

August 8 – 14, 2025

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SESSION STATUS

At 10:05 a.m. on Monday, August 11, 2025, the House stands adjourned until Monday, September 22, 2025, at 12:00 p.m., unless sooner recalled by the Speaker.

At 8:37 p.m. on Tuesday, August 12, 2025, the Senate recessed until Monday, September 8, 2025, at 1:00 p.m.

UPCOMING SESSION DAYS

House

Sept. 22-24 (NV), 29-30
Oct. 1, 6-8, 27-29
Nov. 17-19
Dec. 8-10 (NV), 15-17

Senate

Sept. 8-10
Oct. 20-22, 27-29
Nov. 17-19
Dec. 8-9

The Education Recap is a comprehensive weekly report on legislative and executive actions on education-related legislation in Pennsylvania state government, as compiled and edited by PLS. Additional information, including video, transcript and testimony, is available to [PLSGovTrac](https://www.pslgovtrac.com) users. For more information, contact sales@mypls.com.

Press Conferences

PLS coverage of Capitol events including press conferences, bill signings and media availabilities

No press conferences this week.



Committee News

Comprehensive coverage of the House & Senate public hearings and voting meetings

Senate Education Committee

*08/12/2025, 2:00 p.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building
By Zoe Buchmann, Pennsylvania Legislative Services*

The committee met to consider a nomination.

The nomination for Dr. Carrie Rowe as Secretary of Education was unanimously **reported** out of committee with no recommendation.

Chairman Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Northumberland) emphasized that, beyond fulfilling their constitutional duty, legislators have an obligation to evaluate nominees to ensure they protect taxpayers and serve constituents effectively. She stressed the committee's ongoing oversight role over the Department of Education (PDE) and acknowledged that while disagreements may occur with Rowe or the department, prior conversations have shown they can work together and find compromises in the best interest of Pennsylvania's students and families.

Minority Chairman Lindsey Williams (D-Allegheny) acknowledged Rowe's patience in waiting for the opportunity to appear before the committee and expressed appreciation that both the committee and the public would now hear about her background, community service and qualifications.

Sen. Dawn Keefer (R-Cumberland) introduced Rowe as Gov. Josh Shapiro's nominee for Secretary of PDE, highlighting her 25 years in public education and current role as acting secretary. She noted Rowe's previous position as deputy secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, where she oversaw initiatives on structured literacy, workforce readiness, teacher recruitment and retention and student mental health. She outlined Rowe's career path from Spanish teacher in Pittsburgh Public Schools to six years as superintendent of the Beaver Area School District, as well as her academic credentials from Slippery Rock University, Robert Morris University and the University of Pittsburgh. She emphasized Rowe's leadership in increasing public school funding, expanding career and technical education and improving school infrastructure. Sen. Keefer thanked her for appearing before the committee.

Rowe thanked the committee for the opportunity to appear and expressed appreciation for her nomination by Gov. Shapiro to serve as Secretary of Education. She indicated that she is a lifelong Pennsylvanian and product of the state's public schools, noting over two decades of experience

as a teacher, principal, superintendent and deputy secretary. She cited work on [Act 1 of 2022](#) to support on-time graduation for students facing instability and expansion of dual credit programs benefiting more than 55,000 students. She stated that if confirmed, her priorities would include structured literacy, expanding free school meals, strengthening college and career pathways and improving transparency. She emphasized education as a tool for opportunity and expressed her intent to work with the legislature to advance public education in Pennsylvania.

Chairman Culver thanked Rowe for her introduction and stated that she will begin the question section. She noted that accountability should apply to all schools, not just public schools, and referenced Gov. Shapiro's proposal to spend \$8.2 billion on K–12 education, excluding local and federal funding. She pointed out that reading and math proficiency remain at crisis levels, with only 33% of fourth graders reading proficiently, lower than 34% in 2002, despite 23 years and billions in spending. She emphasized prior discussions with Rowe on the importance of literacy and asked how Pennsylvania can achieve accountability in this area. Rowe agreed that low reading scores are a serious concern, stressing the importance of students learning to read by third grade so they can read to learn in later grades. She noted that addressing literacy requires a systemic approach, starting with universal screening to identify students needing extra support, ensuring high-quality instructional materials and providing teachers with the necessary training. She continued that this also involves changes to educator preparation programs and alignment between student-teachers and their mentors. She said that PDE is working with the Reading Council, training partners and local districts to implement these steps, aiming to raise test scores and, more importantly, ensure students can read proficiently.

