

Harrisburg Handbook

A basic guide to the Pennsylvania General Assembly

Who are the lawmakers?

The Pennsylvania General Assembly is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. There are 203 House Districts, each with about 60,000 people. Representatives serve 2-year terms. All are up for election every even-numbered year.

There are 50 Senate Districts, each with about 242,000 people. Senators serve 4-year terms. Those in odd-numbered districts up for election in 2008. Those in even-numbered districts are up for election in 2010.

The House currently has 104 Democrats and 99 Republicans. The Senate has 30 Republicans and 20 Democrats. The majority party in each chamber controls all committee chairmanships and the flow of legislation. All floor sessions and committee meetings are open to the public pursuant to the Sunshine (open meetings) Act.

How do laws get made?

A bill can be introduced in either the House or the Senate. Each bill has a prime sponsor, who is listed first on the bill. Other members can become cosponsors. When it is introduced it is given a number and referred to a relevant committee. The chair of the committee has control over whether any bill in that committee is considered and voted on. The chair may or may not hold public hearings on bills; public hearings are not necessary for a bill to be considered. To act on a bill, the chair will call a committee meeting. Upon a motion, the committee will vote to report the bill out of committee. Most bills are then referred to the Appropriations Committee to determine their fiscal impact on the state. That committee will then follow the same process.

The bill is then placed on the House (or Senate) calendar and can be voted on by the full chamber after it has been on the calendar for at least three days. Bills can be amended in committee or on the House or Senate floor. If the bill passes, it goes to the other chamber and is subject to the same process. If the second chamber amends the bill it will go back to the original chamber for a vote on concurrence in the amendments. If they concur it goes to the governor for signing. If they "non-concur" it goes to a conference committee to work out the differences.

- The same bill has to pass both chambers within the same two-year session (January of an odd year to November of an even year). It can be amended anywhere in the process.
- The majority party leadership controls the agenda.
- Role of committee chairs:
 - may hold public hearings
 - may bring the bill up for consideration (debate and vote)
- most bills die in committee, never acted on
- Bipartisan sponsorship of bills is important, otherwise partisan considerations will kill them.
- It is much easier to kill than to pass legislation because of the cumbersome process a bill

must go through.

- Related bills are often used as legislative "vehicles," circumventing committees. For example, if any bill amending the Human Relations Act has made it part way through the process, any amendment that is germane to the Human Relations Act can be added to it on the floor or in committee.
- Bills that do not pass in the two-year session die and have to be reintroduced in the next session.

Advocacy Access Points

All state senators have legislative staff. It is important to educate them about issues of concern because they make recommendations and provide background to the senator. Most state representatives, except for committee chairs and those in the leadership, have support staff but do not have legislative staff. It is important to educate the representatives directly.

In deciding whether to cosponsor or vote for a bill, most legislators listen to the concerns of their constituents. Other than on a few hot-button issues, state legislators typically get very few letters or e-mails from constituents on any given issue. People should not underestimate the influence they can have with state legislators.

Ways to influence legislators:

- through the Administration and the various departments of state government
- by working with other interest groups
- contacting the media
- reaching out to other legislators
- making campaign contributions
- rallying other constituents
- speaking to them directly!

Correspondence to all legislators can be sent to House (or Senate) Post Office, Main Capitol, Harrisburg, PA 17120. The Capitol Switchboard is (717) 787-2121. Information on all legislators (including e-mail addresses, district office information, etc.) can be obtained from <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>

Changes for 2009-2010

The 2008 elections increased the Democratic majority in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to 104-99. Rep. Keith R. McCall (D-Carbon) was elected speaker. The Democrats elected Rep. Todd A. Eachus (Luzerne) as Majority Leader to succeed Rep. Bill DeWeese (Greene), who was elected to the position of Majority Whip. Rep. Mark B. Cohen (Philadelphia) was re-elected Majority Caucus Chair.

House Republican leadership continues under Rep. Samuel H. Smith (Jefferson) as Minority Leader, with Rep. Mike Turzai (Allegheny) becoming Minority Whip, and Rep. Sandra J. Major (Susquehanna) Caucus Chair.

On the Senate side, the Republicans have a 30-20 majority. Senate leadership consists of Sen. Joseph B. Scarnati III, President Pro Tempore (and Lt. Governor), and Sen. Dominic F. Pileggi (Delaware) Majority Leader. Democratic leadership consists of Sen. Robert J. Mellow (Lackawanna), Minority Leader, and Sen. Michael A. O’Pake (Berks), Minority Whip. New to leadership positions were Sen. Jake Corman (R-Centre) as the Majority Appropriations Chair and Sen. Jay Costa (D-Allegheny) the Appropriations Minority Chair.

Senate Freshmen

District/Counties	Former Senator	New Member
1- Philadelphia	Vince Fumo (D)	Lawrence Farnese (D)
13- Lancaster, York	Gibson Armstrong (R)	Lloyd Smucker (R)
17- Delaware, Montgomery	Connie Williams (D)	Daylin Leach (D)
23 - Bradford, Lycoming, Susquehanna, Union, Sullivan	Roger Madigan (R)	Gene Yaw (R)
33- Adams, Franklin, York	Terry Punt (R)	Rich Alloway (R)
39- Westmoreland	Bob Regola (R)	Kim Ward (R)
47 - Allegheny, Beaver, Lawrence	Gerald LaValle (D)	Elder Vogel (R)

House Freshmen

District/Counties	Former Representative	New Member
13- Chester	Art Hershey (R)	Tom Houghton (D)
15- Beaver	Vince Biancucci (D)	Jim Christiana (R)
16- Allegheny, Beaver	Sean Ramaley (D)	Rob Matzie (D)
21- Allegheny	Lisa Bennington (D)	Dom Costa (D)
27- Allegheny	Thomas Petrone (D)	Dan Deasy (D)
31- Bucks	David Steil (R)	Steve Santarsiero (D)
57- Westmoreland	Tom Tangretti (D)	Tim Krieger (R)
59- Fayette, Westmoreland	Jess Stairs (R)	Mike Reese (R)
63- Armstrong, Clarion	Fred McIlhattan (R)	Donna Oberlander (R)
69- Bedford, Somerset	Bob Bastian (R)	Carl Metzgar (R)
70- Montgomery	Jay Moyer (R)	Matt Bradford (D)
71- Cambria	Ed Wojnaroski (D)	Bryan Barbin (R)

72- Cambria, Somerset	Tom Yewcic (D)	Frank Burns (D)
75- Clearfield, Elk	Dan Surra (D)	Matt Gabler (R)
83- Lycoming	Steve Cappelli (R)	Richard Mirabito (D)
88- Cumberland	Jerry Nailor (R)	Sheryl Delozier (R)
113- Lackawanna	Frank Shimkus (D)	Kevin Murphy (D)
142- Bucks	Christopher King (D)	Frank Farry (R)
149 - Montgomery	Daylin Leach (D)	Tim Briggs (D)
157- Chester, Montgomery	Carole Rubley (R)	Paul Drucker (D)
162- Delaware	Ron Raymond (R)	Nick Miccarelli (R)
170- Montgomery, Philadelphia	George Kenney (R)	Brendan Boyle (D)
186- Philadelphia	Harold James (D)	Kenyatta Johnson (D)
187- Berks, Lehigh	Carl Mantz (R)	Gary Day (R)
190- Philadelphia	Thomas Blackwell (D)	Vanessa Brown (D)
193- Adams, York	Steve Nickol (R)	Will Tallman (R)
196- York	Bev Mackereth (R)	Seth Grove (R)