

# LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

## COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA THE **VOICE** OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

### IN THIS EDITION:

- **House Advances Election Reforms During Dual Session Week**
- **Counties Offer Testimony in Support of HB 1257**
- **County Pension Law Amendment Advances to Senate**
- **Reentry Bill Awaits Consideration on House Floor**
- **Prevailing Wage Moves Forward in House**
- **Federal Update: White House Releases FY 2026 Budget Request**

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## HOUSE ADVANCES ELECTION REFORMS DURING DUAL SESSION WEEK

Both the House and Senate convened for session this week, marking the last week for the month that members will be in the Capitol. Legislators will return to Harrisburg in June to work on the 2025-26 State Budget and other legislative priorities. During this week, the House moved multiple pieces of legislation that would make significant reforms to the administration of elections in the Commonwealth, if enacted.

### **House Bill 280 – Open Primaries**

**House Bill 280**, introduced by Rep. Jared Solomon (D-Philadelphia), would amend the Election Code to allow registered voters who have selected "none," "no affiliation," or wrote in a clear preference to be unaffiliated or independent from a political party to vote in primary elections in Pennsylvania. At polling places, these voters would be able to choose which party's primary to vote in. For mail-in or absentee voting, they would indicate their party choice on the ballot application. Their choice in one primary would not preclude the voter from choosing a different political party in later primary elections.

While CCAP did not provide an official position on this legislation, counties did express concerns regarding the implementation and procedures outlined in the bill that require further clarification from the General Assembly.

This legislation was reported out of the House State Government Committee and tabled on May 13.

### **House Bill 771 – Implementing Voter Identification (ID)**

**House Bill 771**, introduced by Rep. Thomas Mehaffie (R – Dauphin), would amend the

Election Code to require all voters who vote in person to present proof of identification to an election officer before they can be permitted to vote. Forms of voter ID that would conform to the “photo identification” requirement would include the following:

- A driver’s license or identification card issued by the Commonwealth
- A document issued by the Federal Government
- A document from an agency of the armed forces of the United States or their reserve components
- A document issued by a county, municipality, or school district within Pennsylvania
- A firearm permit
- A student ID card
- An employee ID card issued by a private or public employer

If a voter does not have photo identification, they would have the opportunity to present an alternative form of identification that includes their name, if it substantially conforms to the name on the voter rolls. If they cannot provide any identification, a qualified voter from the same district may vouch for their identity, with both individuals signing an affirmation. If no form of identification is available and no one can vouch for them, the voter may affirm their own identity by signing an affirmation.

This legislation received second consideration by the House and was re-committed to the House Appropriations Committee for further consideration on May 12. The bill awaits third and final consideration by the full House of Representatives.

### **House Bill 1396 – Omnibus Election Legislation**

**House Bill 1396**, introduced by Speaker Joanna McClinton (D-Philadelphia), is an omnibus bill that would make several broad amendments to the Election Code. Reforms in the legislation include, but are not limited to:

- Authorizing seven days of prec canvassing
- Requiring the use of ballot drop boxes
- Implementing early in-person voting
- Moving the mail-in ballot application deadline back from one week before the election to 14 days prior to the election
- Removing the requirement for a voter to date the outer envelope for a mail-in ballot – they will only be required to sign the declaration on the envelope
- Permitting the practice of ballot curing
- Requiring counties to provide prepaid postage for mail-in ballots
- Amending the permanent mail-in voting list to require that voters on the list receive a mail-in ballot, not just the application for a mail-in ballot, for all elections during the year until they remove themselves from the list

The House passed House Bill 1396 on May 12 with a **vote** of 102-101. The legislation will now be sent to the Senate for further consideration.

County governments are encouraged by the House starting conversations to bring much-needed reforms to Pennsylvania’s election law and improve the administration of elections here in the Commonwealth. Counties take their responsibility to administer free, fair, and efficient elections very seriously, and it is paramount that the General Assembly work collaboratively with counties to ensure that changes to the Election Code can be properly implemented and work for all counties across the state. CCAP will continue to monitor developments on these bills and future election reform proposals, and we are eager to partner with the legislature and administration to implement reforms that will ultimately improve the administration of elections for counties and voters alike.

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## **COUNTIES OFFER TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1257**

On May 12, Brian Hoffman, Sullivan County Commissioner and co-chair of the CCAP Emergency Management and Veterans Affairs Committee, **testified** before the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee in support of **HB1257**, introduced by Rep. Tarah Probst (D-Monroe/Pike). The legislation proposes a

constitutional amendment to expand Pennsylvania's Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption program.

