

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

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COUNTY PRIORITIES SPOTLIGHT: SENATE POLICY COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON ELECTION REFORM

On September 25, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee convened a public hearing focused on mail-in and absentee ballot access, featuring testimonies from election and county officials regarding Pennsylvania's electoral process. The committee underscored the significance of the upcoming November election and the essential role of state government in enhancing election procedures.

In his [testimony](#) to the committee, Union County Commissioner Jeff Reber, who also serves as chair of CCAP's Elections Reform Committee, addressed the challenges counties have faced since the implementation of mail-in ballots under Act 77 of 2019 and the need for clearer legislative language to improve election administration. In addition, Reber outlined other county priorities, which include allowing counties to begin prec canvassing mail-in ballots before Election Day and moving the deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot to 15 days before the election. As additional election legislation is developed, counties must be at the table to ensure existing practices and procedures are accurately addressed and improved.

ELECTION RESOURCES FOR 2024

In the lead up to the November election, the Department of State (DOS) is working to promote public confidence in elections and educate voters about the elections in 2024. To support this mission, the DOS has developed a comprehensive range of resources aimed at informing the public about voting procedures and the election process.

- **Voter Education Toolkit:** Comprehensive materials to inform voters about the election process
- **Mail Ballot Availability:** Clear details on how to access mail-in ballots
- **Election Process Transparency:** Two county elections official and two IT directors share their experience on how the checks in the system work.
- **Instructional Videos:** Visual guides on how to properly utilize mail-in ballots, including a **Spanish** version for broader accessibility.

Additionally, CCAP, in partnership with Penn State Extension, has create an **Election Process Quick Guide** to further support counties in educating the engaging the public. This guide offers an easy-to-understand overview of critical topics such as election administration, security measures, the role of poll workers and the importance of elections. It also includes information for first-time voters in Pennsylvania, equipping counties to enhance voter awareness and foster secure, informed voting practices.

SENATE POLICY COMMITTEE EXAMINES PENNSYLVANIA'S PROPERTY REASSESSMENT SYSTEM

On October 3, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee held a hearing to examine the current state of Pennsylvania's property reassessment system.

Lisa Schaefer, CCAP Executive Director, delivered **testimony** on behalf of the association, noting that counties are fully responsible for administering and maintaining the real property assessment system for all local governments – counties, municipalities and school districts. This involves establishing assessment rolls, valuing properties, hearing appeals, and managing programs such as homestead exclusions and Clean and Green. Schaefer underscored that achieving fairness and equity in the current system is challenging due to both the administrative structure and statutory framework, and counties acknowledge there is a need for reforms.

As conversations continue around whether to implement a mandated reassessment schedule for counties, CCAP urged two crucial issues be considered. First, any required assessment timeline must recognize that the differing factors that impact property values across the state will create differing needs for the frequency of reassessments. Second, counties consistently stress the need for financial support to manage the ongoing costs of maintain the assessment system and conducting countywide reassessments, which could include state funding, local funding options or support by the other local governments that also depend on updated property values for their tax bases.

Counties are prepared to collaborate with the General Assembly to modernize the property assessment system and update the laws governing it. At the same time, counties strongly believe that any reform efforts should also include a comprehensive review of the entire property tax system, including areas such as the impact of tax exemptions on the tax base.

HOUSE ADVANCES LEGISLATION FOR TOURISM IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

House Bill 1891, introduced by Rep. Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz (D-Berks), was recently amended and advanced to third consideration on the House floor. This bill seeks to allow counties to establish Tourism Improvement Districts (TIDs), which are geographical areas where businesses, primarily hotels, would be assessed special fees to fund tourism promotion and improvements. This special assessment fee would be based on a formula, such a revenue or occupancy rates and the fees would be managed by tourism improvement district management associations, which are nonprofit entities or authorities. These organizations must operate in accordance with a tourism improvement plan that has been approved by the county.

Counties have a role in establishing and managing TIDs, including the responsibility of managing and overseeing the collection of special assessment fees, offering opportunities for counties to foster partnerships with the tourism sector. In collaboration with the stakeholders drafting this bill, CCAP proposed a set of comprehensive amendments, which were successfully incorporated in the recent action on the House floor.

SENATE LABOR & INDUSTRY COMMITTEE MOVES PREVAILING WAGE LEGISLATION

The Senate Labor and Industry Committee approved with amendment **House Bill 2153**, sponsored by Rep. Jason Dawkins (D-Philadelphia), that would update the Pennsylvania Prevailing Wage Act to require prevailing wage rates be paid to workers for off-site fabrication and HVAC duct cleaning. The bill previously included language that would prohibit the payment of “split rates” – that is, when a worker is paid two different rates for the same job on the same day – but this language was removed by the amendment. It passed in committee. HB 2153 was voted out of committee **unanimously** as amended and is now before the full Senate for consideration.

