

**Feb. 27 – March 5,  
2026**

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## SESSION STATUS

At 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 23, 2026, at 12:00 p.m., unless sooner recalled by the Speaker.

At 1:59 p.m. on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, the Senate recessed until Monday, March 16, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. unless sooner recalled by the President Pro Tempore.

## UPCOMING SESSION DAYS

### House

March 23-25  
April 13-15, 27-29  
May 4-6  
June 1-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-30  
Sept. 28-30  
Oct. 5-7, 19-21  
Nov. 9, 10

### Senate

March 16-18, 23-25  
April 20-22  
May 4-6  
June 1-3, 8-10, 22-26, 29-30

*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.pls.gov/trac) users. For more information, contact [sales@mypls.com](mailto: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*

### House Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with OAG

*03/02/2026, 10:00 a.m., House Chamber  
Pennsylvania Legislative Services*

The committee held a budget hearing with the Office of Attorney General.

The Office of Attorney General (OAG) was represented by:

- Attorney General (AG) Dave Sunday, OAG,
- Kyle King, chief of staff, OAG,
- Kara Bowser, first deputy attorney general, OAG,
- Greg Rowe, chief counsel, OAG, and
- Ben Wren, deputy chief of staff, OAG.

Minority Chair Jim Struzzi (R-Indiana) noted the governor's proposal of a \$171.5 million general fund spend for OAG in the upcoming fiscal year, which is a \$20 million or 13% increase over the current fiscal year. He noted it was \$19 million less than the original request from OAG. He emphasized the importance of understanding these numbers and their implications for public safety in Pennsylvania.

Chair Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia) shared a personal anecdote about his mother watching the proceedings and expecting him to ask certain questions. He welcomed Sunday to make introductory remarks or proceed directly with his testimony.

Sunday introduced his team and expressed pride in his one year in office, highlighting the dedication and talent of the OAG staff across Pennsylvania. He emphasized the importance of the legislature's support for their mission and praised the collaborative efforts across the political spectrum. He expressed his eagerness to hear the committee's questions and participate in the hearing.

Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) highlighted [HB 1460](#)'s aim to grant OAG the authority to regulate harmful mergers, acquisitions and buyouts, while also preventing the sale-leaseback schemes that prioritize profits over patient care. He asked about the importance of the bill in protecting patients and community hospitals. Sunday recounted the efforts of his office to keep the Crozer-Chester Medical Center open, emphasizing the importance of health care access. He highlighted the work done to support legislation that would grant more power to prevent similar situations in the future, ensuring access to health care and emergency services. Rep. Khan inquired about OAG's capability to protect citizens from federal overreach, referencing concerns raised by his constituents about situations like those in Minnesota. Sunday assured that his office possesses the necessary tools and expertise to investigate criminal actions in Pennsylvania, even those

where citizens are harmed or killed at the hands of law enforcement. He highlighted the operation of three investigative grand juries across the state to help with this issue.

Rep. Jim Rigby (R-Cambria) highlighted the recruitment challenges facing police departments, citing federal statistics that show a significant increase in police resignations and retirements between 2020 and 2021. He asked about the discussions and feedback OAG has had with local law enforcement and how the office is addressing these concerns, as well as the support provided to law enforcement officers. Sunday acknowledged the crisis with law enforcement recruitment but noted issues with recruiting individuals for other public servant positions. He detailed the Senate's task force focused on law enforcement recruitment and retention. He explained the need to address funding regarding salaries and referred to prioritizing mental health for the first responders. He stressed that police officers are often asked to be mental health responders, domestic violence counselors and substance abuse counselors, which is a lot to answer to in one shift. He emphasized the importance of putting less stress on these individuals and noted a report would be released by the task force later this year.

Rep. Regina Young (D-Philadelphia) asked about highlights from the past year regarding Human Trafficking Prevention operations for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in the commonwealth, wondering about takeaways on the issue. Sunday highlighted the significant role of Pennsylvania's human trafficking section, noting an increase in cases and the importance of training for police and community members. He reported 78 arrests last year and 81 active investigations, marking a 125% increase since the unit's formation in January 2024. Rep. Young inquired about OAG's initiatives to better support survivors of human trafficking. Sunday emphasized the importance of collaboration and the identification of effective service locations for victims, mentioning Sparrow's House as a positive example.

Rep. Charity Grimm Krupa (R-Fayette) highlighted the disparity in legal counsel numbers between the office of the chief law enforcement officer and the Office of General Counsel (OGC), questioning how the state can fulfill its responsibility with such manpower and budget constraints. Sunday acknowledged the disparity in compensation affecting their ability to retain staff. He noted efforts to reallocate resources within the office to manage workloads. Rep. Krupa discussed the challenges of filtering through complaints for initial investigations and inquired about the jurisdiction of cases involving the misuse of public funds by nonprofits. Sunday confirmed his office takes such allegations seriously and recognized Sean Kirkpatrick, the head of the Public Protection Division, OAG, as someone willing to discuss specific cases off the record.

Rep. Aerion Abney (D-Allegheny) discussed the lack of new funding for additional staff OAG, despite a request for 30 new members, and asked about the roles the staff would play and the limitations of not having them funded. Sunday highlighted the need for more staff due to new duties, specifically mentioning the "Safe to Say Something" program and the tobacco enforcement division, which both require additional personnel due to legislative changes. Rep. Abney then inquired about the Teen Talk series for addressing social media and mental health, as well as the impact of the governor's proposal to remove cell phones in schools. Sunday shared his support for removing cell phones from schools. He discussed the Teen Talk initiative, emphasizing the negative impact of technology on children's mental health and the plan to extend these talks statewide.

Rep. Marla Brown (R-Lawrence) shifted the discussion to human trafficking, noting OAG's efforts in this area, with 78 arrests and 81 active investigations. She questioned whether the proposed budget increase of \$627,000 would meet the office's needs. Sunday responded that the current budget is insufficient, especially with upcoming events like America250 celebrations and the World Cup expected to increase human trafficking activities. He stressed the importance of additional funding to support local police and municipalities in conducting long-term investigations. Rep. Brown agreed with Sunday's concerns, asking what OAG could not do with additional funding. Sunday noted that without extra funding, OAG would struggle to provide necessary support and would have to choose which cases to pursue, impacting public safety in Pennsylvania. Rep. Brown thanked Sunday and stated that "the discrepancy in the budget almost implies the governor is not supportive of law enforcement, and we hope that would change."

Chair Harris addressed the members, reminding them not to express opinions about other duly elected officials' beliefs.

Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny) expressed satisfaction that the human trafficking hotline was added to the governor's budget and questioned why OAG has not been more involved in lawsuits against the federal government, which the Governor's Office has initiated or joined. Sunday explained the distinct roles of OAG and OGC, noting the collaborative yet distinct functions and the large number of litigation referrals received and adopted by his office. Rep. Kinkead questioned why an amicus brief submitted to the commonwealth court did not consider the harm to women unable to access abortions due to Medicaid payment restrictions. She cited studies on the psychological and physical health issues faced by these women. Sunday emphasized his commitment to defending statutes passed by the legislative body, regardless of personal opinions. He assured that his office would continue this practice until a statute is deemed unconstitutional. Rep. Kinkead asked for clarification on the exclusion of certain women from an amicus brief. Sunday stated he would need to consult with the authors for a detailed conversation but expressed willingness for further talks.

Rep. Eric Nelson (R-Westmoreland) inquired about the support OAG might receive to combat sex trafficking, especially in light of the NFL draft in Pittsburgh, highlighting a \$23 million difference in funding for anti-trafficking efforts between the governor's support and OAG's request. Sunday explained that his office is requesting an increase of \$855,000 for human trafficking efforts to add an attorney and an agent, emphasizing the importance of these positions to handle the incoming cases. He stated that \$542,000 was previously allocated from the general government operations (GGO) account to support the human trafficking efforts. Rep. Nelson said that the budget increase was a very reasonable ask. He shifted the conversation to instances of trafficking that have to do with "illegal criminal aliens" who have been arrested across the commonwealth. He noted the \$8 million gap in funding for efforts on this issue, wondering how this increase will help OAG operate more effectively in Operation Clean Sweep and preventative efforts to stop the spread of fentanyl. Sunday highlighted the Bureau of Narcotics Investigations' success in removing 56 million doses of fentanyl last year. He discussed the challenges of underfunding, with an \$8.94 million gap for operational costs, and a decrease in drug forfeiture funds from \$10 million to an estimated \$4 million due to criminals' use of cryptocurrency and a more ethical asset seizure approach, emphasizing the importance of this issue.

Rep. Justin Fleming (D-Dauphin) raised a question about OAG's efforts in prosecuting elder abuse and exploitation, which was established in October and involves collaboration with local law enforcement and the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Sunday detailed the establishment of a specialized section within his office to combat scams targeting seniors, noting the section's overwhelming caseload and the importance of collaboration with the AAAs. Rep. Fleming discussed the evolution of fraud targeting seniors and shared a story where a senior was nearly scammed out of \$15,000. Sunday emphasized that this issue is an all-hands-on-deck approach.

Rep. Jeff Olsommer (R-Wayne) asked about the financial correlation between OAG and county officials due to their increased involvement in drug enforcement. Sunday explained the collaboration between the Bureau of Narcotics Investigations and district attorneys' offices, emphasizing the importance of sharing resources and the critical role of funding for drug task forces. He noted the critical nature of protecting the integrity of cases, officer safety and due process.

Rep. Joe Webster (D-Montgomery) raised a question about the resources available to ensure the integrity of upcoming elections in Pennsylvania. Sunday highlighted his collaboration with the Attorney General's Election Task Force to ensure safe and fair elections by sharing information and investigating potential criminal activities. Rep. Webster noted the importance of making sure discussions were held on election safety. He asked if OAG has enough resources to cover work that protects veterans' benefits from fraud. Sunday discussed the critical issue of GGO funding in Pennsylvania, highlighting the dwindling funds from \$45-46 million to under \$6 million, which were previously used for expenses now needing GGO funding. He emphasized the need for a sustainable budget to support veterans and other needs, advocating for proper GGO funding allocation. Rep. Webster emphasized the importance of focusing on good and quality government and acknowledged the political complexities of these discussions.

Rep. Ann Flood (R-Northampton) discussed the issue of scams in Pennsylvania, sharing distressing stories of constituents affected by scams. She asked whether the insufficient funding from the governor affects the ability to combat these scams and protect vulnerable residents. Sunday confirmed that the lack of funding impacts their ability to combat scams, detailing the OAG Office of Public Engagement's efforts in educating the public through presentations. He stressed the necessity of adequate resources for hiring experts to fight scams and asked for support in reviewing and funding the GGO. Rep. Flood highlighted the ever-changing nature of scams and their impact on seniors, sharing her personal experience of being scammed. She asked if there is a mechanism to help victims recover lost funds. Sunday explained that OAG has a "scam squad" dedicated to mediating and mitigating financial losses from scams, emphasizing the importance of contacting their office for assistance. He noted methods like crypto-ATMs and wiring money make it harder to track.

Rep. Manuel Guzman (D-Berks) raised concerns about online safety for children, highlighting a lawsuit against the Roblox platform for the sexual exploitation of a 13-year-old. He asked about the coordination between OAG and technology platforms to address such predator activities. Sunday highlighted the importance of addressing online safety for children. He detailed a collaborative effort involving 42 attorneys general and other law enforcement leaders to compel companies to modify their business practices to protect children from harmful online interactions. He stated this initiative targeted various companies, including Anthropic, Apple and Google, among others, to secure online platforms. Rep. Guzman emphasized the issue specifically with online gaming platforms that children use, like Roblox, where they are being exposed to child predators. He asked what OAG is doing to protect children from these companies that are allowing child predators to "run rampant" on their platforms. Sunday stated his office is very serious about tackling the issue of child predators on online gaming platforms and has allocated significant resources to address it, though he couldn't provide specific details. Rep. Guzman asked parents to monitor their children's online accounts. He inquired about expanding the task force on violent crime to include smaller cities such as Reading, which he represents, in these new efforts. Sunday recalled his experience working as a district attorney in a third-class city and confirmed the task force's collaboration with small cities. He highlighted efforts in regard to mental health and public safety, offering to discuss technology-related questions with Rep. Guzman later.

Rep. Marci Mustello (R-Butler) noted the proposed budget for OAG is lower than requested and asked how the office plans to adjust its programs and staffing. Sunday explained that without adequate funding, the office would have to continue drawing from restricted accounts, emphasizing the importance of public safety. He noted the governor's proposed budget includes a modest 2% increase in funding and a separate law enforcement support line. Rep. Mustello inquired about alternative funding sources if the budget is not increased. Sunday suggested increasing the cap on recoverable costs for public and consumer protection divisions could provide additional funds. He stated that OAG is asking only for resources that are currently being funded, and the increase in positions is very minimal.

Rep. Ben Waxman (D-Philadelphia) asked if OAG participated in lawsuits against the Trump administration regarding federal grant freezes. Sunday responded that a "yes or no" answer would be misleading due to the complexity of the legal framework. Rep. Waxman highlighted other lawsuits by states that challenged executive actions restricting federal funding for climate change resilience and disaster relief. He asked if OAG participated in those cases. Sunday explained that his office received 541 litigation referrals from the Governor's Office, of which 465 were adopted and litigated. He detailed that some cases were requested to be delegated under the Commonwealth Attorneys Act, which allows the governor to make such requests. Rep. Waxman asked whether OAG was involved in lawsuits related to changes in federal immigration enforcement policy and the expansion of detention facilities. Sunday detailed the specific duties mandated under the Commonwealth Attorneys Act, including protecting children and seniors and removing \$56 million doses of fentanyl. Chair Harris assured that time would be allowed for comprehensive answers. Sunday spoke about the authority given to the governor under the Commonwealth Attorneys Act to initiate cases and mentioned the number of litigation referrals received and adopted by his office. Rep. Waxman asked for an example of an action taken against the federal government's overreach. Sunday cited legal action against major AI companies.