Chairman Culver supported preparing students for the workforce through reading skills and asked whether PDE has examined other state models to improve accountability across all public schools, including districts, charter schools and cyber charter schools, particularly when some are resistant to implementing necessary measures. Rowe said she has not encountered school districts unwilling to implement structured literacy. She explained that reluctance is often due to funding constraints, as existing resources are typically committed to other essential needs. She added that while schools can use Ready to Learn block grants for structured literacy, the funds are often already allocated. She noted that PDE can assist schools with guidance and resources, and that providing targeted funding for literacy would help, with accountability following naturally.

Chairman Culver raised concerns about rural school districts receiving less funding under Gov. Shapiro's proposal, while nearby districts see significant increases. She asked what changes are needed to ensure parity in school funding and avoid creating "winners and losers." Rowe agreed that school funding decisions are typically made using formulas grounded in policy, often resulting in difficult choices. She recognized that rural districts may feel disadvantaged compared to others receiving more funding but emphasized that no student is valued less. She noted that rural schools benefit from factors like the sparsity index in funding formulas, which urban and suburban schools may not receive. She added that it is possible to review funding distribution to identify opportunities to better support rural schools. She acknowledged the complexity of these decisions and offered to provide data and resources to assist lawmakers. Chairman Culver responded that this is a complex issue with potential unintended consequences whenever changes are made. She asked if there are savings in cyber charter funding for school districts, and whether that should be credited against the adequacy spending number. Rowe answered that whether savings from cyber tuition should be redirected to adequacy funding for public school districts is a complex question without a clear answer. She noted that while cyber school fund balances have increased significantly over the past three years, many school districts, especially rural ones, have seen their fund balances decline and continue to face financial struggles. She emphasized that rural superintendents find the current cyber education funding model unsustainable and suggested that any relief funding should be carefully considered in terms of where it is allocated.

Chairman Culver said the State Board of Higher Education, created about a year ago as a coordinating body, has made progress in aligning higher education with workforce development needs. She highlighted that the board has focused on improving collaboration between colleges, employers and government agencies to better prepare students for in-demand careers. Looking ahead, she said she hoped the board will continue to strengthen these partnerships, expand career pathways and address skills gaps to support the state's economic growth. She asked Rowe what she hoped the workload of the board is going to be next year. Rowe explained that the State Board of Higher Education, with its 21 members, has focused on establishing itself by creating six draft goals. She continued that to develop these goals, the board conducted meetings in at least six locations statewide, engaging colleges, universities, K-12 representatives and early childhood education stakeholders for input. She said, "The Board of Higher Education also met with the State Board of Education related to transfer of authority issues, and they are currently working on what that strategic plan will look like moving forward."

Sen. Greg Rothman (R-Cumberland) noted that his children will be returning to second and fifth grade soon and mentioned the federal K-12 scholarship tax credit law signed by President Donald Trump in 2025. He explained that starting in 2027, donors nationwide can receive a 100% federal tax credit for contributions up to \$1,700 annually to qualified scholarship organizations, which Pennsylvania already has about 250. He asked if the Shapiro administration will consider opting Pennsylvania into this program to benefit children who do not attend government-funded schools. Rowe responded that while it is too early to give a definite answer, a "definite maybe" is reasonable. She explained that the bill is lengthy but the relevant part is short and lacks detailed guidance so far. She continued that the program seems similar to Pennsylvania's existing earned income tax credit (EITC) program but uses

federal funds. She stated that once the federal rules are finalized through the rulemaking process, the state will have more information to assess the potential benefits and drawbacks for Pennsylvania's public schools before making a decision. Sen. Rothman emphasized that this federal scholarship tax credit uses federal funds from individual taxpayers' federal income taxes and is separate from state funding. He argued that, therefore, it should have no direct financial impact on Pennsylvania's public school budgets, unless there are unforeseen policy decisions or effects that arise later. Rowe responded that while the federal scholarship tax credit sounds promising at first, it is important to fully understand the rules and potential uses of the funds once the regulatory details are finalized. She noted that the bill references Coverdell Education Savings Accounts, which can be used for tuition, books, technology and enrichment activities, potentially providing broad support. However, she emphasized the need for clarity on the rules before making any definite conclusions.

Sen. Rothman noted that when Gov. Shapiro was running for governor, he said that every child "deserves a shot." He asked if there has been any direct conversation with Gov. Shapiro about changing his position on school choice in relation to the "one big, beautiful bill." He acknowledged Gov. Shapiro's past public support for school choice but did not indicate any shift or new stance connected to the recent federal legislation. Rowe specified that the funding in the federal bill flows through scholarship organizations primarily to non-public schools but noted that Pennsylvania's existing EITC program allows approved scholarship organizations to also support public schools. She added that, depending on federal regulations, both public and private schools might benefit, potentially creating a more balanced funding impact.

