

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

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SENATE BACK IN SESSION; SPECIAL ELECTIONS HELD

Over the past two weeks, both the House and Senate were in session, signaling the start of the spring push for the state budget process. On March 25, special elections were held to fill vacant legislative seats. In Senate District 36, which covers Lancaster County, Democrat James Malone won the seat previously held by Republican Senator Ryan Aument. Despite this shift, Republicans retain control of the Senate. In House District 35, which spans southwestern Pennsylvania, Democrat Dan Goughnour, secured a victory, allowing democrats to maintain their majority in the State House.

Several legislative proposals with potential impacts on counties have been considered during this time as well.

Senate Bill 349: Decommissioning of Solar Energy Facilities

Senate Bill 349, sponsored by Senator Gene Yaw (R-Bradford), establishes decommissioning and bonding requirements for developers of commercial solar energy facilities in Pennsylvania. Under the bill, companies entering into solar energy facility agreements must submit a decommissioning plan, provide proof of financial assurance to the county recorder of deeds, and notify the surface property owner. Additionally, facility owners leasing land for solar projects are required to restore property to a condition comparable to its pre-construction state, including the replacement of topsoil on agricultural land. The bill enforces uniform statewide regulations, preempting any county, municipal, or local government ordinances that conflict with its provisions. Senate Bill 349 has passed out of the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee and is now on second consideration in the Senate.

Senate Bill 138: HazMat Eligibility for Local Tax Credits

Senate Bill 138, sponsored by Senator Doug Mastriano (R-Adams), allows counties, school districts, councils of government, and municipalities to extend tax exemptions for first responders to volunteer hazardous materials (HazMat) responders. This bill seeks to provide volunteer HazMat team members have access to the same benefits if local governments choose to include them. This bill passed out of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committee and is now on first consideration on the Senate floor.

Senate Bill 101: Workforce Development Data Sharing

Senate Bill 101, sponsored by Senator Camera Bartolotta (R-Beaver), enhances data accessibility for local workforce development boards, on which county commissioners serve. This bill requires the Department of Labor and Industry's Center for Workforce Information & Analysis to share existing wage and new hire data with these boards by directing the center to create a public data dashboard that allows users to filter workforce data by location, occupation, industry, demographics, and other key metrics. The center is further required to provide free technical assistance to local workforce boards and other government agencies to ensure they can effectively use the dashboard for workforce planning and decision-making. By addressing the current limitations in data sharing, the legislation would ensure workforce development boards have real-time, easily accessible data to support informed and effective service delivery. In collaboration with the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association, CCAP submitted a letter of support for the bill to the Senate Labor and Industry Committee. The bill passed out of committee and is now on first consideration in the Senate.

House Bill 369: Expanding Land Bank Eligibility

House Bill 369, introduced by Rep. Robert Freeman (D-Northampton), removes population thresholds that currently limit which municipalities can establish land banks. By expanding eligibility to municipalities of all sizes, the bill would give more local governments the ability to tackle vacant and abandoned properties through land banks. Counties are included in the definition of "municipalities" for the purpose of this legislation. This bill passed out of the House chamber last week and was referred to the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee.

Only the House will be in session next week, and further action on key legislation impacting counties is anticipated. CCAP will continue to track developments and provide updates as they unfold.

SENATE HEARING ON TRANSPARENCY LAWS

On Monday, March 24, the Senate Intergovernmental Operations Committee, chaired by Senator Jarrett Coleman (R-Lehigh), held a hearing to examine the use of messaging apps by public agencies, officials, and employees that have self-deletion capabilities. These apps, which automatically delete communications – sometimes within a day or less – raise concerns regarding compliance with Pennsylvania's Right-to-Know Law (RTKL) and the Open Meetings Law (Sunshine Act).

Frank Mazza, Director of Government Relations for CCAP, **testified** that county officials and staff receive education and training on their responsibilities under state transparency laws. He emphasized that county officials work closely with solicitors and staff to address questions related to record retention policies, Right-to-Know requests, and compliance with the Sunshine Act when conducting official county business. Additionally, it was noted that counties recognize the critical responsibility of maintaining records of government actions and public transactions. This includes preserving records for future generations, ensuring accessibility for individuals, and promoting governmental accountability and transparency. At the same time, counties acknowledge the need to balance public access with privacy and security concerns.