Rep. Jamie Barton (R-Schuylkill) inquired about the \$3.1 million request for school safety, which represented a 16% increase, and asked for details on the use of additional funds. Sunday explained the request was due to the expansion of the "Safe to Say Something" program, which introduced new reporting requirements for schools. Rep. Barton asked about any results that have come from the success of the "Safe to Say Something" program. Sunday detailed that since the program's launch, over 178,000 tips were received, with 12.5% related to life safety matters, highlighting the mental health crisis among children in Pennsylvania.

Rep. Kristin Marcell (R-Bucks) followed up on the discussion about the "Safe to Say Something" program, asking if the current budget proposed by the governor was considered adequate. Sunday stated that an increase of \$427,000 is needed for the program due to additional requirements from recent legislation. Rep. Marcell shared concerns about maintaining the anonymity of tips within the program. She spoke about drafting legislation to enhance protections for students' confidentiality, asking for Sunday's thoughts on the issue. Sunday stated that any specific incident details should be shared with Bowser and committed to investigating further to inform Rep. Marcell's legislative efforts. Rep. Marcell emphasized the need to ensure the program's confidentiality and anonymity.

Rep. Tim Briggs (D-Montgomery), chair, House Judiciary Committee, thanked Sunday for collaboration on vape legislation and organized retail theft legislation in the last year. He asked for his opinion on the potential benefits of the False Claims Act and antitrust legislation for the commonwealth. Sunday stated he has not read the legislation but emphasized the importance of utilizing federal remedies for antitrust issues. He expressed willingness to learn more about the False Claims Act. Rep. Briggs proposed organizing a roundtable to explore antitrust issues further and invited Sunday to discuss mental health and reentry, areas of significant interest to OAG. Sunday highlighted the mental health crisis in Pennsylvania and the expansion of the Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative (LETI) program to include a mental health component. He recognized the importance of creating crisis centers and increasing access to reentry to prevent individuals from ending up in prison. He expressed eagerness to discuss further ways to facilitate employment for those who have been held accountable.

Rep. Joshua Kail (R-Beaver) thanked Sunday for the "seriousness" he is bringing to the position. He asked about the issue of AI and if OAG is properly staffed to combat issues which these new technologies. Sunday acknowledged OAG's current limitations in fully addressing AI challenges but noted efforts to improve, including the creation of a new section focused on data privacy and responsible technology. He emphasized the importance of proper funding to hire experts. He detailed Pennsylvania's leadership in AI issues, including collaborations with other states and the use of legislation like the Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) law to prosecute AI-related crimes. He stated his office would defend the constitutionality of AI statutes if challenged. Rep. Kail asked whether OAG could offer competitive salaries to attract talent compared to the private tech sector. Sunday responded that while they cannot match private sector salaries, they aim for salary parity with other government agencies to attract talent. He highlighted the dedication of attorneys motivated by the mission and legal battles.

Rep. Joseph Ciresi (D-Montgomery) asked about the ideal state of OAG with proper funding and staff to tackle AI issues. Sunday described the OAG's proposed budget as crucial for enhancing the Public Protection Division funds, emphasizing the importance of funding for litigation and the goal of ensuring Pennsylvanian safety through changing company behaviors. Rep. Ciresi inquired about the office's position on his bill, [HB 1299](#), which aims to make canceling online subscriptions as easy as subscribing. Sunday explained that his office was not familiar with HB 1299 but promised to review it and reach out to Rep. Ciresi for comments. Rep. Ciresi discussed the issue of rising rents for seniors in manufactured home communities due to private equity firms' acquisitions.

He expressed a desire to collaborate to ensure the passage of a bill addressing these practices. Sunday highlighted his office's experience in litigating rent-to-own scenarios and expressed willingness to investigate complaints.

Chair Struzzi humorously thanked both Chair Harris and Sunday's mothers for watching this morning's hearing. He expressed concern over the governor's current spending proposal of approximately \$51.5 billion and sought clarification on the budget figures. He noted the discrepancy between the \$63 million recommended in the governor's proposed budget and the \$73 million requested by the OAG in last year's budget, asking if those figures were correct. Sunday confirmed the figures were correct. Chair Struzzi asked about the discrepancy in the budget proposal for this upcoming fiscal year, observing a request of \$82 million against the governor's proposal of \$59 million. He noted his concerns with the difference, asking if Sunday believes the governor is not prioritizing OAG and public safety. Sunday confirmed the figures and expressed that while the governor proposed an increase, it was deemed insufficient. He stated he focuses on his role with the resources available, without speculating on the governor's prioritization of public safety. Chair Struzzi acknowledged the importance of adequately funding public safety initiatives.

Chair Harris cautioned against inferring a lack of support for public safety based on voting records against the budget last year, emphasizing the importance of not making generalizations about motives. He noted that some comments from today's hearing could have been in violation of House rules due to the inability to make inferences over people's political motivations when they are voting. He asked whether it's considered an unlawful, deceptive practice for ticket resellers to falsely advertise ticket availability, referencing a specific incident involving a Mumford and Sons concert in Pittsburgh. Sunday acknowledged the issue with ticket resellers and noted that while current laws address unfair trade practices, new legislation could provide more clarity, encouraging complaints to be filed for investigation.

Chair Harris thanked Sunday and his team at OAG, humorously stating he would listen to Mumford and Sons to find out who they are. He announced the adjournment of the budget hearing, with the next hearing scheduled for 1 p.m. in the House Chamber.



### **Senate Appropriations Committee - Budget Hearing with PennDOT**

*03/02/2026, 1:15 p.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Department of Transportation.

The Department of Transportation (PennDOT) was represented by:

- Sec. Mike Carroll, PennDOT,
- Meredith Biggica, deputy secretary, Multimodal, PennDOT,
- Corey Pellington, deputy secretary, Administration, PennDOT,
- Chuck Zimmerman, director, Bureau of Fiscal Management, PennDOT, and
- Kara Templeton, deputy secretary, Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS), PennDOT.

Sen. Joe Pittman (R-Indiana), Senate Majority Leader, initiated the discussion by pointing out that the motor license fund's current balance is at \$3 billion. Sec. Carroll specified that the actual available balance is closer to \$40 million or \$50 million due to ongoing projects. Sen. Pittman emphasized that the \$3 billion represents actual cash in the bank. Sec. Carroll compared the situation to the multimodal fund, noting the dynamic of promised projects across the state. Sen. Pittman noted that in January 2015, the motor license fund had a \$750 million balance, highlighting its growth over 10 years by \$2.25 billion. Sec. Carroll explained that the fund's balance is fluid and emphasized the importance of using the funds for necessary repairs across the state. He mentioned that fulfilling obligations for ongoing or upcoming projects would reduce the fund balance to under \$100 million.

Sen. Pittman discussed the funding of projects, including a billion-dollar I-83 bridge project, with total lettings for the coming year expected to be \$4 billion. Sec. Carroll explained that the motor license fund, which receives about \$5 billion annually, supports these projects. Sen. Pittman questioned the projected balance of the fund by next year, considering the current \$3 billion balance and the expected allocation of \$4 billion for projects. Sec. Carroll answered that there would be enough funds to meet the obligations of committed and upcoming projects. Sen. Pittman highlighted that with the current balance, PennDOT could immediately write a check for \$3 billion from the fund. Sec. Carroll emphasized the necessity of paying vendors and contractors for their work, noting that if PennDOT did that, it would not be able to pay for any work that is already being done. Sen. Pittman inquired about the expected balance of the motor license fund by next year, given the scenario of allocating \$3 billion for projects last year and letting \$4 billion

worth of work this year. Sec. Carroll stated that they would have sufficient funds for current and next year's obligations. Sen. Pittman questioned the financial management of PennDOT, suggesting a positive cash flow scenario even after a \$3 billion expenditure. Sec. Carroll objected, stating that PennDOT has other obligations that predate last year that are still being delivered as well. Sen. Pittman highlighted the increase in the motor license fund's cash balance from \$2.25 billion to \$3 billion over the last decade. Sec. Carroll explained PennDOT's need to maintain a cash balance for ongoing projects like the I-83 bridge. Sen. Pittman noted that payments for such projects are spread over several years. Sec. Carroll detailed how the planning team estimates annual financial requirements to match the total cost with available funds.

Chair Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) asked for more details on the reasons behind the significant increase in transportation funds since January 2015. Zimmerman attributed the increase to Act 89 and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which brought in significant new revenues and increased PennDOT's lettings.

Sen. Pittman noted the motor license fund balance increased from \$750 million to \$3 billion after state police expenditures were removed, adding a \$2.3 billion burden to the general fund. Sec. Carroll explained that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs (IIJ) funds require an 80/20 funding match, generating about \$800 million annually for road and bridge projects. Sen. Pittman specified that a 20% match would amount to \$160 million over five years. Sec. Carroll added that discretionary funds are also available and assured that the Treasury balance would be drawn down over the next five years due to IIJ projects. Sen. Pittman highlighted the significance of the \$3 billion fund balance increase over the last decade. Sec. Carroll emphasized that the perception of the motor license fund's balance does not accurately reflect the actual situation due to future commitments. Sen. Pittman responded that they had the same conversation nine months ago and that the balance has gone up since then. Zimmerman explained that on March 1, municipal payments of about \$300 million will be made, increasing the treasury by \$350 million, which has grown over the past nine months and will be paid out immediately.

Sen. Pittman asked about the handling of the accumulated interest on the fund. Zimmerman explained that non-restricted revenues, including parts of the gas tax and driver and vehicle service revenue, contribute to the motor license fund, which finances construction and maintenance, and that the fund accrued an interest of approximately \$80 million or \$90 million in the last fiscal year. Sen. Pittman asked where that was appropriated to. Zimmerman further explained that the accumulated interest is reappropriated to either PennDOT sources or other funds, including state police. Sen. Pittman questioned where the list of projects encumbering \$3 billion is located, noting that he has been told he would receive it since June. He expressed frustration over not receiving a promised list of fully obligated projects for the transit and motor license fund, insisting on a timeline for receiving it. Zimmerman assured him the list would be provided within one week.

Sen. Pittman asked if there is a distinction between obligated funds and lettings. Zimmerman explained that funds are committed when let, while obligated funds refer to the 12-year plan. Sen. Pittman discussed the financial aspects of project lettings, highlighting that with \$5 billion in annual new revenue and an accumulated \$3 billion fund balance, there should be approximately \$8 billion available for checks in the upcoming year. Zimmerman noted that a significant portion of the \$5 billion allocated for maintenance has already been spent but assured that providing a list for the motor license fund would be easily accomplished. Sen. Pittman mentioned hearing a \$4 billion let number that morning. Zimmerman specified that his reference excluded the I-83 bridge. Sen. Pittman confirmed that \$4 billion worth of projects are being let this year and requested information on the expenditure for these projects within a week.

Sen. Patty Kim (D-Dauphin) asked for a clear definition of "letting," "obligation" and "obligated." Sec. Carroll specified the process of "letting" as the award of a contract for the construction of a project and distinguished this from the "obligation of funds." Zimmerman explained the financial commitments and reimbursements associated with project lettings, detailing that for a project like the I-83 bridge, \$1 billion would be committed over five fiscal years. He specified that "obligated" refers to planning stages, while "commitment" signifies a legal document for expenditure. Zimmerman mentioned that PennDOT receives over \$2 billion in reimbursements from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which are used to augment the construction appropriation in the budget.

Chair Scott Martin asked for clarification on how transportation improvement plans (TIPs) from across the state integrate and at what stage of the process this occurs. Sec. Carroll explained that the planning partners put together a 12-year plan that is approved and that is then delivered as a blueprint to PennDOT for them to deliver. He added that the funds in the first four years are the most important segment of the TIP.

Sen. Judy Ward (R-Blair), majority chair, Senate Transportation Committee, discussed the integrity of Pennsylvania's Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program, mentioning an incident involving an alleged terrorist suspect with a non-domicile CDL issued by PennDOT, which led to a pause in issuing all non-domicile CDLs on Sept. 29, 2025. She detailed efforts to address the issue through legislation and asked about the status of the 11,700 non-domiciled CDLs in circulation. Sec. Carroll explained that PennDOT complied with federal regulations to preserve \$150 million in federal funding, noting recent adjustments by federal partners to limit the number of eligible visa holders and demonstrating PennDOT's compliance with federal rules. Sen. Ward expressed concerns

from constituents about PennDOT issuing licenses to illegal aliens and asked how PennDOT will restore confidence in the CDL issuance process. Sec. Carroll specified that Pennsylvania has not issued any CDLs to illegal aliens, stating that one must be lawfully present in the U.S. to obtain a driver's license, in accordance with both federal and state laws.

Sen. Ward inquired about the number of Real IDs issued to non-U.S. citizens. Templeton reported that PennDOT has not cross-referenced non-domiciled commercial driver licenses with Real ID, expressing openness to further discussion on the possibility. Sen. Ward asked if Pennsylvania would face federal sanctions for not offering real IDs to non-U.S. citizens. Sec. Carroll stated he was unsure about the federal regulations regarding the issuance of real IDs to non-U.S. citizens and their compliance status. He asserted that current practices were in compliance with federal regulations but was uncertain about the implications of choosing not to offer real IDs to non-U.S. citizens. Sen. Ward asked what system and process checks are in place to ensure laws are upheld to prevent the issuance of documents to illegal immigrants. Sec. Carroll explained that individuals must prove lawful presence at a driver's center to obtain a PennDOT product, acknowledging human error but not aware of any instances where undocumented individuals received a license due to the rigorous documentation requirements. Templeton noted that, in addition to reviewing documentation for customers who are lawfully present, they also perform safe checks in their system.

Sen. Ward asked if Pennsylvania would face any federal sanctions if Real IDs were offered to non-U.S. citizens. Sec. Carroll explained PennDOT uses the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (U.S. DHS) Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) check system for systematic alien verifications to ensure license issuance eligibility, suggesting that perhaps U.S. DHS could improve its diligence in classifying individuals as terrorists while still allowing states to issue licenses.

Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) asked Sec. Carroll about the annual volume of vehicle registrations, titles and driver's licenses processed by PennDOT. Sec. Carroll explained the complexity of providing a specific number due to the 10 million drivers, most of whom renew their licenses every four years and opt for annual vehicle registrations, with a two-year option available. Sen. Vogel inquired about the number of PennDOT services expected to shift online in the next three years and whether any services are currently exclusively online. Templeton noted the consideration of online payments for the rock fee, specifically the monthly payment for electric vehicles (EVs), as part of the internal railway user charge, indicating it as the only service that could be fully transitioned online. She promised to follow up with a list of services targeted for online enhancement, highlighting efforts focused on modernizing their vehicle system.

Sen. Vogel raised concerns about issues with salvage certificates having incorrect names and the lack of awareness about the yellow dot program, suggesting the need for increased advertising. Sec. Carroll acknowledged the limited public awareness of the yellow dot program and expressed willingness to consider ways to enhance its visibility. Sen. Vogel inquired about upgrades at the Port of Philadelphia, particularly improvements in refrigeration to support the agricultural community. Biggica pointed to a nearing completion project at Packer Avenue Marine Terminal that includes a refrigerated warehouse and noted the increase in crane capacity and refrigeration plugs at the terminal in the past couple of years.

Sen. Vogel asked about the success and usage of the highway transfer turn-back program. Sec. Carroll discussed the reluctance of communities and counties to take on additional roads and bridges from PennDOT's inventory, noting minimal interest even with financial support. Sen. Vogel brought up the issue of shipping-related insurance claims due to a major state road in his district being tarred and chipped, leading to windshield chips and similar issues. Sec. Carroll promised to provide information on claims related to road hardships and mentioned that focusing solely on asphalt paving would result in less preservation work on smaller roads. Sen. Vogel emphasized the importance of addressing potholes before they lead to more significant road damage.

Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Northumberland) commended maintenance districts three and four for their cooperation and responsiveness. She discussed the decreasing funds in the liquid fuels program over the last eight years, despite increasing road maintenance costs, and asked for an explanation for an expected \$8 million increase in the fiscal year 2026-2027. Sec. Carroll explained the increase is due to more fuel-efficient vehicles leading to less gasoline purchased, but it is not sufficient to meet overall allocation needs. Zimmerman stated he does not have an explanation for the \$8 million increase and considers it relatively flat in the context of a \$3 billion budget. Sen. Culver asked if the increase was simply found money, to which Sec. Carroll specified it was due to a modest increase in motor fuel taxes collected this year. He highlighted the \$500 million investment allocated to communities for local road networks and bridges. Sen. Culver asked if municipalities would see this increase. Sec. Carroll confirmed they would receive their checks within 30 days. Sen. Culver asked if districts should be cautioned against expecting the trend of increased liquid fuel allocation to continue. Sec. Carroll discussed the future of motor license fund revenues, expecting a "slow or static arrangement."

Sen. Culver inquired about the growth in license and fee revenue. Sec. Carroll attributed the growth partly to EV fees and the indexing of many fees as per Act 89. Sen. Culver requested a detailed list of licenses and fees by fiscal year to project future growth. Templeton agreed to provide the information on the fees DVS collects and committed to collaborating with the office to search for the requested information over a 10-year timeframe.

Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York) proposed using interstate highway right-of-ways for transmission infrastructure to ensure access to affordable electric power in Pennsylvania, asking if PennDOT would reconsider its policy on this matter. Sec. Carroll expressed openness to considering proposals for using interstate right-of-ways for transmission infrastructure, emphasizing the importance of public safety and the challenge of integrating such infrastructure with the electric grid. Sen. Phillips-Hill inquired about the significant increase in the budget for highway systems, technology and innovation, which went from \$20 million to \$25 million. Zimmerman explained that the increase was to fund current expenses previously covered by the maintenance appropriation, aiming to enhance transparency and align expenditures with their appropriate categories. Sen. Phillips-Hill questioned whether the increase was an actual rise or a shift within the budgeting documents. Zimmerman specified it as partly an actual increase and partly a budget realignment. Sen. Phillips-Hill further inquired about the true increase in cost due to this shift and whether the proposed \$25 million fully covers the related costs. Zimmerman acknowledged the need for further details and noted that some expenses are charged to the maintenance appropriation. Sen. Phillips-Hill then questioned why Gov. Josh Shapiro's budget shows level funding for this line item in subsequent years despite potential additional costs. Zimmerman responded that maintenance funding has remained flat due to revenue constraints, indicating a need to offset expenditures within the existing appropriation.

Sen. Timothy Kearney (D-Delaware) asked about measures taken to restrict access to personal information by immigration and federal law enforcement agencies without judicial warrants, citing constituents' concerns over agencies accessing databases containing personal details like driver's license photos and addresses. Templeton stated that while PennDOT provides some data access through systems like the Pennsylvania Justice Network (JNET) and the Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (CLEAN), it does not authorize access to these systems. She emphasized that PennDOT allows information access as per federal and state laws, including to law enforcement, aligning with Secretary Carroll's previous statements. Sen. Kearney asked whether PennDOT was only following federal guidelines regarding access to personal information and not taking additional steps. Sec. Carroll confirmed that PennDOT adheres to all federal guidelines.

Sen. Kearney inquired about updates on Amtrak, specifically regarding Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility upgrades at existing stations along the Keystone West. Sec. Carroll described PennDOT's successful transition to a more multimodal approach. Biggica outlined the current status and future plans for station construction and ADA accessibility improvements across Pennsylvania. She listed several stations east of Harrisburg, including Coatesville, Parkesburg and Downingtown, that are under construction or planned for reconstruction, with Coatesville expected to be completed by 2027 and Downingtown by 2031. She added that West of Harrisburg, stations like Altoona, Tyrone and Pittsburgh are undergoing a state of good repair and ADA improvements, which are Amtrak's responsibility. Biggica highlighted efforts to secure additional federal funds to support these projects. Sen. Kearney inquired about PennDOT's involvement in ADA upgrades, specifically with the Southeast Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA). Biggica explained that Downingtown Station is especially a shared project between Amtrak and SEPTA, and they are collaborating closely with SEPTA on this specific project.

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R-Lackawanna) asked for more details on the direct passenger rail project from Scranton to New York City, inquiring about the project's status within Pennsylvania's transportation plan and the funding required to move the project forward. Sec. Carroll noted the excitement surrounding the launch of the second Pennsylvanian passenger rail service later in the year, emphasizing the importance of the Scranton to New York project, as well as the Reading to Philadelphia service. He noted that there is eagerness for passenger rail service in the Pocono region and mentioned discussions about a potential Allentown to New York train, which he described as being in the early stages compared to other projects. Biggica explained that Pennsylvania has 69 corridors accepted into the Corridor ID Program, with PennDOT leading the New York City corridor project. She added that the Scranton to New York City corridor is currently in step two of three, with a 10% state match required, which has been committed. She continued that for step three, preliminary engineering, a 20% match from PennDOT will be needed. She stated that this phase will assess infrastructure needs, potentially costing up to \$1 billion based on older studies. She explained that the \$500,000 grant was received to develop a statement of work to progress to step two, which involves a roughly \$4.5 million service development plan with PennDOT responsible for a 10% match.

Sen. Brown highlighted that the project is an estimated \$840 million economic driver for the region. She moved on to discuss spending, asking what two initiatives are within PennDOT that are within Sec. Carroll's control and what has been done to cut costs to give more efficiency and lower expenses. He discussed PennDOT's efforts to improve efficiency in driver license and motor vehicle services, pointing to partnerships and a collaboration with a Tioga County school district to facilitate driver's license knowledge tests. He noted the challenge of inflation and a digital delivery program for bridge projects as a potential source of savings.

Sen. Wayne Langerholc (R-Cambria) highlighted his advocacy for aviation, mentioning Johnstown's designation as an Advanced Air Mobility site and the economic benefits of businesses investing in the area. He asked about the investments and costs associated with aviation technologies, including Air Mobility. Biggica stated the need for investment in emerging aviation technologies and emphasized a collaboration with several states to identify specific needs. She noted that while there is about \$25 million available annually for aviation, funds are mostly allocated to public-use airports, leaving limited resources for new technologies. Sen. Langerholc discussed legislation he authored, emphasizing its passage and the potential for significant returns on investment in



aviation technologies. He expressed frustration with delays in implementing legislative changes at PennDOT, specifically regarding EV fees and driver records updates, and asked for an explanation and solutions. Sec. Carroll explained that delays in implementing legislative changes are due to an outdated computer system at PennDOT, which complicates updating driver records and vehicle services. He noted that a new system is being developed but changes must be applied to both systems, prolonging the process.

Rep. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Beaver) questioned whether aviation funding is sufficient, noting a decline in the condition of runways and highlighting the need for additional funding. She referenced a Senate bill that could address these concerns. Sec. Carroll discussed the challenges of expanding small regional airports in Pennsylvania, including funding limitations. He stated that motor license fund dollars are not used for aviation and referenced a bill related to tax treatment for property adjacent to airports, aimed at stimulating economic activity. Sen. Pennycuick praised regional airlines for their work in alleviating some congestion around Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and inquired if PennDOT is planning to expand small regional airports as opposed to just having two major hubs. Sec. Carroll answered that the funds available limit PennDOT's ability to take on additional projects that would enhance the likelihood of new services. He reminded that the Motor Vehicle Funds are specified in such a way that they cannot be used for aviation. Sen. Pennycuick asked if there are any moves to partner with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to build smaller airports. Sec. Carroll discussed tax treatments of properties adjacent to airports, adding that there are legislative policy decisions to be made with respect to tax credits, but noted that there is a policy for it.

Sen. Pennycuick asked if PennDOT has requested a waiver to keep any unspent money from last year's appropriation. Sec. Carroll explained that PennDOT had to request multiple waivers for unspent budget funds due to a budget impasse, to prevent the funds from reverting to their original sources. He committed to providing details on the waiver amounts later.

Sen. Cris Dush (R-Jefferson) highlighted significant increases in PennDOT's account balances, from \$380 million to \$1.5 billion in the checking account and from under \$100 million to \$1.4 billion in the savings account. He expressed concerns over transparency and questioned the delay of a major construction project in Brookville until 2027. Sec. Carroll acknowledged that he was not familiar with the specific bridge projects in Jefferson County that Sen. Dush referred to and highlighted the challenge of keeping track of the state's 25,000 bridges. He mentioned a past attempt to toll bridges, which was undone by legislation. Sen. Dush emphasized that there are at least two major bridges involved in the project that are causing disruptions for a school district by necessitating a detour for buses. Sec. Carroll acknowledged the challenges faced by school bus routes due to roadways under I-80 in Brookville and committed to exploring ways to accommodate the school district's needs amidst significant bridge investments. Sen. Dush expressed his familiarity with the local school's challenges due to the bridge issues and concern about potential delays similar to those experienced in Mount Rose. Sec. Carroll assured that he would strive to accommodate the school district and children's needs.

Sen. Jarrett Coleman (R-Lehigh) raised concerns about the automatic enforcement of stop-sign cameras in his district, mentioning issues such as erroneous tickets, long waits for appeals and a high overturn rate for appealed tickets. He criticized the system's accuracy and discussed efforts to improve the system's integrity without legislative changes. Sec. Carroll acknowledged the challenges with the automatic enforcement system and suggested that the program deserves reconsideration due to the overwhelming volume of appeals.

Sen. Coleman discussed the need for statutory changes to allow traffic ticket disputes to be taken to the magisterial level and inquired about the formal response to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) letter regarding corrective actions and the SAVE verification process. He asked whether the SAVE system grants ultimate authority to issue licenses or simply confirms lawful presence. Sec. Carroll explained that SAVE provides only a green light to allow PennDOT to issue the product and emphasized that it is a system run by U.S. DHS. Sen. Coleman discussed the SAVE system's role in authorizing employment for individuals on parole and PennDOT's practice of keeping copies of lawful presence documents, confirming that reviews showed individuals were authorized to work. He asked if PennDOT reviews the documents. Sec. Carroll addressed PennDOT's handling of discrepancies in lawful presence and driver's license expiration dates among 11,500 cases, acknowledging minimal errors in extending expiration dates.

Sen. Sharif Street (D-Philadelphia) criticized the lack of sustainable mass transit funding in the General Assembly, affecting SEPTA and other transit agencies. He asked Sec. Carroll for ideas on sustainable funding and the impact on smaller transit agencies. Sec. Carroll discussed Gov. Shapiro's proposal to allocate an additional 1.75% of sales tax revenue to fund transit and acknowledged the need for additional operating revenue for transit agencies. Sen. Street inquired about expanding refrigeration capacity at shipping ports and airports, emphasizing the importance of multimodal transportation solutions. Biggica discussed Act 89's provision of dedicated funding to support public ports and PennDOT's willingness to consider matching funds for projects that expand refrigeration capacity.

Sen. Joe Picozzi (R-Philadelphia) asked for an update on PennDOT's multi-year lane expansion project on I-95 serving northeast Philadelphia. Sec. Carroll alluded to several projects on I-95 but was unclear about the specific segment referred to. Sen. Picozzi sought an update on the ongoing lane construction near the Common Avenue exit on I-95. Sec. Carroll agreed to provide more

detailed information about the northbound segment of I-95 from segment five. Sen. Picozzi added he would provide information on the southbound direction, which is often a concern. Sec. Carroll said he would also include a detailed explanation of the situation with the other information after the hearing.

Sen. Picozzi asked about the status of the Bridge Street and Harbison Avenue exit closure and discussed the financial arrangement between SEPTA and Amtrak, suggesting the possibility of transferring SEPTA's annual payment to Amtrak from SEPTA's operating budget to a state expense covered. Biggica explained that SEPTA's payment to Amtrak comes from its 15-14 allocation of state funds, amounting to roughly \$77 million. Sen. Picozzi argued that the \$77 million payment could potentially be shifted to the Public Transportation Trust Fund (PTTF) as a capital expense to lighten SEPTA's financial burden. Biggica replied that she needed to double-check whether that specific expenditure was classified as a capital or operating expense. Sen. Picozzi highlighted the need for more clarity and transparency from PennDOT regarding the status of funds in the PTTF. Sec. Carroll acknowledged the complexity of the financial information and expressed a desire to provide answers. Sen. Picozzi emphasized the importance of transparency in discussions about transit funding, particularly after a recent three-week period of significant inconvenience for his constituents. He stressed the need for openness regarding the amounts in the Transit Account for developing long-term solutions.