Sen. Jarrett Coleman (R-Lehigh) asked Rowe about her familiarity with a December 2024 settlement between the School District of Philadelphia and the U.S. Department of Education concerning a Title VI complaint alleging violations of the Civil Rights Act related to creating a safe environment for Jewish students. He also inquired about PDE's role in reviewing policy changes made by the district in response to the settlement. Rowe stated that PDE provides guidance and technical assistance as needed for the school. Sen. Coleman asked her to expand on that. Rowe explained that PDE has a division within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education that helps school districts conduct environmental scans. She stated that this process reviews the overall school culture, especially if there are concerns about hostility toward certain religious groups or student populations. She noted that such scans provide a holistic view of the student body and context, assisting schools in making informed decisions. She added that this service is available to Philadelphia City Schools if they request it. Sen. Coleman asked if PDE has reviewed the schools' adherence to Pennsylvania anti-bullying laws. Rowe responded that PDE receives regular information from every school and school district in Pennsylvania, including assurances of compliance and data points, which are used to evaluate adherence to anti-bullying laws and related policies. Sen. Coleman inquired if Rowe will monitor this as well, which she affirmed.

Chairman Williams noted that Rowe has been acting secretary for about six months and asked if there has been anything new or surprising since then. Rowe replied that one of the most "delightful" parts of the confirmation process was meeting individually with each senator who was willing to meet with her. She said they "gave their time generously" and "provided thoughtful questions for consideration." Chairman Williams thanked Rowe for the regular monthly meetings, highlighting them as valuable opportunities to discuss detailed education policies. She welcomed questions from school leaders and emphasized her commitment to accessibility and responsiveness. She acknowledged the positive working relationship over the past six months, expressed her support for Rowe's nomination and wished her success in leading PDE.



Senate Appropriations Committee

08/12/2025, 5:30 p.m., Rules Committee Conference Room

By Kyle Purchase, Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee met to consider one bill.

[SB 160](#) – (PN 529) The General Appropriation Act of 2025 provides appropriations from the General Fund for the expenses of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Departments of the commonwealth, the public debt and the public schools for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide appropriations from special funds and accounts to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide for the appropriation of federal funds to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; and to provide for the additional appropriation of federal and state funds to the Executive and Legislative Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. Section 8101 shall take effect immediately. The remainder of this act shall take effect July 1, 2025, or immediately, whichever is later. The bill was **reported as committed**, along a party-line vote, with Democrats voting in the negative.

[A01634](#), by Hughes, mirrors [House Bill 1330](#). The amendment was **tabled**, on a party-line vote, with Democrats voting in the negative.

Regarding his amendment, Minority Chairman Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia) explained that the amendment is the bill that passed the House. He noted the bill passed in a bipartisan manner and outlined certain provisions and the funding amounts for the items.

Chairman Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) motioned to table Chairman Hughes's amendment.

On the overall bill, Chairman Hughes acknowledged the date of August 12 and expressed his hopefulness to "aggressively" come to an agreement on a budget.



Joint House and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees

08/13/25, 10:00 a.m., Red Barn Annex-Ag Progress Days Site, 2710 W. Pine Grove Road, Pennsylvania Furnace

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committees held a joint informational hearing on "the state of the livestock industry in Pennsylvania: producer perspectives."

Chairman Elder Vogel (R-Beaver), Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, opened the 2025 Ag Progress Days hearing by welcoming attendees and acknowledging key participants, including Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding, FFA leadership and the Farm Bureau president. He explained that the hearing was inspired by a similar House Agriculture Committee session earlier in the year focused on the livestock, dairy and poultry industries. He emphasized the importance of hearing directly from industry stakeholders.

[U.S. Rep. Glenn Thompson \(R-PA\)](#), chairman, [U.S. House Committee on Agriculture](#), thanked committee chairs and testifiers for focusing on the state's livestock industry. He highlighted challenges facing producers, including the recent avian influenza outbreak, market conditions and mandates such as California's [Proposition 12](#). He reviewed provisions of the recently enacted "Farm Bill 1.0" as part of the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#), noting investments in biosecurity, disaster assistance, conservation programs, market access, crop insurance expansion for specialty crops and estate tax exemptions for family farms. He also discussed federal efforts to combat animal diseases such as screw worm, African swine fever and foot-and-mouth disease. U.S. Rep. Thompson previewed priorities for "Farm Bill 2.0," including a legislative fix to limit states from imposing livestock production standards on out-of-state producers, continued disease prevention measures, support for small processors and strengthened trade safeguards. He emphasized bipartisan cooperation and ongoing engagement with producers to ensure federal policy meets the needs of Pennsylvania agriculture.