However, this bill fails to address a longstanding concern for counties and local governments, which is the outdated threshold for paying prevailing wages under the act. Expanding the scope of a public project under the Prevailing Wage Act to include custom fabrication off-site further compounds the existing struggles local governments have in stretching limited tax dollars on critical public projects. Counties joined their other local government partners in opposing the legislation, arguing that the bill should first address their longstanding concern regarding the outdated threshold for paying prevailing wage rates under the Act, which is a top **priority** for counties in 2024. Counties and their local government partners stand ready to work together with the Shapiro Administration and the General Assembly to finally address this longstanding concern for local governments across Pennsylvania.

PLANNED COMMUNITY AND RECORDING FEES BILLS CONSIDERED IN COMMITTEE

In the House Local Government Committee, **House Bill 2240**, sponsored by Rep. Tim Brennan (D-Bucks), and **House Bill 2497**, sponsored by Rep. Joe Ciresi (D-Montgomery), both advanced to the House floor after passing out of committee. Counties have indicated their opposition to both bills.

House Bill 2240 would require county planning commissions to compile and report specific data on common interest ownership communities in an annual report. Counties have concerns with the bill, specifically the challenges and effort required to gather this information compared to the actual benefit counties would derive from it. While some argue that the information mandated by this legislation is readily available through the county planning commission’s review of development plans and the associated condominium association declarations filed with counties, the reality is that extracting the specific information sought by this bill from these documents is not a straightforward process. Even if it were, it would be helpful only to gathering information about new or updated community associations, not existing ones nor maintenance of the data. Counties argue that the bill only creates unnecessary burdens with no public policy justification for requiring the collection of this information.

House Bill 2497 would require counties to impose a flat fee per uniform parcel identifier (UPI) number for property records and land parcels, while also capping the total fee for recording a document. Counties oppose this legislation due to concerns about the potential impact of the arbitrary flat fees and caps on local revenue generation, as they do not account for the actual work that goes into recording these lengthy documents and would be a hindrance to covering county administrative expenses. Expecting counties to handle a large volume of paperwork without allowing them to collect additional fees associated with an increased demand in work will cause major cost challenges when counties have no means to cover the costs of the work their recorders perform.

FCC TO VOTE ON GEOROUTING IMPLEMENTATION FOR 988

On September 25, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline **announced** the launch of georouting, a process that routes cellular phone calls to 988 contact centers based on the caller’s approximate location rather than their area code. The rollout of this new system began in early September with two major U.S. wireless carriers, which together handle nearly half of all wireless calls to the 988 Lifeline. This advancement is expected to enhance response times and ensure that callers are connected to the nearest available crisis center for more localized support.

The Federal Communications Commission will vote on final rules to formally adopt this georouting process at its October 17 open meeting. If approved, the rules will require all U.S. wireless carriers to implement georouting, with a 30-day compliance window for nationwide providers and a 24-month timeline for smaller, non-nationwide carriers.

Currently, more than 200 contact centers across the country provide support through the 988 Lifeline network. By connecting to the closest available center, georouting ensure more timely and appropriate local interventions. Unlike geolocation, georouting does not provide precise location data, preserving the caller’s privacy while ensuring they receive essential localized support.

PENNSYLVANIA BROADBAND AUTHORITY RELEASES BEAD PROGRAM GUIDELINES

In June 2023, Pennsylvania received more than \$1.16 billion in funding from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) through the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program. The Pennsylvania Broadband Authority (PBDA) recently released the program [guidelines](#) that outline the requirements for participation in the BEAD program.

The BEAD application process is divided into two grant periods, with the following key milestones:

- **September 2024: Preliminary list of Broadband Serviceable Area established. Program guidelines, application templates, recorded webinars, and application FAQs posted on [BEAD Program Page](#).**
- **October 2024: Final list of BEAD eligible locations announced and Period 1 applications open.**
- **December 2024: Period 1 of BEAD applications close.**
- **January 2025: BEAD Period 1 application review.**
- **February 2025: BEAD Period 1 provisional awards announced. BEAD Period 2 applications open.**
- **April 2025: BEAD Period 2 applications close. Period 2 application review.**
- **May 2025: Period 2 provisional awards announced. Draft of Final Proposal.**

After both Period 1 and Period 2 of the program have concluded, PBDA will draft its final proposal and release it for public comment before submission to NTIA. Award notices will be issued once NITA approves PBDA's final proposal. PBDA further updated the [Pennsylvania Broadband Map](#) to include Broadband Serviceable Areas eligible under the BEAD program. No pre-qualification is required for applications. PBDA will hold three office hours on October 10, November 12, and December 11.

NACO WEBINAR ON STATE FUNDING FOR COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS SYSTEM

The National Association of Counties (NACO), in partnership with The Pew Charitable Trust and the MacArthur Foundation, is hosting a webinar focused on state funding for county behavioral health crisis services.

During this session, speakers will highlight state-funded initiatives that enhance behavioral health crisis services at the county level. Two counties that have successfully leveraged state funding to improve their crisis response systems will share their experiences, offering valuable lessons and insights. This webinar aims to uncover new opportunities for strengthening local behavioral health services.

The webinar is scheduled for Tuesday, October 22, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Registration is available on the NACO [website](#).

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