Sen. Pittman discussed his conversations with SEPTA, emphasizing that they pay their bills to Amtrak from either their capital fund or other operating funds. Biggica stated that funding for transit could come from either the state capital allocation or the operating allocation, noting that several agencies, including New Jersey Transit, contribute to the project under the oversight of the Northeast Corridor Commission. Sen. Pittman added that from their perspective, they do pay the bill on behalf of another entity because they provide the funds. Biggica replied that she would argue that the funds come from the state, but that it is part of PennDOT allocations from the General Assembly.

Sen. Pittman stated that SEPTA's \$65 million annual payment to Amtrak, if considered part of their capital allocation, would significantly increase their unspent capital funds, which total \$859 million. Biggica specified that an operating cost, such as the payment to Amtrak, would not affect an agency's capital balance. Sen. Pittman highlighted SEPTA's unique funding crisis, partly due to their direct payment to Amtrak, a cost not typically covered by transit agencies in other states. Biggica mentioned the need to verify if the expense is an operating expense and explained that SEPTA uses state-allocated funds to cover it, with at least three other agencies also contributing to this federally mandated operation. She added that PennDOT is required by federal law to pay for Amtrak Keystone and Pennsylvanian services.

Sen. Pittman inquired about the status of projects deferred due to the governor reallocating \$153 million from the motor license fund to transit. Sec. Carroll stated that all five projects remained on schedule, except for a minor delay in a York County project, and promised to provide a precise schedule for all five projects. Sen. Pittman asked why the use of \$153 million from the motor license fund for transit resulted in the deferral of projects. Sec. Carroll answered that the allocation of funds was deferred, but project delivery was not affected. Sen. Pittman explained that the \$153 million withdrawal from the motor license fund did not materially impact the projects because they were not yet contracted and no bills were pending payment. Sec. Carroll replied that the \$153 million allocation from the motor license fund for transit was a cash flow maneuver that did not affect the delivery schedule of specific projects, thanks to the use of federal funds allowing for this flexibility. He added that despite the initial announcement's implications, project deliveries were not impaired and the motor license fund's cash balance at the time enabled the reallocation of federal funds without delaying project timelines.

Sen. Pittman stated that despite the \$153 million transfer from the motor license fund, the fund's balance continued to grow, indicating the fund's resilience and assuming that the transferred funds were replenished within a reasonable timeframe after completing necessary paperwork between federal partners and the state. Zimmerman specified that the funds in question were federal funds, received for reimbursement after spending state funds, indicating there was not a withdrawal from the motor license fund but merely a reduction in federal highway funds. Zimmerman further explained that the funds were federal and could be flexed, apologizing for any previous lack of specificity. Sen. Pittman asked if there was an excess of federal funds, given that \$153 million was taken from federal funds designated for projects without negatively impacting those projects. Zimmerman noted he is not an expert on federal funds, TIP and reimbursements, emphasizing that the TIP and planning process is a multi-year process. Sen. Pittman again highlighted that there must have been funds in the account even if they started new projects, because they would not have had a material impact yet. Sec. Carroll apologized for not having detailed answers to Sen. Pittman's questions about federal funds and project impacts, explaining the limitation in the number of participants at the hearing. He committed to providing the requested information later.

Sen. Pittman expressed concerns about Gov. Shapiro's decision in November 2024 to redirect \$153 million from infrastructure projects to transit within the state, questioning the lack of evaluation on potential negative impacts and the availability of \$153 million on top of the \$3 billion in the motor license fund. Sec. Carroll explained that reallocating \$153 million was a cash flow strategy to meet immediate needs without affecting project progress. Sen. Pittman sought confirmation on the motor license fund's growth, its annual input and the projected status for the following year. Zimmerman explained that PennDOT does not project year-end balances for the motor license fund, focusing instead on managing annual revenues, expenditures and ensuring the budget is

balanced to prevent deficits. He added that they anticipate spending \$1 billion more than received over the next five years, leading to a decrease in the fund balance, and agreed to put together a five-year projection. Sen. Pittman expressed surprise at the lack of multi-year projections for fund balances to avoid sudden shortfalls. Zimmerman emphasized that PennDOT balances its budget every year, with the balance in question accumulating from revenues of prior year budgets. Sen. Pittman inquired about projections for the transportation and transit trust funds. Biggica explained that their projections are based on best estimates of future expenditures and statutory allocations. She added that they would prefer earlier spending in the PTF and acknowledged anticipating a balance in the funds based on revenues and expenditures.

Sen. Pittman asked if the increase was expected based on budget projections. Biggica answered the anticipated increase in the balance based on available funds and expenditures. Sen. Pittman noted the known authority to transfer dollars to operating funds as exercised in August. Sec. Carroll stated that assistance would be provided upon request if consistent with the agency's guidelines.

Sen. Pittman discussed the proposal to allocate an additional \$300 million annually to transit, questioning the legality and precedent of transferring funds from the motor license fund for operating expenses. Sec. Carroll explained that SEPTA had already utilized their one-time transfer opportunity. Sen. Pittman asked about the duration of the prohibition on specific actions, indicating uncertainty about any existing time limit. Biggica explained the regulation allows for a one-time transfer or waiver of capital to operating funds, which SEPTA has already utilized. Sen. Pittman suggested the possibility of changing regulations to allow for the continued use of the capital account if the fund balance grows. Sec. Carroll stated that granting another opportunity for a waiver would be a policy decision. Sen. Pittman discussed changing regulations or laws to allow for non-perpetual waivers, inquiring about future projections of the PTF balance. Biggica explained that financial projections are based on statutory allocations, not new revenues, and mentioned about \$90 million in invoices pending for Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT).

Sen. Pittman highlighted the \$1.4 billion increase in the PTF over the last five years and questioned the need for an additional \$300 million in new revenue. He suggested a joint meeting with PennDOT, SEPTA and the Port Authority to address transit funding issues.

Sen. Ward asked why the governor's budget did not include money for roads and bridges infrastructure. Sec. Carroll discussed PennDOT's efforts to reconcile legislative exercises with maintenance practices, highlighting the strategic approach to asphalt paving and the readiness of Pennsylvania's transportation system for upcoming major events. Sen. Ward asked a question about whether PennDOT maintenance crews performing more in-house work, particularly asphalt paving, represents a new trend. He explained that PennDOT both performs paving in-house and contracts it out, depending on district capacity and funding availability. He added that Asphalt paving is more expensive than alternatives like tar-and-chip, so when possible, using PennDOT crews can help stretch taxpayer dollars and maintain more roadway miles within budget constraints. Sen. Ward shifted to transportation readiness for major upcoming events like the NFL Draft in Pittsburgh, the FIFA World Cup and the Major League Baseball (MLB) All-Star Game in Philadelphia and America205. She asked what PennDOT is doing to prepare. Sec. Carroll emphasized extensive coordination between PennDOT, local governments and event organizers. He noted that additional state funding was appropriated last year to support infrastructure preparation. He expressed confidence that transportation systems in both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia will be prepared to handle the increased demand associated with these high-profile events.

Sen. Culver asked when PennDOT expects fuel tax revenues to be insufficient for road and bridge maintenance due to increased vehicle fuel efficiency and EV growth. Sec. Carroll discussed the difficulty in predicting future motor fuel tax revenues because of federal policies affecting EV sales and increasing fuel efficiency in gasoline vehicles. He was skeptical about a rapid increase in motor fuel tax revenues due to these trends. Sen. Culver then asked about the anticipated revenue loss from increased EV use and how the current EV fee offsets that decline. Sec. Carroll explained that the current EV fee of \$250 does not fully cover the average \$325 to \$350 a year in gasoline taxes paid by vehicle owners, thus not completely offsetting the decline in motor license fund revenues from increased EV usage. Sen. Culver asked about the budget allocation towards maintenance versus expansion or new projects. Zimmerman explained that the budget is roughly divided into thirds, one-third for maintenance, one-third for construction and one-third for operations.

Sen. Kim emphasized the need for better communication and presentation for clearer financial allocations understanding and highlighted the importance of public safety announcements on work zone safety. Sec. Carroll discussed the effectiveness of the work zone speed enforcement program in Pennsylvania, crediting its success in reducing speeds in work zones and leveling off citations for repeat offenders to the General Assembly's passage and reauthorization. He stressed the importance of public partnership for work zone safety.

Chair Martin highlighted the seriousness with which participants are addressing the state's challenges, the complexity of managing various government levels and the importance of working together to overcome fiscal challenges. He emphasized the need for accountability in budgeting to support the state's growth and safety and expressed interest in continuing discussions about outdated systems.



## House Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with L&I

03/03/2026, 11:00 a.m., House Chamber

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Department of Labor and Industry.

The Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) was represented by:

- Sec. Nancy Walker, L&I,
- Maria Macus, deputy secretary for unemployment compensation (uc) programs, L&I,
- Christopher Hallock, deputy secretary for safety and labor management relations, L&I,
- Patricia Blumenauer, deputy secretary, Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board, L&I,
- Gerald Mullery, deputy secretary for compensation and insurance, L&I,
- Scott Weiant, deputy secretary of administration, L&I, and
- Ryan Hyde, executive director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), L&I.

Minority Chair Jim Struzzi (R-Indiana) outlined the governor's proposal for L&I, which includes a 6.8% budget increase to \$103.3 million for the next fiscal year. He noted new initiatives totaling \$8 million for industry partnerships, vocational rehabilitation and a schools-to-work program.

Sec. Walker expressed her readiness to answer questions, highlighting her appreciation for the chamber's support and the efforts of L&I workers.

Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) asked about the impact of raising the minimum wage to \$15 immediately and the efforts to assist individuals with disabilities in entering the workforce. Sec. Walker discussed the benefits of raising the minimum wage, including economic savings and increased competitiveness. Rep. Khan noted current workforce shortages and asked about L&I's work to assist disabled individuals in entering the workforce. Sec. Walker detailed efforts to integrate workers with disabilities into jobs through summer internships and apprenticeships that give individuals the skills needed in the workforce, noting the support of First Lady Lori Shapiro. Rep. Khan inquired about the potential role of L&I in enforcing a bill to ban captive audience arrangements. Sec. Walker expressed willingness to support and discuss enforcement to make sure it aligns with the needs of the workforce.

Rep. Jamie Barton (R-Schuylkill) asked about the prospects for enhanced energy investment in Pennsylvania and its impact on the workforce, noting the lack of utility-scale natural gas projects since the 2019 initiative to join the Regional Green Gas Initiative (RGGI). Sec. Walker emphasized the importance of creating a robust workforce in the energy sector through apprenticeship programs, grants and schools-to-work programs. He emphasized the importance of creating jobs that are well-paid and family-sustaining. Rep. Barton emphasized Pennsylvania's status as the second-largest energy and natural resource producing state in the United States and highlighted the potential for economic development through lower energy costs.

Rep. Aerion Abney (D-Allegheny) asked about the effectiveness of the technology developed for UC and the success of the Service Infrastructure Improvement Fund (SIIF). Sec. Walker highlighted improvements in Pennsylvania's UC system, including the addition of 380 intake interviewers and the implementation of UC Connect and UC Chat, funded by SIIF. She detailed a \$7.7 million reduction in federal funding for UC, stating that a requested investment of \$115.6 million for the year would ensure the continuation of these services. Rep. Abney inquired about the status of the UC appeals process, specifically the backlog in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas. Sec. Walker explained that the backlog had reduced from 19,000 claims last year to about 7,000 now, below the 45-day benchmark. She noted upcoming regulatory changes to allow telephone or video hearings, sharing that the department is moving in the right direction.

Rep. Jeff Olsommer (R-Wayne) discussed concerns regarding the management of federal broadband funds and the importance of broadband access for economic development in rural areas. He highlighted the conditional approval of over \$711 million for broadband expansion in Pennsylvania and expressed concerns about the Shapiro administration's refusal to differentiate between fiber optic and electrical line work. Sec. Walker urged that all 130,000 locations targeted for broadband rollout will be served. She committed to collaborating with other departments to ensure the release of funds. Rep. Olsommer highlighted a discrepancy, noting the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) website lists 254,000 unserved and underserved locations, leaving nearly 125,000 locations without a broadband plan. He questioned why the L&I continues to contest the classification and wage rates for broadband expansion workers. Sec. Walker deferred questions regarding DCED, classification and wage rates to

her colleagues and mentioned that a decision from the commonwealth court is expected soon.

Rep. Joe Webster (D-Montgomery) discussed an upcoming resource fair in his district aimed at supporting 18-year-olds transitioning into the world post-high school, featuring over 400 families and 75 vendors, including OVR and universities. He expressed concern about the impact of reduced federal funding on such initiatives. Hyde highlighted the publication of success stories of individuals with disabilities and detailed the pre-employment transition services offered by OVR. He described the program's expansion and the challenges posed by fluctuating federal funding, including a specific incident in 2024 when the federal government flat-funded OVR. He stated that any complications with federal funding will not impact the services OVR will continue to provide in the coming years. Rep. Webster emphasized the importance of consistent funding for planning and supporting families, especially for organizing events like his resource fair.