[Glenn Gorrell](#), president, [PA Dairymen's Association](#), [Bradford County](#), shared his background and concerns facing the dairy industry. He described his family's 44-year history in dairy farming, including leadership roles in various agricultural organizations, and noted the association's contributions of over \$4.5 million to support the industry over the past nine years. He discussed

significant changes in dairy farming, such as larger herd sizes, higher production and greater operational investment, alongside persistent labor shortages. He emphasized the reliance on Hispanic and H-2A workers, the rising costs associated with that program and challenges in finding skilled employees. He highlighted shortages in agricultural support services, such as machinery repair and large-animal veterinary care, forcing farmers to take on more technical and medical responsibilities themselves. He cited other challenges, including rising input costs, especially electricity, weather-related setbacks to planting and harvesting and Pennsylvania's loss of dairy processing opportunities to neighboring states like New York. He expressed concern about barriers for young farmers entering the industry without significant capital and supported expanded Sunday hunting to help manage wildlife populations. Gorrell noted the value of agricultural promotion events, referencing his participation in a Beef Council initiative at the Little League World Series, and encouraged the state to promote the event more broadly as a showcase for Pennsylvania agriculture.

Darwin Nissley, president, Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association, Lancaster County, outlined the state of Pennsylvania's cattle industry and its challenges. He noted that the state has over 13,000 cattle farms with 1.6 million head, valued at more than \$700 million, and benefits from both large-scale national packers and numerous small butcher shops. He stressed the importance of maintaining processing capacity, warning that the loss of a major plant would have severe economic impacts. He cited key challenges including limited access to grazing land due to urban development, costs for fencing and fertilizer, regulatory compliance burdens and shortages of large-animal veterinarians in rural areas. He emphasized the industry's commitment to environmental stewardship, including stormwater management and Chesapeake Bay watershed regulations, but noted these requirements can be time-consuming and costly. He highlighted the benefits of the \$1.4 million "Ag Excellence – Beef" line item in the previous state budget, which funded producer education, infrastructure grants and programs such as "PA Beef to PA Schools" and "Beefing Up Backpack," aimed at promoting Pennsylvania beef and supporting food-insecure students. Nissley expressed concern that current budget proposals allocate only \$600,000 for the program and urged restoring funding to previous levels, arguing it delivers high returns for both producers and consumers. He stressed the collaborative nature of the Pennsylvania beef working group in advancing the industry statewide.

Coleman Wagner, AgVentures, Lancaster County, stated that Pennsylvania's hog industry has faced difficulties since 2022 due to high input costs and stagnant markets, though profitability has recently improved. He identified the primary challenges, including aging infrastructure and disease prevention. He explained that most contract-finishing hog barns, built in the early 1990s, are reaching the end of their useful life, with closures outpacing new construction. He added that rising building costs, regulatory hurdles from local townships and lengthy permitting processes, which sometimes exceed a year, have discouraged investment. He suggested cost-sharing programs or low-interest loans to help farmers replace aging facilities. On animal health, Wagner stressed the importance of maintaining Pennsylvania's competitive advantage of high biosecurity, noting the ongoing risks of African swine fever (ASF) and Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS). He urged the state to extend disease prevention support to the swine sector, similar to efforts in the poultry industry, and invest in infrastructure improvements such as additional wash bays and biosecurity facilities.

Chris Pierce, president, Heritage Poultry Management Services Inc., Lebanon County, described the state's poultry sector, noting Pennsylvania ranks fourth nationally in egg production, with about 125 small family farms under his company's management. He outlined the severe impacts of avian influenza, which has killed millions of birds nationwide, driving egg prices as high as \$8 per dozen. He praised the legislature, the Department of Agriculture (PDA) and state diagnostic labs for their rapid response, recovery funding and biosecurity measures, which helped limit losses compared to other states. He discussed industry growth opportunities, including new farms and younger farmers continuing family operations. However, he mentioned permitting delays as a major obstacle to expansion and succession. He encouraged continued egg consumption and emphasized the industry's commitment to responsible farming and resource stewardship.

Tessa Applegate, chief financial officer, Clark's Feed Mill Inc., Northumberland County, thanked the committee for the invitation to testify and provided background on her family business, which began in 1929 and now produces chicken feed and raises about 4,000 broilers weekly. She noted the poultry industry's significant growth, citing Pennsylvania's lead in the 2022 Census of Agriculture, but emphasized ongoing challenges, particularly highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). She credited state programs, including the HPAI Recovery Reimbursement Grant, for helping farmers improve biosecurity, with more than \$14.5 million awarded over three years. Applegate discussed rising input costs, regulatory inconsistencies between townships and counties and permitting and tax disparities that hinder farm expansion. She highlighted the Clean and Green program as a helpful but inconsistently implemented tool for farmland preservation. She urged legislators to align local policies to create a level playing field, and stressed that small, independent farms face particular pressure to remain competitive. She affirmed agriculture's central role in Pennsylvania's economy and expressed confidence in the industry's long-term viability with continued state support.