Commissioner Hoffman emphasized counties' strong support for HB 1257, which aims to make the exemption for disabled veterans more equitable and accessible. Counties have long advocated for updates to the program to better reflect the needs of veterans while balancing the fiscal responsibilities of local governments.

Counties specifically support the following proposed changes in HB 1257:

- Removing the requirement that a veteran must have served in a war or conflict
- Extending the exemption to spouses of service members who were killed in the line of duty, declared missing in action, or who would have been deemed disabled but passed away before an official determination was made.

Counties remain committed to supporting veterans, both through the delivery of direct services and through informed public policy. They will continue to monitor the legislation as it progresses and work with legislators and stakeholders to ensure it strikes the right balance between eligibility and fairness, while continuing to advocate for thoughtful approaches that recognize the fiscal impact on county governments.

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## COUNTY PENSION LAW AMENDMENT ADVANCES TO SENATE

On May 5, [House Bill 754](#), introduced by Representative Patrick Harkins (D-Erie), passed the House and now awaits consideration in the Senate. The bill amends the County Pension Law to give county pension boards greater flexibility in granting cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) to retirees. Under current law, any COLA must be retroactive to the last time an adjustment was made and must match the full increase in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). This often results in large, one-time increases that can place significant strain on county pension funds. House Bill 754 would allow boards to authorize smaller, more incremental COLAs instead, helping to preserve long-term fund solvency while still providing meaningful support to retirees. Counties support this reform, which strikes a thoughtful balance between fiscal responsibility and the needs of retired public servants and urge the Senate to advance the bill.

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## REENTRY BILL AWAITS CONSIDERATION ON HOUSE FLOOR

On May 5, [House Bill 282](#), introduced by Representative Tim Briggs (D-Montgomery), passed out of the House Judiciary Committee and now awaits further consideration on the House floor. This bill proposes amendments to the Human Services Code to authorize a reentry program under the state's medical assistance program for incarcerated individuals. Currently, when an individual receiving medical assistance becomes incarcerated, their benefits are temporally suspended and only reactivated upon release. The bill maintains that structure but allows for new provision subject to federal approval.

The proposed reentry program would enable eligible incarcerated individuals to access certain medical services prior to release that would be covered by their Medicaid, including substance use disorder treatment and case management services. The program would be voluntary for counties, which could apply to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to have their correctional institutions participate. This bill aims to ease the transition from incarceration to community life by ensuring continuity of care and support for individuals reentering society. Counties recognize the importance of improving reentry outcomes and support this legislation as a tool to strengthen community health and reduce recidivism. Counties remain committed to patterning with the General Assembly to advance this bill through the legislative process.

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## PREVAILING WAGE MOVES FORWARD IN HOUSE

On May 6, [House Bill 846](#), introduced by Representative Jason Dawkins (D-Philadelphia), passed out of the House Labor and Industry committee and now awaits further consideration on the House floor. The legislation proposes to expand the scope of the Pennsylvania Prevailing Wage Act by including custom fabrication and HVAC duct cleaning in its coverage, and by prohibiting the use of split wage rates for workers on public projects.

While this bill aims to enhance worker protections, counties are concerned about the growing fiscal pressures it would place on local governments. Expanding prevailing wage requirements to include offsite custom fabrication would significantly raise the cost of public infrastructure projects- at a time when counties are already grappling with tight budgets and rising construction costs. This could lead to fewer projects being completed and critical community improvements being delayed or abandoned altogether. Counties instead urge the General Assembly to prioritize modernizing a key component of the Prevailing Wage Act: the \$25,000 project threshold, which has remained unchanged since the law was enacted in the 1960s. In today's economy, this outdated threshold captures nearly all public construction projects, regardless of size or complexity. Raising the threshold to reflect inflation and current market conditions is a top priority for counties and would ensure that taxpayer dollars are used more efficiently and effectively to meet the growing needs of Pennsylvania's communities. Counties remained committed to working with the legislature and the Administration to enact reforms that balance fair wages with responsible stewardship of public funds.

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## FEDERAL UPDATE: WHITE HOUSE RELEASES FY 2026 BUDGET REQUEST

On May 2, the White House released the [President's Budget for Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2026](#), outlining the administration's proposals for budgetary spending for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025. The budget requests cutting non-defense discretionary funding by 23 percent, amounting to \$163 billion, and proposes a 7.6 percent spending cut to discretionary spending. This proposal reflects the administration's priorities but is unlikely to be passed in its current form and will need to be approved by Congress to be implemented.

NACo has compiled a breakdown of what changes would most directly impact county governments and residents. To read NACo's analysis on the President's budget request, click [here](#).

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