audits like that each year, audits that have a tangible and positive impact on people,” he said. “Despite a 7 percent cut to our budget—the largest cut of auditors in all 50 states—and having the agency’s lowest number of employees in over 50 years, my team continues to produce excellent audits and is prepared to tackle the full agenda I have for this year.”

This year, DePasquale will announce the results of major performance audits of:

- The Lancaster School District,
- Aspira of Pennsylvania Charter School in Philadelphia,
- PennDOT, and
- The state’s workforce development system which touches five state agencies.

Audit teams also are starting or preparing to start major performance audits of:

- The Allegheny Port Authority,
- The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission,
- School districts in Coatesville, Reading, Susquehanna Township, and Wilkinsburg,
- Various aspects of the Department of State’s voter registry to ensure integrity of the commonwealth voting system, and
- The Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Two special reports are underway:

- An Action Plan for Children and Youth Agencies will follow up on audits of the state’s ChildLine system and the auditor general’s “State of the Child” report, and
- Commonsense measures that will reduce firearm injuries and deaths without legislative action.

“Meanwhile, billions of dollars in state spending by the General Assembly and municipal authorities are exempt from independent audit oversight,” DePasquale said.

Stop Taxpayer-Funded Sexual Harassment Settlements

“I have always been clear about this, no taxpayer money should be used to pay settlements for sexual harassment complaints against elected officials,” DePasquale said.

“Based on my team’s excellent work cracking down on sexual harassment at the Philadelphia Parking Authority, I offered those services to the General Assembly.

“My team is preparing to review sexual harassment policies in the executive branch while I await a response from the General Assembly,” he said. “I realize that some legislators may not welcome a full-on audit of legislative accounts, I am willing to conduct an audit limited to reviewing the various sexual harassment policies and settlement payouts.”

In April, DePasquale sent a letter to legislative leaders offering his office’s audit services to review legislative accounts. Rep. Bob Freeman and a bi-partisan group of legislators introduced and sponsored legislation (House Bill 1257) to authorize the Department of the Auditor General to audit the General Assembly and legislative agencies. HB 1257 has been stuck in the Finance Committee since April 20.

Ready to Audit Municipal Authorities

“After five years, the number one consistent request that I receive — and am legally barred from conducting — is to audit municipal authorities,” DePasquale said.

This week he is sending a letter to legislators encouraging their support for Senate Bill 597 which would allow the Department of the Auditor General to audit municipal authorities, closing a major gap in accountability and transparency in municipal water, parking and sewer authorities.

“The lack of state review of authorities that manage billions of dollars, and provide critical services such as water supply, does a great disservice to Pennsylvanians,” he said.

“When the Philadelphia Parking Authority and Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority responded to public pressure to allow my team in, we uncovered wide-ranging problems that led to dramatic reforms at both entities,” he said. “By authorizing my department to conduct financial and performance audits of various municipal authorities, SB 597 would give my qualified auditors the ability to dig deep so we can recommend changes that could cut costs and potentially reduce the need for the authorities to increase fees for the residents they serve.”

DePasquale noted that the first authorities where he would send his team include:

- the Scranton Sewer Authority,
- the Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County, and
- the Greater Erie Community Action Committee.

Regulate and Tax Marijuana

“While December’s monthly revenue came in above what was estimated, the commonwealth continues to face significant budget challenges,” DePasquale said. “We cannot keep borrowing or raiding special funds just to keep state government operating.

“And while belt-tightening is certainly in order, we need a dependable revenue stream to help ensure the commonwealth can continue to serve its citizens.

“That is one of the reasons why I will continue to push for Pennsylvania to regulate and tax marijuana. There is no reason we should not benefit from a booming industry expected nationally to be worth more than \$20 billion and employ more than 280,000 people in the next decade,” he said, noting that according to the most recent Franklin and Marshall College poll, 59 percent of Pennsylvania voters support legalization of marijuana, up from only 22 percent in 2006.

Continue Fighting Opioid Crisis

“Last month Gov. Wolf signed legislation recommended in my audits on Pennsylvania’s response to the opioid crisis,” DePasquale said. “Now the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs can license or certify recovery homes that receive public funds or referrals from state, county, or federal agencies.

“That is progress, but we must scientifically approach the opioid crisis as a medical problem. This is another area where Pennsylvanians would benefit from legalizing and taxing marijuana. The medical community has found marijuana can help reduce opioid addiction,” he said, noting that the opioid crisis is affecting children.

“As I travel around the state meeting with Child and Youth Services caseworkers, I hear at every turn that the opioid crisis is having a major negative impact on the children they are trying to help. When we find a way to help parents to avoid or overcome opioid addiction we will also be helping thousands of children. Properly regulated and used, marijuana could be a part of that solution.”

Eliminate Untested Rape Kits

“I will continue pushing to resolve Pennsylvania’s backlog of untested rape kits,” he said. “The Department of Health reports that approximately 1,200 kits have been awaiting testing for 12 months or more. That’s a significant decrease from the roughly 1,900 untested kits reported in 2016.

“That means almost 700 people received answers in the last year about whether evidence contained in their rape kits could help them achieve justice.

“The bad news is that it will likely take years to effectively eliminate Pennsylvania’s backlog at the current pace, especially if we continue to rely solely on federal grants to address the problem,” he said, noting that House Bill 1821 which was approved by the House last month would implement several recommendations from my 2016 special report on untested rape kits.

“I urge the Senate to consider HB1821 as soon as senators return to Harrisburg and to pass it to help ensure the timely receipt and testing of all rape kits,” DePasquale said. “I will send a letter to Gov. Wolf this week with information on how governors in 13 other states are funding the testing of their backlogged rape kits.”

Auditor General DePasquale posts all audit reports, along with his travel expenses and the agency’s monthly expenses, online at: www.PaAuditor.gov.

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