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Smythe Seeks to Reduce Financial Barriers to Attend Police Training Academies
If elected State Representative, Smythe says he will introduce legislation to provide educational grants to low and moderate-income individuals

HARRISBURG, PA – Bob Smythe, the Republican candidate for State Representative in Pennsylvania 165th Legislative District, announced today a proposal to provide financial assistance for individuals to attend Police Training Academies in Pennsylvania. Smythe said that, if elected, he will introduce legislation to create a new grant program administered by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) to reduce financial barriers for individuals who wish to enter a career in law enforcement.

Under Pennsylvania law, all individuals who wish to become a municipal police officer in Pennsylvania must complete a 22-week basic training program at a certified police academy. Due to budget constraints, the vast majority of police departments – both in Delaware County and across Pennsylvania -- require an individual to have already obtained their police academy certification before they can apply for a position and be hired. In Delaware County, the exceptions are the Chester City Police Department and Upper Darby Police Department, which hire an individual first and then cover their tuition cost.

“Many law enforcement officials acknowledge that they face major challenges in recruiting, hiring, and retaining accredited candidates,” said Bob Smythe, who works as a K-12 educator and whose father has served in law enforcement for nearly 50 years. “I want to reduce the financial barriers for individuals who want to join the ranks of law enforcement but lack the economic means to attend an academy. This will provide police departments with a more diverse pool of candidates that is representative of all socio-economic levels.”

If elected, Smythe said he will introduce legislation that authorizes the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) to provide grants to cover up to 75 percent of the cost of tuition to attend a certified police academy. Smythe noted that PHEAA already has in place a grant program that provides need-based awards for students who major in subjects related to specific sectors, including Energy, Health, Advanced Materials & Diversified Manufacturing, and Agriculture/Food Production. Known as the Pennsylvania Targeted Industry Program (PA-TIP), it provides need-based awards that cover up to 75 percent of an individual’s educational costs, including tuition, books, fees, and supplies. The legislation Smythe plans to introduce would expand this list of “targeted industries” to include law enforcement.

“My proposed PHEAA grant program will alleviate the financial barriers that prevent too many individuals from pursuing a career in law enforcement,” said Smythe. “If a member of law enforcement is putting their life on the line to keep our communities and families safe, the last thing they should be worried about is how they are going to repay their student loan.”