Dan Turner, president, PA Sheep and Wool Growers Association, Cumberland County, outlined the industry's history, current status and future prospects. He noted that sheep farming was once a major agricultural sector in the state, with over a million sheep, but it declined after World War II due to reduced lamb consumption and the introduction of synthetic fibers. He continued that today, the state's sheep industry includes about 98,000 head across 3,600 mostly small, family-owned operations, ranking fifth nationally in

number of producers. He explained that while wool remains part of production, meat sales, particularly to growing ethnic markets, are driving expansion, with lamb slaughter increasing 35% from 2019 to 2023. He highlighted the emerging role of sheep in targeted grazing and “agrivoltaics,” where flocks manage vegetation under solar panels, creating new revenue streams. He added that growth is also occurring in sheep dairy production, which offers nutritional benefits and rising consumer demand. He listed challenges, including limited veterinary access, high processing costs, weak wool markets and a shortage of shearers. He noted that industry groups and universities are supporting innovation through education, research and breeding programs. He announced the inaugural Pennsylvania Sheep and Wool Festival in October 2025, featuring demonstrations, education and product sampling, and emphasized the sector’s diversification, economic contributions and potential for continued growth.

Chairman Vogel asked Wagner what he believes should be done to attract more young people to farming, particularly within the agricultural sector. Wagner answered that attracting more young people to farming requires making the profession more financially attainable. He noted that even small family farms often require millions of dollars to build new facilities as older ones wear out. He stated that recent cost increases of around 40% in the past few years, coupled with contract terms that have not kept pace, make it difficult for such investments to be financially viable. He added that higher interest rates, two to three percentage points above rates from just a few years ago, add to the challenge. He explained that while some U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs exist, they are often inaccessible due to restrictive requirements, such as debt coverage ratios that conflict with typical bank lending standards. He argued that as a result, many farmers cannot qualify for the grants or loans intended to support them. He concluded that while there is interest among young people in entering farming, the current economic conditions and lack of feasible support programs make it unrealistic for many.

Chairman Eddie Day Pashinski (D-Luzerne), House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, thanked all the panelists for their testimony and dedication to keeping Pennsylvanians fed. He acknowledged that most consumers do not understand the complexity and effort required to produce food and praised the panelists as exemplary of Pennsylvania agriculture. He suggested arranging additional meetings to gather more specific information on costs, including expenses for field operations, fuel and other inputs. He noted interest in discussing regulations and permitting — areas where the legislature might have some influence. He emphasized the importance of an open-ended conversation to collect facts, identify challenges and develop a concrete plan to address them.

Minority Chairman Dan Moul (R-Adams), House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, praised the committee for its bipartisan support of agriculture in Pennsylvania. He acknowledged the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and local permitting as challenges for farmers, sharing examples of delays that hinder farm operations and development. He encouraged Wagner to follow up after the hearing to connect with his office for assistance with permitting issues. He also highlighted the efficiency of Pennsylvania’s response to HPAI, commending Pierce and the industry’s rapid action in depopulation and containment. He urged legislators to maintain the HPAI indemnity fund at its current level, stressing that reductions could be devastating in the event of an outbreak at a large facility, such as Hillandale Farms in Adams County. He emphasized the need to keep state support strong for agriculture.

Rep. Tom Jones (R-Lancaster) thanked the panel for their testimony and highlighted the diversity in Pennsylvania’s livestock industry. He noted the synergy between sheep and solar grazing, emphasizing that sheep are particularly suited for managing vegetation under solar panels, unlike cattle or goats. He echoed previous comments about regulatory and permitting challenges, stressing the need for DEP to streamline systems and for state legislators to support local governments in making permitting processes more efficient. He praised environmental progress, including improvements in the Susquehanna River Basin and Chesapeake Bay, but noted the need to balance regulation with the practical needs of farmers. He emphasized protecting individual property rights, including homeowners’ ability to keep chickens, while maintaining strong biosecurity and HPAI protections. He commended the panel for feeding the community and the nation, thanking them for their contributions to Pennsylvania agriculture.