Rep. Thomas Kutz (R-Cumberland) inquired about the extent of UC fraud in 2024 and 2025, referencing a report that highlighted \$570 million in fraudulent UC payments during 2020 and 2021. He asked for an estimate of fraud in the UC system for 2024 and 2025, and the amount recovered by the department. Sec. Walker highlighted the implementation of multifactor authentication and ID.me kiosks at Career Link and United Parcel Service (UPS) locations to verify identities and reduce fraud. She stressed that fraud levels are currently very low. Macus explained that fraudulent overpayments identified in a given year are not necessarily recovered within the same year due to limitations in statutory remedies available to pursue such fraudulent payments. Rep. Kutz wondered about the extent of UC fraud in dollar amounts and inquired about legislative actions and resources needed to reduce fraud. Macus provided specific figures on fraudulent overpayments for various unemployment programs in 2024 and 2025, totaling \$43,586,000 and \$33.84 million, respectively, with \$4.9 million attributed to regular UC. Rep. Kutz noted the drastic change in fraudulent overpayments from five years ago. Macus attributed the reduction in fraudulent overpayments to several factors, including identity verification, the use of a modernized system with multi-factor authentication and an increase in staff supported by the SIIF. She referenced the partnership with the United States Department of Labor and the Attorney General's Office in referring cases of waste or fraud and recovering money. Rep. Kutz asked how much the department spends on fraud recovery compared to the amount recovered. Macus stated she would need to estimate costs for services from ID.me and federal cross-matches for identity verification to give a specific amount. Rep. Kutz asked about additional statutory measures that could be put in place to reduce fraud. Macus emphasized the importance of SIIF funding for maintaining staff to investigate fraud and the difference between pandemic-related fraud and traditional UC fraud. She expressed hope that fraudulent overpayments would decrease but acknowledged the ongoing human element. Rep. Kyle Mullins (D-Lackawanna) offered Macus additional time to expand on her remarks. Macus noted the unique nature of pandemic-related identity theft fraud, emphasizing hope that it does not become prevalent again.

Rep. Anthony Bellmon (D-Philadelphia) highlighted Pennsylvania's employment of approximately 100,000 federal workers and inquired about the progress of hiring federal furloughed workers. Sec. Walker responded that her agency has successfully hired several and encouraged more applications. She called it a priority for the administration and noted they are always looking for good talent. Rep. Bellmon asked about the impact of doubling the schools-to-work funding to \$7 million. Sec. Walker shared that the program has already benefited thousands of young people. She highlighted 52 grantees from last year and expressed an aim to double the number of participants with increased funding.

Rep. Eric Nelson (R-Westmoreland) raised concerns about fraud during COVID-19 and asked about Pennsylvania's efforts to recover funds and prevent future issues. Sec. Walker detailed the use of comprehensive identity checks and systems used to prevent fraud, emphasizing the need for continued staffing. Rep. Nelson discussed the interconnected issues of fraud and inquired about ways to pursue contractors using undocumented workers, who often have a 30% advantage, highlighting the potential for significant tax fraud. Sec. Walker explained that the 30% number referenced is the cost of an employee and not paying taxes on them, which provides for an unfair playing field to law-abiding contractors and businesses. She noted around 21,000 misclassified workers identified through the UC tax service auditing system, with 2,300 turned over to the Bureau of Labor Law Compliance. She stated that L&I's only statutory enforcement is through the Construction Workplace Misclassification Act, so having resources to continue getting on sites and looking at documents and payroll records will help decrease potential fraud. Rep. Nelson expressed concerns about the Uninsured Employers Guaranty Fund (UEGF), noting a significant surcharge increase on legitimate employers due to costs for undocumented or under-the-table workers. He highlighted the lack of requirement for proof of wages to identify employers, allowing individuals to claim they were working and earning a certain amount without verification. He asked about implementing checks and balances for contractors paying workers off the books. Mullery detailed that workers' compensation judges and commissioners review evidence about wages to determine compensation rates, following the law strictly. Rep. Nelson restated that the current law does not require proof of wages, allowing individuals to verbally claim their earnings without verification. Mullery discussed that workers could submit bank deposits or employer memorandums as evidence of their wages for workers' compensation claims, emphasizing that judges and commissioners evaluate the credibility of witness testimony.

Rep. Regina Young (D-Philadelphia) inquired about the variation in fines collected from child labor violations since 2020, seeking to understand the correlation between reporting, investigations and the fluctuation in fine collections. Hallock explained that the variation in fines since 2020 is due to an increase in complaints and investigations, with the fines assessed reflecting the violations found. Rep. Young asked for more clarification, specifically for child labor violations. Hallock noted a significant increase in

investigations resulting in fines from 71 in 2020 to 165 in the fiscal year 2024-2025. Sec. Walker attributed the increase in child labor to a tighter labor market, leading to more children being employed. Rep. Young discussed her legislation in the Senate aimed at increasing fines for Child Labor Act violations, suggesting that higher fines could lead to better compliance. She inquired about the impact on schools-to-work and apprenticeship initiatives. Sec. Walker explained that increasing fines contributes to the General Fund, which would enhance the opportunity to allocate funds to other areas, especially if the fines are not used to reimburse workers' wages. Rep. Young asked about employers hiring fewer youths due to increased accountability. Sec. Walker stated that cases with employers often resolve with an agreement to cease wrongful actions, monitored for compliance, instead of hiring fewer youths.

Rep. Eric Davanzo (R-Westmoreland) inquired about the governor's proposal to allocate an additional \$1 million to OVR to aid Pennsylvanians who are blind, deaf or hard of hearing in securing employment. Sec. Walker explained the proposed \$1 million would support service providers for individuals who are deaf and blind and training in skills like using white canes, serving a population of 112,000 people currently not receiving vocational rehabilitation funds. Rep. Davanzo asked if, when an individual is hired for a job, it is often more short-term, long-term or in the middle. Sec. Walker explained the goal of placing individuals into competitive, integrated employment by providing training programs and necessary support for individuals to keep a job that supports their family.

Rep. Mullins asked about the funding for Centers for Independent Living (CILs), noting their value and questioning whether there should be an increase in funding. Sec. Walker highlighted the importance of CILs, noting the flat funding request of \$2.64 million for the state's nine CILs and suggesting they would benefit from additional funding.

Rep. Ann Flood (R-Northampton) inquired about the waiting list for services provided by OVR, wondering about updates on the order of selection due to flat federal funding. Sec. Walker detailed that there are no waitlists for the most significantly disabled individuals, but there are waitlists for others, with 1,319 under the significantly disabled category and 163 in the disabled category. She stressed that efforts are underway to remove individuals from the waitlist each month.

Rep. Bridget Kosierowski (D-Lackawanna) acknowledged improvements within the State Workers' Insurance Fund (SWIF) and inquired about the impact of lifting SWIF's statutory cap on equity investments. Sec. Walker explained that increasing the cap to 20% could potentially add about \$17.3 million in one year to the corpus of the fund. She expressed openness to help with drafting any legislation to continue long-term financial stability.

Rep. Charity Grimm Krupa (R-Fayette) discussed the allocation of \$3.5 million within the schools-to-work appropriation, inquiring about the specifics of how the additional funding would be utilized and whether it would directly support career and technical centers (CTCs) and school districts or be managed through workforce boards and nonprofits. Sec. Walker emphasized that doubling the investment to \$7 million will hopefully double the outcome. She detailed that seed money was given to 17 programs across the commonwealth and that the administration hopes to focus on areas such as teachers, health care and building and construction trades, aligning with workforce needs. Rep. Krupa asked for detailed information on the allocation of funds from the schools-to-work program, emphasizing the need for transparency and accountability to Pennsylvania taxpayers. Sec. Walker deferred the discussion on administrative details to her colleague. Blumenauer explained that grants are administered through a competitive grant process. Rep. Krupa stated that grants are administered through "political goodwill." Blumenauer continued that eligible applicants are partnerships between schools, businesses and organizations, with administrative caps on the grants to support direct training activities. Rep. Krupa asked for clarification on how the grant money is allocated, expressing concern about ensuring the funds serve their intended purpose without being misused. Blumenauer detailed that there are robust processes for the procurement and management of grants, including monthly and quarterly reporting completed by the department. Rep. Krupa inquired whether CTCs can apply for funding independently. Blumenauer responded that entities must be in partnership with other organizations to apply. Rep. Krupa asked about a decrease of \$2.5 million in apprenticeship training funds, wondering about the shift. Sec. Walker detailed that L&I has consistently requested \$10 million in funding for apprenticeships and would accept the additional \$2.5 million if offered.

Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny) highlighted the importance of mentoring in workforce development and inquired about its representation in the budget, emphasizing its potential to assist young adults and citizens returning to the commonwealth. Sec. Walker discussed a \$9.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor for a reentry program that includes mentoring, which is critical in reducing recidivism and aiding successful reintegration. Rep. Kinkead expressed interest in expanding support to prevent recidivism through mentoring. She asked about protections for workers at various stages of the citizenship process, especially in light of increased federal enforcement on immigration. Sec. Walker explained that her agency enforces laws irrespective of an individual's status. She emphasized the importance of educating both workers and employers about labor laws. Rep. Kinkead asked about the benefits of paid family leave and how the administration plans to enact it. Sec. Walker expressed willingness to discuss legislative strategies to support families, highlighting the benefits of such initiatives for workforce retention.

Rep. Zachary Mako (R-Northampton) asked about the \$5.5 million increase in the worker administration compensation fund, which is focused on security upgrades and functional improvements within the department's online platform for external users in the insurance agency. He asked how the changes would assist those workers. Mullery explained that L&I regularly meets with

stakeholders and “anything that is contained in these current enhancements is being driven by stakeholders.” He added that the funding will also go to security measures like multi-factor authentication. Rep. Mako inquired about the security protocols and whether the General Assembly should consider additional funding for the effort. Mullery mentioned that the Bureau of Workers’ Compensation is funded through assessments, and there was no current need for additional assistance from the General Assembly.

Rep. Kyle Donahue (D-Lackawanna) addressed the issue of worker misclassification in Pennsylvania, mentioning his sponsorship of [HB 721](#) and asking for recent misclassification statistics. Sec. Walker reported that nearly 22,000 workers were found to be misclassified through audits, and the competitive advantage gained by companies through misclassification. “It’s a huge problem, because when people misclassify the workers, which means they’re not paying the taxes, they’re saving hugely in a competitive market,” she said. Sec. Walker recommended strong enforcement.

Rep. Chad Reichard (R-Franklin) asked about the impact of the governor’s proposal to increase the minimum wage to \$15. Sec. Walker stated that 553,800 workers earn between the minimum wage and \$15-an-hour. Rep. Reichard suggested that the number of workers making between minimum wage and \$15-an-hour was decreasing. Rep. Reichard stated that individuals being paid that amount are predominantly younger, and as they age and gain experience, they earn a higher wage. Rep. Reichard inquired about the administration’s support for [HB 1549](#), which proposed phasing in the minimum wage by county, versus an immediate increase to \$15 across the commonwealth. Sec. Walker stated the governor advocates for an immediate increase to \$15-an-hour.

Rep. Tim Brennan (D-Bucks) discussed a proposed \$3.5 million increase in funding for schools to work programs. He questioned some of the impacts the program has affected. Sec. Walker highlighted the diversity of pathways available through state programs. “There’s an endless opportunity for young people, and these are programs that give them the opportunity to go out and see what a job looks like, get skills, get certifications and perhaps even dual enroll are able to be dual enrolled,” she said. Rep. Brennan discussed updating the death benefit in Pennsylvania’s workers’ compensation. He suggested that [HB 2049](#) would help cure the discrepancy between the current benefit rate of \$7,000 and the average funeral cost, which is \$20,000. He asked about adjusting the death benefit to align with market costs and the potential impact on insurance premiums. Sec. Walker expressed willingness to discuss benefits for families affected by workplace injuries or deaths. Rep. Brennan inquired about the implementation of [HB 183](#), which addresses full-body scarring. He asked how the department would implement the legislation. Mullery detailed discussions on administering the bill through the existing workers’ compensation system, where injured workers would present their disfigurement to a judge for assessment. Mullery acknowledged that the new bill would likely lead to an increase in both claims and in-person hearing requests.

Rep. Kristin Marcell (R-Bucks) discussed the governor’s proposal for a SIF authorization of \$115.6 million for fiscal year 2026-2027. She asked about the optimal number of staff positions needed for UC call centers. Rep. Marcell further reported that there were 1,638 positions across all UC bureaus and offices at the end of 2025, which is 51 positions less than at the end of 2024. She asked what the secretary thought was the optimal number of positions. Sec. Walker said, “We’re trying to be really content, and it does take time to train people, obviously, but trying to be really thoughtful and intentional about how many people we have on staff.”

Rep. La’Tasha Mayes (D-Allegheny) expressed interest in discussing the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act, which addresses race-based hair discrimination. She asked if L&I works with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) on discrimination enforcement. Sec. Walker stated her department does not have a role in enforcement but can connect individuals to resources. Rep. Mayes asked about the significant number of women, particularly 300,000 Black women nationwide, leaving the workforce and sought strategies to support and re-attract women to the workforce. Sec. Walker discussed the impact of childcare and caregiving responsibilities on women leaving the workforce in Pennsylvania and mentioned state efforts to support childcare programs and workforce programs offering career pathways with sustainable wages and benefits.

Rep. Joshua Kail (R-Beaver) expressed concern about reports predicting dramatic changes and potential mass unemployment due to AI within the next six months to a year and asked the department’s perspective on how AI might affect labor markets in the commonwealth. Sec. Walker said the department is working with other agencies to create a commission to study the issue and determine how best to help people to transition into different jobs. Rep. Kail described his grandfather’s emphasis on college education for success after a local mill shut down. He asked about state actions to encourage job creation, focusing on the types of jobs to direct children towards. Sec. Walker highlighted the demand for jobs not requiring a college degree in sectors like building, construction trade and manufacturing, as identified in the governor’s economic development plan. She emphasized the vulnerability of recent college graduates to job displacement by AI and the importance of upskilling and transitioning individuals into new roles, advocating for continued research on future job trends. Rep. Kail asked about the timeline for significant job market changes due to AI. Sec. Walker responded that the impact is already being felt and will continue, however, the timeline is uncertain. Rep. Kail expressed a desire to collaborate with the department on policy development and voiced concerns about job preparedness for future generations.