For several legislative sessions, counties have prioritized updates to public transparency laws, including the RTKL and the Sunshine Act. These updates aim to modernize regulations while addressing practical challenges related to compliance. Moving forward, we look forward to collaborating with stakeholders and the General Assembly to implement meaningful reforms to enhance government transparency, improve agencies' ability to comply with the law efficiently, and reduce resource and financial burdens in the process.

FEDERAL COURT RULING ON DATING MAIL-IN BALLOTS

On Monday, March 31, U.S. District Judge Susan Baxter ruled in federal court that the provision requiring voters to date their mail-in ballots infringes on the Constitutional right to vote under the First Amendment. This is the latest **ruling** of a series that has resulted from enactment of Act 77, which permitted Pennsylvania voters to vote-by-mail without an excuse.

Since the enactment of Act 77, counties continue to identify areas of the Election Code that need to be addressed to ensure that they can fulfill their responsibility to effectively administer elections. The lack of clarity around these provisions in the Election Code continue to create challenges for counties, putting many at risk of litigation due to ambiguous legislative language – addressing undated or misdated ballots is just one of the provisions in the Election Code that has become the focus point for legal debate. This court decision shows that legislation is required to address unclear provisions within the Election Code and provide more guidance to counties to ensure they can efficiently run elections in a uniform manner.

Counties take their responsibility for the fair, secure, and accurate administration of Pennsylvania's elections very seriously. As such, it is critical that counties are involved in discussions on any election law reforms at the earliest possible point to develop positive, meaningful, and effective election policy.

LEGISLATURE RECOGNIZING LOCAL GOVERNMENT DAY, WEEK

Ahead of Local Government Week in Pennsylvania, both chambers within the Pennsylvania General Assembly are preparing to recognize local governments in Pennsylvania via **Senate Resolution 52** and **House Resolution 118**, respectively. These resolutions were recently introduced by Senator Dawn Keefer (R-York) and Senator Patty Kim (D-Dauphin), Chairs of the Senate Local Government Committee, and Rep. Robert Freeman (D-Northampton) and Rep. Brett Miller (R-Lancaster), Chairs of the House Local Government Committee. These resolutions designate the week of April 14-18 as Local Government Week and April 16 as Local Government Day in Pennsylvania.

April is also National County Government Month, where counties will honor the county workforce, educate residents about local programs and services, and celebrate the county role in the intergovernmental partnership. Additional details are available on the **NACo website**.

Counties can offer their recognition by adopting a resolution honoring National County Government Month and Pennsylvania Local Government Week; a **sample** is available on the CCAP **Legislative Action Center**.

IFO RELEASES MARCH REVENUE UPDATE

The Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) released the monthly revenue **update** for March 2025, showing that General Fund collections for the month totaled \$6.25 billion, which is \$27 million (0.4%) higher than the IFO's official estimate. In particular, collections from personal income tax exceeded monthly projections by \$26.6 million. March 2025 collections were \$34 million (-0.5%) lower than during the same month of the previous year.

Fiscal year-to-date (FYTD) state revenues for FY 2024-2025 through the end of March continue to outperform the IFO's official estimate by \$171 million (0.5%) for a total of \$33.22 billion. Additionally, year-to-date collections are \$423 million (1.3%) higher compared to this time last year.

NACO 90th ANNUAL CONFERENCE – REGISTRATION OPEN

The National Association of Counties (NACo) 90th annual conference is coming to Philadelphia from July 11-14, offering a unique opportunity for county leaders to exchange best practices, shape NACo's federal policy agenda, and elect the association's leadership. This year's conference will feature engaging discussions on key issues such as resilience, land use, disaster response, workforce development, behavioral health, and financial management.

With the conference taking place right here in Pennsylvania, we look forward to a strong showing from CCAP members to highlight the leadership and innovation happening across our counties.

For registration and more details about the conference, please visit the [NACo website](#).

CCAP RESOLUTIONS PROCESS

Beginning in May, CCAP policy committees will be holding their annual virtual meetings to consider resolutions amending the **Pennsylvania County Platform**, CCAP's comprehensive policy document determined by counties. All CCAP members are invited to review the Platform and to send any proposed resolutions for additions, changes or deletions to CCAP Government Relations staff at PAcountiesGR@pacounties.org, or to discuss them with CCAP policy committee chairs. A membership discussion and vote on the resolutions will be held in conjunction with the CCAP Annual Conference in early August. An overview of the process, timeline and related materials can be found on the CCAP Policy [webpage](#).

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