Sen. Gene Yaw (R-Lycoming), chairman, Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, shared his background growing up on a farm and his experience milking cows by hand. He discussed Pennsylvania’s role in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, noting that the Susquehanna River provides about 50% of the Bay’s freshwater and drains 65,000 acres across 43 of 67 counties. He explained that roughly 70% of Pennsylvania’s required reductions in nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment came from farms. He added that programs like the Clean Streams Fund and the Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) have been highly successful, helping farmers implement practices such as riparian buffers, stream fencing and keeping animals out of waterways. He stated that these measures benefit Pennsylvania farmers directly while also improving downstream water quality. He highlighted that Pennsylvania has become a national leader in water cleanup, as recognized by the Baltimore Sun, due largely to farmer participation. He also noted that a significant portion of Chesapeake Bay-related Farm Bill funding returns to Pennsylvania to support practical conservation measures such as fencing, stream management, manure collection and riparian buffers. Sen. Yaw also emphasized the appointment of a new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 3 administrator from Bradford County, a farmer, signaling strong local representation and understanding of agricultural priorities. He expressed pride in the accomplishments of Pennsylvania farmers in protecting water quality.

Rep. David Zimmerman (R-Lancaster) thanked the panel for their testimony and highlighted the importance of having all agricultural sectors in Pennsylvania working together, both for the state's economy and the national agricultural perspective, noting U.S. Rep. Thompson's presence. He then asked a question regarding the shortage of large animal veterinarians, specifically whether farmers have adequate access to necessary medications and drugs, given that they are doing more veterinary work themselves due to the shortage. Nissley answered that in Lancaster, that is not an issue and is more of a problem in other parts of the state. Gorrell stated that he has a working relationship with his veterinarian, which makes it easier to get the care he needs for his animals. He noted that if someone does not have that relationship, they are not going to get the medicine they need.

Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny), vice chair, House Hunger Caucus, highlighted the connection between agriculture and food security. She expressed concern over recent funding cuts to programs that support food-insecure individuals, specifically the \$13 million reduction to the USDA's Local Food Purchase Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) program, which has already had an impact, and several hundred million dollars cut from the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), with effects not yet fully realized. She asked the panel to speak about how these cuts affect both the individuals relying on these programs and the food producers who supply the food, noting that the impact of the LFPA cuts is already being felt. Pierce noted that as a board member of the Caring Cupboard food pantry in Lebanon County, he has firsthand experience with local food insecurity. He stated that he personally donated all of the pantry's eggs but emphasized that, despite these efforts, the pantry is facing growing challenges. He said that demand from clients has surged, with some families visiting the pantry multiple times per month rather than just once, stretching resources thin. He highlighted the difficulty in planning budgets and sourcing enough food to meet this increasing need, expressing concern about how to continue serving the community effectively under these constraints.

Rep. Jones highlighted recent bipartisan progress addressing food insecurity in Pennsylvania. He referenced newly signed legislation that allows grocers, both large and small, to donate food past its "best by" date without fear of liability, as long as the food is still safe to consume. He explained that this measure is intended to increase food donations and help fill gaps in local pantries, representing a concrete step toward addressing community needs. He emphasized that this was achieved through bipartisan cooperation.

Rep. Kinkead noted that, while not all gaps can be immediately addressed, two key programs, the State Food Purchase Program and the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System, play a critical role in supporting both food insecurity efforts and local producers. She stated that with the state budget not fully finalized, there is an opportunity to evaluate these programs and potentially allocate more funding to help address unmet needs, benefiting both communities facing food insecurity and the agricultural producers supplying these programs.

Rep. Paul Takac (D-Centre) highlighted recent efforts to streamline permitting through DEP's new Streamlining Permits for Economic Expansion and Development (SPEED) Program, which allows qualified professionals to partner with applicants and currently covers Chapter 102 applications, with Chapters 101, 105 and others opening soon. He emphasized the Agriculture Innovation Grants, noting that last year \$10 million in matching funds supported \$68 million in projects helping Pennsylvania producers adopt advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, biosecurity measures and bio-digesters. He encouraged attendees to provide examples or suggestions to improve the program, emphasizing its potential impact on the state's agricultural community.

Chairman Vogel thanked all the testifiers for their participation and the audience for attending. He noted that the session had been very informative and that he personally gained many insights and ideas. He encouraged everyone to enjoy the rest of Ag Progress Days and adjourned the hearing.



House Appropriations Committee

08/13/2025, 3:00 p.m., Room 140, Main Capitol

By Dominic Kenny, Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee met to discuss one bill.

SB 160 – (PN 529) The General Appropriation Act of 2025 provides appropriations from the General Fund for the expenses of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Departments of the commonwealth, the public debt and the public schools for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide appropriations from special funds and accounts to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide for the appropriation of federal funds to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; and to provide for the additional appropriation of federal and state funds to the Executive and Legislative Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. Section 8101 shall take effect immediately. The remainder of this act shall take effect July 1, 2025, or immediately, whichever is later. The bill **failed** in committee, along a party-line vote, with Democrats voting in the negative.