Rep. Gina Curry (D-Delaware) asked about the Family Leave Act, noting that around four million workers in Pennsylvania lack access to paid leave, resulting in significant financial loss. She inquired about the financial impacts observed and whether the administration supports ensuring access to paid family and medical leave for every working Pennsylvanian. Sec. Walker said she would be pleased to discuss legislation for paid family leave and acknowledged the financial challenges it can pose. Rep. Curry asked about the state's strategy to retain college graduates in Pennsylvania. She noted that her children will soon graduate from high school and attend college out of state. Sec. Walker stated that curricula need to match jobs that exist within Pennsylvania communities, as well as enhance work-based opportunities like internships and apprenticeship programs.

Rep. Lee James (R-Venango), minority chair, House Labor and Industry Committee, asked about regulatory barriers to workforce development, specifically focusing on the state's apprenticeship regulations and the high ratio of journeymen to apprentices. He noted the aging skilled tradesman workforce and inquired about efforts to modernize these regulations. Sec. Walker said her department is glad to engage legislators on topics of interest to working people. She remarked that the Apprenticeship and Training Council meets every month, and if anyone thinks that the ratios are unworkable, they may seek an exemption. Rep. James said exemptions are rarely granted. He expressed concern about a potential shortage of skilled tradesmen in his district. Rep. James noted that the department has requested an increase that is 80% higher than four years ago. He asked what progress the department has made in meeting federal benchmarks. He noted L&I "came up a little short on five of the six benchmarks." Sec. Walker explained that the funding request increase was due to a \$7.7 million decrease in federal allotment, while still working to have personnel improvements. Macus highlighted improvements in UC performance benchmarks for Pennsylvania, including increases in first pay timeliness from 65.4% in 2024 to 76.9% in 2025 and in non-monetary 21-day timeliness from 45.1% in 2024 to 62.7% in 2025. She emphasized efforts to improve these rates through examiner performance standards, additional training and staffing strategies. She expressed confidence that the department will meet federal targets.

Rep. Steven Malagari (D-Montgomery) spoke about providing prevailing wage rates to workers on construction projects funded through grants, such as the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RCAP). He asked about the process by which a project is chosen and the steps for verifying that prevailing wage dollars are going to individuals bidding on these employment contracts and "doing the job right." Sec. Walker stated her office does not release RCAP grants. She explained her office's role in overseeing prevailing wage compliance, including the authority to inspect work sites and check payroll records to ensure correct wages are paid. She highlighted that her team conducts inspections across all counties in Pennsylvania to verify wage compliance. Rep. Malagari inquired about the process followed when a discrepancy in prevailing wage payments is found on grant-funded construction projects. Sec. Walker detailed that her office ensures workers are paid what they are owed, and employers who violate wage laws are sanctioned. She noted that repeat offenders may potentially be debarred from future projects.

Rep. Malagari referenced a slight increase in complaints filed for prevailing wage issues from 2020 through the end of 2025. He asked about the current number of investigators available to address these complaints. Sec. Walker discussed that her office is onboarding new personnel to address resource shortages. She emphasized the ongoing issue of needing more resources, especially as infrastructure development increases. Rep. Malagari highlighted the rise in construction worker misclassification from 2020 to 2025. He wondered if the misclassifications are overshadowing the prevailing wage issues, leading the employees not to be paid. Sec. Walker noted the increase in complaints for both misclassification and prevailing wage issues. She detailed that the law for construction workplace misclassification differs from that of prevailing wage, so there is little overlap. She cited more issues with prevailing wages on work sites where individuals are not submitting certified payrolls. Rep. Malagari referenced the impact of the governor's proposal to double the funding for the schools-to-work program to \$7 million and asked for details on the program's impact and the pathways it has supported. Sec. Walker cited that 2,300 students have successfully completed schools-to-work programs, leading to roles such as student teaching and working as emergency medical technicians (EMTs) in their communities. She stressed the importance of keeping younger people in Pennsylvania as they enter the workforce. She expressed a desire to expand the program to cover all 67 counties in the state, despite currently only being able to award grants to a "fraction" of the potential programs.

Chair Struzzi expressed concerns about workforce readiness in Pennsylvania, emphasizing the need for investment in career and technical education (CTE), especially in the building trades, due to the end of the RGGI. Sec. Walker discussed L&I's focus on workforce needs in the data center and broadband expansion sectors, citing a \$2 million grant for northeastern Pennsylvania for data center infrastructure construction. She highlighted the importance of funding workforce grants for building and construction trades and training for maintenance and electrical work, with the crucial nature of apprenticeship funding. Chair Struzzi asked whether there is close collaboration between the Department of Education (PDE) and DCED to ensure alignment in workforce development efforts. Sec. Walker confirmed weekly meetings between L&I, the Office of Transformation and Opportunity, DCED and PDE to ensure a collaborative approach. She stressed the importance of avoiding redundancy and gaps in efforts, particularly in issuing grants for agriculture and other sectors. Chair Struzzi asked about a timeline for filling broadband gaps. Sec. Walker recalled Secretary Rick Siger's testimony that gaps would be filled by 2030. Chair Struzzi asked if the committee could be provided with the fraud numbers before and after the COVID-19 pandemic to understand trends, as referenced earlier in the hearing. Sec. Walker stated that the situation has significantly improved, and those numbers can be distributed.



Chair Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia) announced a recess, stating the session would resume at 2 p.m. with PDE.



### **House Democratic Policy Committee**

*03/03/2026, 12:00 p.m., Room G-50, Irvis Office Building*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee met to hold a public hearing on universal early childhood education programs.

Rep. Sean Dougherty (D-Philadelphia) emphasized the significance of early childhood education and pre-K programs in Pennsylvania. He noted that early education provides several benefits, such as better health outcomes and a stronger workforce. He mentioned that children who attend pre-K are more likely to be prepared for kindergarten, require fewer remedial services, graduate high school and contribute positively to their communities.

Chair Ryan Bizzarro (D-Erie) noted Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) introduced [HB 46](#).

Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) highlighted his collaboration with Rep. Dougherty on HB 46. He stressed the importance of high-quality early childhood education from a health care perspective. He noted that such education aids in brain development, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, preparing children for school success, increasing their likelihood of employment and reducing their chances of engaging with the criminal justice system.

Zaina Cahill, early childhood education policy director, Children First PA, discussed the importance of universal pre-K in Pennsylvania, highlighting its potential economic and social benefits. She shared experiences illustrating the prohibitive costs of childcare and its impact on families' economic mobility and the state's economy. Cahill suggested that universal pre-K could integrate classrooms by race and socioeconomic status, improving outcomes for all children, and referenced New Mexico's successful implementation of universal childcare as a model.

Rep. Mary Isaacson (D-Philadelphia) emphasized the importance of early childhood education in developing social and emotional skills in young children. She mentioned her efforts to increase funding for pre-K to make it universally available and asked for further discussion on the economic benefits of universal pre-K for Pennsylvania. She noted that universal childcare would leave more money in parents' pockets and increase workforce participation. Rep. Isaacson asked for further details on the economic impact of early childhood education in Pennsylvania. Cahill explained that reducing childcare costs could significantly benefit the state's economy by increasing workforce participation, generating tax revenues, and enhancing family incomes. She highlighted her own annual childcare expenses of \$15,600 to \$20,000. She suggested that more affordable childcare could reduce Pennsylvania's economic loss, which is estimated between \$6.6 billion and over \$11 billion. She added that universal childcare programs could also encourage population growth through increased birth rates.

Rep. Dan Williams (D-Chester) asked about the implications of high infant and toddler care costs on the broader issue of universal pre-K. Cahill emphasized the high cost of infant and toddler care, averaging \$13,254 in Pennsylvania. She mentioned New Mexico's approach of shifting focus from universal pre-K to universal child care for children aged zero to five. She stressed the importance of addressing the full spectrum of early childhood education to support working families and ensure children have access to high-quality education.

Otis Bullock, CEO of the Greater Philadelphia Community Alliance, introduced his organization's mission to break the cycle of generational poverty in Philadelphia, focusing on early childhood education as one of its core service pillars. He discussed the disparities in income and access to high-quality childcare in Philadelphia and advocated for universal pre-K as a means to improve education and economic development, citing its benefits for children, parents and the economy.

Rep. Dougherty agreed that the cost of childcare is high. Bullock said he chose not to have more children due to financial constraints.

Rep. Melissa Cerrato (D-Montgomery) shared her personal struggle with childcare. She highlighted the economic impact of women leaving the workforce due to childcare provider closures, stressing the need for a solution.

Rep. Dougherty highlighted the issue of rising costs of early childcare in Philadelphia, especially for children with special needs, and asked Bullock to address the issue. Bullock acknowledged the challenges of providing care for children with special needs and the high costs involved. He noted that his organization must raise additional private funds to cover these expenses and emphasized the difference in funding for childcare subsidies and educational support for children with special needs.

Rep. Nikki Rivera (D-Lancaster) inquired if Bullock agreed that universal childcare would be difficult to implement with how school districts are organized. She asked, “Do you also agree that under a mixed delivery system is the best approach?” Bullock stated that a mixed delivery system is the best approach for implementing pre-K services across the commonwealth. He stated that in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia School District “wouldn’t have the capacity to do it all on their own and would need organizations like mine to help them with that.”

Rep. Williams asked why the business community does not advocate more for childcare, despite the educational and economic advantages. He inquired if they recognize the economic benefits of partnering in this advocacy. Bullock mentioned that the business community in Philadelphia is active in supporting early childhood care, highlighting the state’s Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program (EITC) as a mechanism many businesses utilize. He suggested increasing incentives like EITC to encourage more business investment in early childhood education.

Benjamin Hover, legislative representative, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), emphasized the impact that the lack of high-quality early childcare has on students, parents, and educators. He advocated for investing in high-quality universal pre-K as a crucial policy to support Pennsylvania’s children and families.

Rep. Khan described how he protested with union members for the beverage tax in Philadelphia to support universal pre-K programs in the city. He asked about the program’s effectiveness since its 2017 launch. Hover responded that there have been several positive outcomes of the pre-K programs in Philadelphia, such as improved math and reading scores. He expressed a desire to have certified teachers in pre-K classrooms to enhance student learning and teacher retention.

Rep. Isaacson raised concerns about teacher shortages and the low incomes of early childhood educators in Pennsylvania, particularly in Philadelphia. She emphasized the need for a living wage to help with recruitment and retention in the pre-K education sector. Hover addressed the challenges faced by women in the education sector, especially the impact of inadequate childcare and pre-K programs, and the absence of guaranteed parental leave. He advocated for a guaranteed salary structure and proper leave benefits for pre-K teachers to improve retention and recruitment. Rep. Isaacson encouraged the authors of HB 46 to consider including a set pay structure to attract and retain teachers.

Rep. Gina Curry (D-Delaware) explained she recently visited Delaware County Technical School, which has a “preschool lab.” She asked how those types of strategies will make an impact on teacher recruitment. Hover supported the implementation of educational programs in Delaware County because they offer students a pathway to becoming certified teachers through hands-on experience and financial support for college tuition. He emphasized the benefits of earning a paycheck while pursuing a career in education, because they provide immediate benefits rather than addressing long-term concerns such as parental leave or retirement benefits.

Rep. La’Tasha Mayes (D-Allegheny) asked about the effectiveness of budget allocations for early childcare educators, specifically referring to last year’s \$25 million and this year’s proposed \$35 million for retention and recruitment bonuses. She asked if these bonuses have successfully retained or recruited early childhood educators and asked for advice on further incentivizing them to stay in the workforce. Hover confirmed that incentive programs for educators are effective. He shared his experience of benefiting from a federal program that reduced his student loans for becoming an educator. Hover emphasized that such incentives are crucial for encouraging individuals to enter and stay in the education field, especially those from backgrounds without financial support for college.



## House Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with PDE

03/03/2026, 2:00 p.m., House Chamber

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Department of Education.

The Department of Education (PDE) was represented by:

- Sec. Carrie Rowe, PDE,
- Jessica Seitz, director, Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management, PDE
- Amy Lena, deputy secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, PDE,
- Shante' Brown, deputy secretary, Child Development and Early Learning, PDE,
- Dr. Lynette Kuhn, deputy secretary, postsecondary higher education, PDE.

Chair Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia) welcomed Sec. Rowe and the PDE team.

Minority Chair Jim Struzzi (R-Indiana) mentioned Gov. Josh Shapiro's proposal of an \$18.92 billion in spending from the General Fund for pre-K education in the upcoming fiscal year, marking an increase of \$884 million or 4.4% over the current year. He highlighted that pre-K through 12 spending accounts for nearly 36% of the state budget, with significant portions allocated to basic and special education funding as well as Ready to Learn (RTL) Block Grants. Chair Struzzi expressed concerns over the budget increases and the potential draining of the Rainy Day Fund and surplus to meet these spending requests.

Rep. Joe Webster (D-Montgomery) emphasized the importance of adequacy funding for Norristown area schools and the state library's flat funding. He advocated for increased support for public libraries. Sec. Rowe emphasized the critical role libraries play in communities and advocated for equitable financial support for them. Rep. Webster inquired about the timing and location of new regulations on libraries. Sec. Rowe mentioned that the regulations for libraries haven't been updated for a while and are currently being advanced through the required process. Rep. Webster expressed his concern about the lack of a clear commitment regarding the timing of the new regulations.

Rep. Thomas Kutz (R-Cumberland) thanked Sec. Rowe for her engagement with educational facilities in his district. He highlighted the growth challenges faced by Cumberland Valley School District and the need for improved reading levels among students. He asked for a discussion on long-term infrastructure funding and its role in overall education funding. Sec. Rowe said all types of schools have significant facility needs and require support. She noted that in 2024, PDE distributed about \$75 million for infrastructure projects ranging from flood damage repairs to costly heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) and roof replacements. She added there are "so many needs in schools" and acknowledged the state currently does not have a comprehensive facilities survey to fully assess them. Sec. Rowe highlighted a federal Supporting America's School Infrastructure Grant Program (SASI) that allows PDE to work closely with 37 qualifying school districts to evaluate facility conditions in relation to student outcomes. She said lessons learned from that effort could potentially be extrapolated to help assess needs across the remaining roughly 500 districts, including those experiencing enrollment growth. Rep. Kutz expressed interest in a follow-up conversation about conducting a facility survey to identify funding needs for areas experiencing growth. He emphasized its importance for basic and special education adequacy as well as facilities.