Minority Chairman Jim Struzzi (R-Indiana) stressed that budget negotiations were in a “late hour.” He said the proposed bill would establish last year’s funding levels, totaling \$47.6 billion. He highlighted the importance of funding critical institutions such as hospitals, schools and other government services. “We can continue to have negotiations,” he said. “But at this time, we think this is the best solution to make sure the government remains functional and provides for the people in this commonwealth.”

Chairman Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia) criticized the Senate for sending a bill that mirrors last year’s budget, arguing that a negotiating platform would have been more appropriate much earlier in the process. He said inflation necessitates the commonwealth to increase spending from last year, similar to increases in the cost of living. He argued that offering the same budget as last year would lead to service cuts across Pennsylvania, including negative impacts to school districts that have already finalized their budgets with increased state funding in mind. He expressed hope to finalize a “serious” spending plan in the coming days. He highlighted Medicaid recipients, early childhood centers and higher education students among those who would be impacted if SB 160 were to become law.

Chairman Struzzi noted that state funds can not flow if there is no spending plan in place. He said the bill is meant to sustain government services until an agreement is made on a larger spending plan. He said he wished the bill had been introduced earlier.

Chairman Harris criticized lawmakers’ lack of urgency in budget negotiations. He said the House passed a bipartisan budget on July 14 that featured less money than originally proposed by Gov. Josh Shapiro. He argued that SB 160 was “not a serious document.”

Chairman Harris and Chairman Struzzi thanked each other for their respectful candor during the negotiation process. Chairman Struzzi stressed the importance of delivering a budget that meets the needs of all Pennsylvanians.



Bullet.in.Points

DEP: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRANTS; 2026 GRANT OPPORTUNITY

The Department of Environmental Protection announced a new round of Environmental Education Grants. The project period is July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. The application process will begin Monday, August 18, 2025. Applications must be submitted on the department’s [website](#) by 11:59 p.m. on November 14, 2025. Additional information is available on the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

Cosponsor Memos

HCO2565 - Cell Phones in Schools

Sponsor

Rep. Mandy Steele (D)

Summary

Requires public school entities to restrict student cell phone possession and use during the school day in school buildings

Intro Date

08/13/2025

Last Action

08/13/2025 H - Cosponsor memo filed

Basic Ed Bill Actions

SB160 - An Act to provide appropriations from the General Fund for the expenses of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Departments of the Commonwealth, the public debt and the public schools for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide appropriations from special funds and accounts to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide for the appropriation of Federal funds to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; and to provide for the additional appropriation of Federal and State funds to the Executive and Legislative Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Sponsor

Sen. Scott Martin (R)

Summary

(PN 529) The General Appropriation Act of 2025 provides appropriations from the General Fund for the expenses of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Departments of the commonwealth, the public debt and the public schools for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide appropriations from special funds and accounts to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide for the appropriation of federal funds to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; and to provide for the additional appropriation of federal and state funds to the Executive and Legislative Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. Section 8101 shall take effect immediately. The remainder of this act shall take effect July 1, 2025, or immediately, whichever is later.

Intro Date

04/03/2025

Actions

08/12/2025 S - Meeting Scheduled - 08/12/2025 - Voting Meeting (Senate Appropriations), Rules Committee Conference Room

08/12/2025 S - Voted Favorably From Committee - Senate Appropriations

08/12/2025 S - Re-reported as committed - Senate Appropriations

08/13/2025 H - Referred to - House Appropriations

08/13/2025 H - Failed in Committee - House Appropriations

Higher Ed Bill Actions

HB1799 - An Act amending the act of April 3, 1992 (P.L.28, No.11), known as the Tuition Account Programs and College Savings Bond Act, in tuition account programs, further providing for declaration of policy, for definitions, for Tuition Account Programs Bureau, for powers of department, for Tuition Account Guaranteed Savings Program, for Tuition Account Investment Program, for general provisions governing both tuition account programs and for Federal taxation; establishing the Keystone Scholars Grant Program and the Keystone Scholars Grant Program Account; and making a repeal.

Sponsor

Rep. Patrick Gallagher (D)

Summary

(PN 2213) Amends the Tuition Account Programs and College Savings Bond Act (TAP Act), in tuition account programs, further providing for declaration of policy to include elementary and secondary education, for definitions, for Tuition Account Programs Bureau, for powers of department, for Tuition Account Guaranteed Savings Program, for Tuition Account Investment Program, for general provisions governing both tuition account programs and for federal taxation; establishing the Keystone Scholars Grant Program as part of the Tuition Account Guaranteed Savings Program Fund to promote access to postsecondary educational opportunities for each eligible child and the Keystone Scholars Grant Program Account as a separate account within the Tuition Account Guaranteed Savings Program Fund; and repealing section 312 of the Fiscal Code. Defines "eligible elementary or secondary educational institution," "qualified education loan," "registered apprenticeship program" and "sibling." Amends the definitions of "other educational expense credits" and "Tuition Account Program contract." Includes postsecondary, elementary and secondary education in provisions for the Tuition Account Programs Bureau and specifies the payments for which money contributed pursuant to a Tuition Account Guaranteed Savings Program Contract may be withdrawn. Provides for the conversion of tuition credits for use at an eligible elementary or secondary educational institution, for repayment of qualified education loans and for use in a registered apprenticeship program. Amends sections 309.1, 309.2(b) and (d) and 317 to remove language reading higher education expenses and provides for educational expenses. Outlines the administration of the Keystone Scholars Grant Program. Stipulates that money contained in the Keystone Scholars Grant Program Account shall be for the exclusive purpose of providing scholarship grants to eligible children to pay for qualified higher education expenses associated with attendance at an eligible educational institution. Specifies what applies to allocations and actuarial status. Provides for the amount of a scholarship grant. Requires program account balances to be available to each parent or guardian of an eligible child through a secured internet account. Allows the State Treasurer to establish an annual match of contributions and financial incentives, prohibiting money from the Tuition Account Guaranteed Savings Program Fund from being used for those purposes. Provides for contributions from persons and entities. Mandates monitoring of the program by the board. Defines "account," "eligible child" and "program." Effective in 60 days.

Intro Date

08/13/2025

Actions

08/11/2025 H - Introduced

08/13/2025 H - Referred to - House Finance

Upcoming Events

MONDAY – 08/18/2025

1:00 PM, [House Democratic Policy](#)

Public Hearing, Philadelphia City Hall, 1401 John F. Kennedy Blvd., Philadelphia
Public hearing on Protecting Pennsylvanians Act.

In the News

[08/11/2025 - Topper: Budget Impasse Exacerbated by Lack of Real Negotiation, Siloed Approach](#)

[08/11/2025 - Independent Fiscal Office \(IFO\): Monthly and Quarterly Revenue Estimates](#)

[08/12/2025 - State Budget at Standstill as Issues Persist, Pickett Says](#)

[08/12/2025 - ICYMI – WATCH & READ: Safer Communities Start with Investments in Our Youth](#)

[08/13/2025 - Senate Education Committee Advances Nomination of Dr. Carrie Rowe as Secretary of Education](#)

[08/13/2025 - Senator Collett Shares Frustration with Republican Failure to Sustainably Fund Transit, Advance Timely Budget](#)

[08/13/2025 - Commonwealth Foundation: Pa. Senate Passes Budget Protecting Taxpayers, as Shapiro, House Democrats Continue Gridlock](#)

[08/13/2025 - Senate Democratic Leader Jay Costa, Democratic Appropriations Chair Vincent Hughes Urge Senate Republicans to Return to Negotiations as House Votes Down Unserious Budget and Transit Bills](#)

[08/13/2025 - Baker: Transportation and Budget Bills Deliver Real Dollars for Pennsylvania Communities](#)

[08/13/2025 - Budget, SEPTA Funding Discussions Not Based in Reality, Topper Says](#)

[08/14/2025 - PUC Seeks Public Comment on Proposed Settlement with Kaib and Kaib, LLC Regarding Alleged Overbilling of Natural Gas Customers](#)

[08/14/2025 - PUC Approves Settlement with PPL Electric Following 2022 Transformer Fire in Carbondale, Lackawanna County](#)

[08/14/2025 - AG Sunday Offers Guidance to Avoid Being Scammed while Back-to-School Shopping](#)

[08/14/2025 - PUC Doubles Fines in Settlement with FirstEnergy Pennsylvania over Response to Downed Wires in Washington County](#)

[08/14/2025 - Pennsylvania Legislators Lead Effort to Protect Kids from Online Exploitation](#)

Education Recap is a comprehensive weekly report on legislative and executive actions on education related legislation in the Pennsylvania Capitol and is compiled and edited by PLS.

For subscription information, questions or more information contact PLS at mypls@mypls.com or 717-236-6984. Thank you, Deborah, Cheryl, Derek, Hattie, Sam, Grace, Aaron, Christian, Katie, Zoe, Daniel, Kyle, Nicholas, Dominic, Julia and Noah.

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