Rep. Abigail Salisbury (D-Allegheny) discussed the financial accountability of state funds allocated to public school districts. She noted that Pennsylvania contributes approximately \$14.6 billion of the \$38.6 billion in revenues for public schools. She expressed concern over the elimination of the Bureau of School Audits in 2022 to save \$5 million, which resulted in the loss of 46 auditors. Rep. Salisbury asked about the current state of school audits in Pennsylvania. Sec. Rowe explained that PDE did not receive the necessary positions or funding to take over the Bureau of School Audits' responsibilities but works with school districts to address problems and provides technical assistance and support where needed. Rep. Salisbury inquired about the workflow for handling fraud, waste and abuse reports and the current staffing levels dedicated to these tasks. Seitz explained that PDE created its own fraud, waste and abuse system about a year ago, accessible through its public website, in addition to existing avenues. She mentioned a partnership between PDE and the Bureau of Audits (BOA) in the Office of the Budget (BO) to conduct audits for a variety of agencies starting in 2024-2025.

Rep. Joshua Kail (R-Beaver) highlighted a local issue in Beaver County involving black mold at New Horizon School, a special education facility, leading to a \$14 million bond floated by school districts for repairs. He inquired about potential funding assistance from the administration for this project. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the importance of New Horizon School and mentioned that PDE currently lacks specific funds for facilities. She suggested that the administration is open to changing the law to make intermediate units eligible for facility grants as part of a comprehensive funding package.

Rep. Aerion Abney (D-Allegheny) discussed the challenges of pupil transportation in the Pittsburgh region and highlighted the shift from yellow bus services to public transportation bus passes due to driver shortages and the resulting safety concerns. He asked if there were measures to address these transportation and safety issues for students. Sec. Rowe discussed the challenges Pittsburgh Public Schools faces in providing pupil transportation and attributed the scaling back of yellow bus services to rising capital costs and the pursuit of efficiency. She acknowledged safety concerns for younger students using public transportation and suggested increasing the transportation subsidy as a partial solution. Rep. Abney focused on workforce development, specifically career and technical education (CTE) challenges, including student backlogs and waitlists. He asked about progress in implementing creative solutions to reduce these waitlists, such as utilizing schools or school districts to host CTE programs. He requested an update on student access to these programs. Sec. Rowe mentioned progress in reducing the CTE program waitlist by using school districts as satellite locations. She referenced the York County School of Technology and Central Westmoreland Career and Technology Center as examples where CTE programs are offered. Sec. Rowe added that this approach is effectively addressing space issues and helping decrease the waitlist for CTE programs.

Rep. Zachary Mako (R-Northampton) inquired about the adequacy gap funding. He mentioned a recommendation by the Basic Education Funding Commission (BEFC) to allocate \$565 million to the RTL Block Grant on Feb. 7, 2023. He asked if this grant is being used to address the adequacy funding issue and whether the adequacy formula is applied through it to fill the current year's adequacy gap. Sec. Rowe explained that certain school districts have been historically underfunded by about \$4.8 billion, with specific allocations made each year to address this adequacy gap. She noted the allocated funds of \$565 million this year, combined with \$1.6 billion over the last three years, will not yet close the entire funding gap for historically underfunded school districts. Rep. Mako asked about PDE's plans to fill the funding gap, including the amount of money and the number of years it will take. Sec. Rowe stated PDE would continue providing incremental amounts until the total determined amount of \$4.8 billion has been fulfilled. She was unsure about the exact projection for closing the funding gap and initially estimated it at nine or 10 years from the start. Sec. Rowe expressed hesitation in setting an end date due to the multifaceted nature of the issue. Rep. Mako expressed concern about bridging the funding gap for schools, given the limited funds and potential depletion of the Rainy Day Fund. He emphasized the need for a serious discussion on sustaining funding in the future and expressed strong support for dual enrollment programs. Rep. Mako suggested that funding for these programs should be increased.

Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny) highlighted the underfunding of public libraries and stated they need \$132.6 million to meet current needs. She discussed a performance audit of five cyber charter schools and revealed a misalignment between the tuition rate formula and the actual cost of providing online education, which allowed cyber charter schools to increase their fund balance reserves by 144% over three years. She pointed out that the Commonwealth Charter Academy (CCA) spent \$196 million on property with unclear purposes and asked about the changes enacted in November, as well as additional reforms proposed by the governor in the current budget. Sec. Rowe explained the recent and proposed changes to the cyber charter school funding formula, including adjustments to deductions for facilities, student activities and tax collection, which aim to redirect approximately \$250 million in savings from cyber schools back to school districts. Rep. Kinkead asked about the possibility of implementing additional cyber charter reforms and specifically mentioned fund balance limits and capital spending guardrails. Sec. Rowe discussed the progress in balancing the relationship between public school entities and cyber schools. She emphasized the importance of listening sessions with school districts. Sec. Rowe highlighted the truancy problem and the low participation rate in standardized exams among cyber school students and suggested incentives to ensure student participation. Rep. Kinkead highlighted the benefit of the excess spending factor for Pittsburgh Public Schools and expressed her view that this advantage should extend to all qualifying school districts, including North Gate, which could have saved an additional \$100,000.

Rep. Marla Brown (R-Lawrence) asked about the lack of increases in the RTL Block Grant in the governor's executive budget for the years 2027 through 2031. Sec. Rowe explained that the absence of increased funding in future planning years reflects that only statutorily mandated funds are projected forward. She highlighted the distinction between mandatory and non-mandatory funding. Rep. Brown commented that she expected the governor's budget to have planned numbers for the RTL grants. Sec. Rowe explained that projecting increases for the RTL grant in future years would be "presumptuous" and noted these amounts are subject to negotiation between the General Assembly and the administration. Rep. Brown asked about the relationship between school district funding and academic performance and inquired about the specific academic performance targets schools must meet to continue receiving additional funding through the RTL grants. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of adequate funding for schools and noted improvements in graduation rates, math scores and "English language attainment learners" achievements due to targeted funding, including block grants. She mentioned this year's request for an additional \$50 million in basic education funding to support more counselors and address teacher vacancies. She underscored the positive impact of such investments on educational outcomes. Rep. Brown asked if there would be penalties for schools that do not meet graduation rates. Sec. Rowe stated PDE would offer additional support to schools not meeting criteria and focused on curriculum or coaching issues rather than just financial assistance.

Rep. Pat Gallagher (D-Philadelphia) asked how PDE ensures low-income students taking college-level credit courses have the resources for exams. Sec. Rowe responded that PDE is working to make these courses free for 56% of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, despite challenges.

Rep. Jeff Olsommer (R-Wayne) inquired about the common uses of the RTL Block Grants and how the formula ensures fairness, especially in rural districts. Sec. Rowe explained that adequacy dollars are used for enhancing academic performance and supporting various educational programs. She noted resources are allocated based on each school's needs, with some rural districts effectively using funds for literacy and math resources and career and technical center (CTC) attendance.

Rep. Justin Fleming (D-Dauphin) highlighted the bipartisan effort securing \$10 million for structured literacy and asked how it would be allocated. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of structured literacy and mentioned ongoing initiatives for its implementation. Lena detailed the steps taken to promote structured literacy, including distributing a guide, maintaining communication with school administrators and conducting a survey to guide resource allocation and professional development in partnership with intermediate units (IUs). Rep. Fleming asked if Sec. Rowe was aware of the issue of district-wide telephone messages being categorized as spam rather than going to parents or guardians. Sec. Rowe acknowledged her previous unawareness of the issue and recognized the similarity of this issue to email spam problems. Rep. Fleming stressed the importance of effective communication between schools and families for critical information sharing.

Rep. Ann Flood (R-Northampton) raised concerns about fraud in child care and early childhood education funding and noted media reports about other states. She inquired about the safeguards in Pennsylvania. Sec. Rowe detailed the measures in Pennsylvania to prevent such fraud and highlighted the commonwealth's robust processes and annual monitoring. Brown stated that child care licensing is under the Department of Human Services (DHS) and mentioned yearly inspections for all licensed child care facilities. Rep. Flood asked about the governor's budget proposal, which includes over \$504 million for early intervention. She noted an increase of over \$51 million or 11%. Sec. Rowe explained that the budget increase is due to the growing number of students receiving services and the need for supplemental budgets for unpredictable service needs. She mentioned a realignment of providers to the state's fiscal year.

Rep. Tim Brennan (D-Bucks) expressed concern about Pennsylvania falling behind in civic education and asked about PDE's efforts to support educators in teaching civics. Sec. Rowe emphasized PDE's support for technical assistance in civics education and mentioned the requirement for students between 7th and 12th grade to take an end-of-year exam, with the citizenship exam being one option. Lena highlighted a civics toolkit, available through the PDE Standards Aligned System (SAS) website, for educators looking for additional resources on civic education. Rep. Brennan emphasized the need for prioritizing civics education due to national testing and teacher feedback.

Rep. Chad Reichard (R-Franklin) raised concerns about Pennsylvania State University's (Penn State) announcement to close seven of its commonwealth campuses, including one in his district, and inquired about the plans regarding the closure. Sec. Rowe responded that PDE needs to review Penn State's plan and assess statutory requirements before making a decision. Rep. Reichard asked whether Sec. Rowe would refuse to sign the closure orders if the plans were unsatisfactory and sought specific criteria for the plans. Sec. Rowe suggested that Kuhn could provide more detailed information. Kuhn mentioned the collaboration with Penn State and the affected communities to ensure higher education remains accessible. Rep. Reichard discussed the checklist and regular check-ins with Penn State to monitor progress. Kuhn confirmed the collaboration and the sharing of plans with the campuses. Rep. Reichard questioned the declining post-secondary enrollment trends noted by Penn State, given the growth in some counties. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the trend and the responsibility of PDE and the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) to address these issues.

Rep. Kyle Donahue (D-Lackawanna) mentioned shortages in certified school nurses and psychologists in Pennsylvania schools and asked about PDE's efforts to recruit and retain these professionals, including support for state investments or programs. Sec. Rowe explained the state's approach and highlighted the Pennsylvania Mental Health Education Learning Program in Schools (PA HELPS) and efforts to attract more individuals to these professions. Rep. Donahue inquired how PDE is incorporating mentoring into its budget, given its importance for students' post-pandemic learning recovery. Sec. Rowe mentioned that schools have the flexibility to use their basic education funding for mentoring programs.

Rep. Kristin Marcell (R-Bucks) discussed the limited capacity of CTCs in Bucks County and noted the high demand and need for additional support to accommodate more students. She asked about any budget provisions or actions that could assist these CTCs. Sec. Rowe discussed potential solutions to accommodate more students in CTE programs, including relocating less equipment-intensive programs and allowing students to take the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) exam in 11th grade. Rep. Marcell asked about two CTE program goals mentioned by Sec. Rowe regarding ensuring equity and inclusion and expanding career pathways for multiple exit and re-entry opportunities. "I just wanted to know what those goals meant," she stated and asked for the information post-hearing.

Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) mentioned that over the past three years, the House majority has allocated over \$3 billion in additional funding for education, including about half a billion dollars for Philadelphia. He asked about the observed impacts of this funding. Sec. Rowe explained the positive impacts, including the ability to fill teaching positions with qualified teachers, reduce class

sizes and send more students to CTCs, which has led to improved graduation rates, higher math test scores and better performance among English language learners. Rep. Khan mentioned that he is the prime sponsor of [HB 46](#), aimed at expanding free high-quality pre-K education in Philadelphia. He asked about the impact of extending universal pre-K across Pennsylvania. Sec. Rowe highlighted the benefits of high-quality pre-K programs, including improved academic performance and higher lifetime earnings, but noted the lack of mandatory full-day kindergarten and suggested a practical approach was needed to achieve universal pre-K.

Rep. Eric Nelson (R-Westmoreland) inquired about the specifics of a 50% budget increase for teacher professional development, amounting to an extra \$2.5 million, and how it would be utilized. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of professional development and mentioned the creation of new courses and enhancements to existing ones, including a focus on civics, 911 education and media literacy. Rep. Nelson raised concerns about the rigor and validity of online professional development courses offered through the Albion Center at Idaho State University. He questioned their alignment with Act 48 requirements. Sec. Rowe acknowledged recent awareness of concerns regarding Albion Center and emphasized the need for all providers to meet strict criteria. Rep. Nelson discussed the financial implications for districts of teachers taking courses through Albion Center and expressed interest in collaborating with PDE to address these issues.

Rep. Gina Curry (D-Montgomery) reflected on the impact of COVID-19 on students' foundational math and reading skills and inquired about current trends in behavioral and mental health among students. She noted an uptick in issues within schools. Rep. Curry asked about the correlation between technology use and mental health among high school students. Sec. Rowe acknowledged that excessive technology use can lead to decreased student engagement and increased mental health issues but couldn't confirm a direct correlation, though she mentioned problems in both areas. Rep. Curry expressed her interest in the educational and mental health needs of high school students. She highlighted the William Penn School District's role in a school funding lawsuit and its nearly \$23 million adequacy gap. She asked for insights on fund utilization and suggestions for effective investment, especially for the "COVID cohort generation." Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of addressing the specific needs of students affected by COVID. She suggested funding allocation towards targeted support, like literacy coaches and engaging students in CTE, to reinvigorate their interest in learning.

Rep. Charity Grimm Krupa (R-Fayette) discussed the issue of declining public school enrollment in Pennsylvania and mentioned discussions on school closures and consolidations in her district. She supported local control over these decisions but expressed concern about potential negative impacts and asked if the commonwealth has a strategic plan to assist districts in managing enrollment decline. Sec. Rowe mentioned limited funds available for districts to conduct feasibility studies for mergers or consolidations and highlighted the importance of proper planning in response to statewide enrollment decline. Rep. Krupa emphasized the need for proactive planning and raised concerns about the proposed budgets for the RTL Block Grant. She noted a \$565 million increase for the 2026-2027 year but flat funding through to the 2030-2031 fiscal years. She questioned the adequacy of this funding to address future needs. Sec. Rowe explained that the administration only provides out-year estimates for items that are statutorily mandated. Rep. Krupa highlighted the Pennsylvania Constitution and the administrative code's requirements for a balanced operating budget and a financial plan for at least the next five years. She questioned whether level funding meets these requirements for detailed planning. Sec. Rowe agreed that providing reasonable detail in budget planning is necessary and acknowledged that subsequent budgets involve negotiations focusing on mandatory items in the out years.

Rep. Paul Friel (D-Chester) asked about the unmet need in CTE programs and noted the high demand and limited slots in Montgomery County. He questioned whether this is a statewide issue. He asked for specifics on the number of students enrolled versus those on the waitlist, given the modest increase in funding for CTE programs. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the lack of specific data on CTE program waitlists but emphasized the need for creative solutions to space limitations and the importance of aligning programs with industry needs. Rep. Friel suggested that obtaining detailed information on waitlists would help the legislative body assess the resources needed to address these gaps and asked if it would be possible to collect and provide this data. Sec. Rowe explained that PDE cannot mandate schools to provide certain information unless required by law and that the General Assembly would need to mandate the collection of specific data, like waitlist numbers. Rep. Friel shifted the discussion to the impact of increased immigration enforcement on school communities. He highlighted incidents where children witnessed immigration actions against their parents. He asked what PDE could do to inform and train schools on the rules regarding bus stops and other areas where children are picked up, and how they could support schools in dealing with the trauma experienced by students. Sec. Rowe mentioned that PDE issued a "Dear Colleague" letter suggesting schools understand and train staff on policies and procedures, update emergency contact information for students and prepare for potential immigration enforcement actions. She noted that school policies are handled at the local level.

Rep. Marci Mustello (R-Butler) inquired about the administration of the Dual Credit Innovation Grant Program. Sec. Rowe mentioned that the practical aspect of the program is managed by PDE's higher education deputy secretary. Rep. Mustello asked if there is a specific committee responsible for overseeing the applications for the program. Kuhn mentioned that their department has a team that reviews the applications. She explained that the number of reviewers per application depends on the volume of applications received, with each application reviewed by two individuals, and a third review is requested if their scores are significantly different. Kuhn mentioned that the number of reviewers per application can reach 30, depending on the volume of applications received. She

noted that last year they received 25 applications, necessitating two reviewers each, with a total of 40 to 50 reviewers available. Rep. Mustello asked if there was a specific formula for reviewing applications. Kuhn stated that a rubric is followed. Rep. Mustello asked if the criteria for evaluating applications could be provided. She expressed concern over a denied application for a community college in Butler. Kuhn advised institutions to contact the Postsecondary and Higher Education Bureau for specifics on low scores or missing elements. She highlighted issues that could relate to program details and eligibility requirements.

Rep. Mustello inquired about the number of applications received last year, how many were funded and the number of those that were community colleges. Kuhn mentioned that most of the recipients were community colleges, with \$14 million distributed last year, and institutions were able to apply for a maximum of \$1 million each. Rep. Mustello questioned the discrepancy in budget figures, thinking it was \$7 million rather than \$14 million. Kuhn explained that funding from the previous year was combined with current funds to maximize expenditure efficiency. Rep. Mustello asked if the funding amount for the upcoming period would remain the same. Kuhn mentioned the appropriated amount is \$7 million but they will advocate for more funding. Rep. Mustello inquired if the funding was sourced from other programs. Sec. Rowe explained the decision to combine two years' worth of funding was due to budget delays. Rep. Mustello asked if fewer institutions would receive funding this year. Kuhn stated she anticipated about seven institutions. Rep. Mustello asked for the criteria used to determine funding denials, to which Kuhn confirmed agreement.

Rep. Anthony Bellmon (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the importance of driver's education in Pennsylvania, mentioning Department of Transportation (PennDOT) data reporting approximately 21,000 crashes involving young drivers aged 16 to 20. He inquired if reimbursement for the Safe Driving Course extends beyond school districts. Sec. Rowe confirmed it is only available to school districts. Rep. Bellmon asked for recommendations on expanding access to driver's education. Sec. Rowe suggested addressing the funding issue and proposing a statutory change to allow PDE to provide more than the minimum \$35 subsidy if additional funds are available.

Rep. Jim Rigby (R-Cambria) discussed the negative impacts of cell phone use among youth, including increased rates of depression, anxiety, suicide and cyberbullying, as well as decreased academic performance. Rep. Rigby asked for an opinion on banning cell phones in schools due to their potential correlation with increased mental health issues. Sec. Rowe stated that the governor is interested in signing a bill that bans cell phones in schools and noted the distraction they cause. She shared her personal experience of not checking her phone during the meeting to illustrate how life can continue without constant notifications and expressed support for measures requiring students to set aside their cell phones. Rep. Rigby mentioned that banning cell phones in schools has led to improved grades and a decline in mental health problems and fighting. He indicated positive outcomes from such bans.

Rep. La'Tasha Mayes (D-Allegheny) mentioned her intention to introduce a bill for comprehensive sexuality education in Pennsylvania school districts, which would be medically accurate and include an opt-out option for parents. She inquired about PDE's stance on comprehensive sexuality education and feedback from school districts on the need for such education. Sec. Rowe highlighted that PDE is focused on the health, safety and well-being of all students. She mentioned that the State Board of Education is reviewing standards related to physical education, health and safety. Sec. Rowe noted that the next discussion on these standards is scheduled for March and suggested it would be beneficial for the State Board of Education to understand the bill's objectives. Rep. Mayes mentioned receiving concerns from various stakeholders about the health of young people in the commonwealth and expressed eagerness to work on the comprehensive sexuality education bill. She emphasized the need for support as young people transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood.

Rep. Jamie Barton (R-Schuylkill) inquired if Sec. Rowe agreed that the Commonwealth Court mandated increased spending on pre-K through 12 education in a 2023 court case, to which Sec. Rowe agreed. Rep. Barton asked for clarity on the governor's decision not to project increases in the RTL Block Grant line item and whether providing adequacy funding was mandated by the court ruling. Sec. Rowe explained that funding projections are based on statutory language, which specifies if a funding stream is required for the current year and subsequent years. She mentioned the Commonwealth Court found Pennsylvania's school funding unconstitutional, leading the BEFC to determine the necessary funding levels for schools moving forward.

Rep. Manuel Guzman (D-Berks) said Reading has the largest school funding adequacy gap in Pennsylvania and argued the state's system was ruled unconstitutional because it discriminates based on property wealth. He stated recent budgets have begun addressing what he called a "broken system," while criticizing the General Assembly for years of underfunding districts like Reading. Rep. Guzman asked Sec. Rowe to explain the impact of state-funded school breakfast programs on students' ability to learn and stay engaged across all 67 counties. Sec. Rowe highlighted that 63% of students in schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are eligible for free or reduced meals. She emphasized that the governor's plan provided 92 million free breakfasts in the past year to help students focus on learning by ensuring they do not have to worry about their next meal. Rep. Guzman asked whether the investment in providing free breakfasts to students would yield future benefits. Sec. Rowe reiterated that free breakfasts allow students to concentrate on their education "so that they can take those next steps and claw themselves out of poverty." Rep. Guzman then shifted the discussion to chronic truancy and absenteeism in Reading and asked about measures to support chronic truants. Sec. Rowe emphasized tailoring solutions to individual needs to address the root causes of truancy.

Rep. Eric Davanzo (R-Westmoreland) addressed the issue of cell phone use in schools and its mental health implications. He asked about PDE's readiness to address these issues once cell phones are removed from classrooms. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the systemic nature of bullying and mentioned PDE's initiative of hosting student symposiums to create a safer learning environment. Lena elaborated on the student symposiums and explained that they provide a platform for students to discuss their needs and experiences with immediate feedback implementation.

Rep. Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster), minority chair, House Education Committee, expressed appreciation for the governor's proposal to increase funding for CTE by nearly 10% and inquired about specific policy changes to improve CTE. He asked Sec. Rowe about potential legislative updates needed besides the NOCTI exam to facilitate forward-thinking changes. Sec. Rowe expressed interest in discussing policy changes for CTE, including letting students take the exam in 11th grade. She suggested involving CTCs directly in the conversation for insights. Sec. Rowe mentioned discussing the issue with "perhaps the deputy secretary or the director specifically related to career and tech." Rep. Cutler inquired if the governor had shown any inclination towards opting into the new federal tax credit program for individual contributions and scholarships, as outlined in the One Big, Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). Sec. Rowe expressed cautious optimism about the new federal tax credit program's potential benefits for both public and private schools. She mentioned the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has yet to finalize the rules, which is a current obstacle to making a decision.

Rep. Peter Schweyer (D-Lehigh), chair, House Education Committee, expressed a desire to discuss the broader progress made in education, particularly through the incorporation of the new adequacy formula by the BEFC and its impact on student outcomes across the commonwealth. Sec. Rowe reported an increase in the four-year graduation cohort rate, improvement in regular attendance, stability in the career standards benchmark, nationwide recognition for career exploration at the middle school level, increases in math proficiency rates and the "highest" English learner growth and attainment rate. Rep. Schweyer discussed the impact of the first tranche of \$500 million in funding distributed across approximately 380 school districts. He noted its reflection in the latest testing scores and the improvement in English language learners due to targeted additional funding. Sec. Rowe highlighted the benefits of the universal free breakfast program and the increase in school and mental health counselors, contributing to better student outcomes.

Chair Struzzi asked Sec. Rowe if the \$565 million in adequacy funding would be available in the 2027-2028 budget, to which Sec. Rowe mentioned that she anticipates funding will be made available to continue closing the adequacy gap. Chair Struzzi confirmed that \$565 million in adequacy funding is expected to be included in the 2027-2028 budget, particularly in the outlying years. He then criticized the current budget proposal for being \$53 billion, which exceeds expected revenues by \$6.4 billion. He highlighted the governor's plan to "drain" the emergency stabilization fund by \$4.5 billion and empty the reserves, while noting the absence of necessary funding in the outlying years. Sec. Rowe asked if the statutory language specifies funding for "this year and all subsequent years" and emphasized the importance of negotiations between the General Assembly and the administration. Chair Struzzi expressed concerns about the predictability of funding for school districts due to current spending proposals that exceed revenues and the depletion of reserves. Sec. Rowe thanked Chair Struzzi for his perspective and agreed on the importance of honesty regarding the state's fiscal situation, especially concerning education funding. Chair Struzzi shifted the conversation towards the challenges faced by K through 12 education, including decreasing student demographics and increasing costs, and asked if there were any strategies being considered to help school districts save money. Sec. Rowe explained that PDE does not create unfunded mandates but implements what the General Assembly approves. She expressed willingness to collaborate to review burdensome mandates. Chair Struzzi acknowledged the limitations of PDE's role in mandates but expressed interest in exploring areas within their control to reduce costs.

Chairman Harris asked Sec. Rowe to confirm her confirmation by the state Senate and if she took an oath of office after her confirmation. Sec. Rowe confirmed she did take an oath of office. She confirmed her action and her belief in the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. She acknowledged being aware of the Commonwealth Court's ruling on Feb. 7, 2023, in the case of William Penn School District versus PDE. She summarized the ruling by stating that schools have been historically and unconstitutionally funded, necessitating remedies. Chair Harris concurred and emphasized the judge's point on the need for students to have a meaningful opportunity to succeed, which was compromised by insufficient funding. Sec. Rowe affirmed the necessity of the General Assembly's requirement to align with the Commonwealth Court's ruling, given their oath to uphold the Pennsylvania Constitution. She explained that the funding allocated to the adequacy bucket over the last two years aimed to address the gap created by the period of unconstitutional funding. She agreed that not allocating funds to the adequacy bucket would keep the General Assembly in violation of the court's order and the Pennsylvania Constitution.

Chair Harris highlighted the General Assembly's responsibility to uphold the Pennsylvania Constitution, mentioning the unchallenged Commonwealth Court ruling as law and necessitating action to rectify unconstitutional school funding. Sec. Rowe confirmed the responsibility of addressing this issue and stated there is a constitutional mandate to do so. Chair Harris agreed that addressing the constitutional mandate on school funding adequacy aligns with their oath of office. He concluded the budget hearing and thanked Sec. Rowe and PDE for their participation.





## **Senate Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with State-Related Universities**

*03/03/2026, 3:25 p.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with state-related universities.

The Pennsylvania State-Related Universities were represented by:

- Dr. Michael Driscoll, president, Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP),
- Dr. Daniel Wubah, president, Millersville University,
- Kenneth Long, president, East Stroudsburg University (ESU), and
- Dr. Laurie Bernotsky, president, West Chester University.

Chair Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) opened the hearing by welcoming the university presidents and discussing the focus on university successes and higher education issues, with a budget of \$625.8 million. He asked the presidents to share strategies for combating declining enrollment, noting a slight increase in current-year enrollment. Driscoll shared IUP's strategies, including enhancing support services to improve retention rates from 71% to 78% in two years, keeping tuition flat for seven years and developing programs that align with student interests, which led to growth in the freshman class. Wubah discussed Millersville University's efforts to expand its student base by increasing adult learners through online programs, re-enrolling students, enhancing graduate and professional degree offerings, targeting high school dual enrollment programs and attracting international students with online courses. Long described ESU's initiatives to engage with the regional community, including meeting with high school superintendents, partnering with local hospitals for nursing needs and collaborating with community colleges like Northampton Community College to share resources and foster affordable education access. Bernotsky highlighted West Chester University's focus on access and affordability, covering tuition for Pell-eligible students starting fall 2026 and adopting an inclusive admission policy with comprehensive support services to ensure student success.

Chair Martin discussed demographic challenges, student debt and affordability concerns in Pennsylvania. He praised the Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program (Grow PA) for its scholarship offerings in high-demand fields and the Grow PA tuition waiver program aimed at attracting out-of-state students, emphasizing the need to improve the program to retain talent within Pennsylvania. Long highlighted the importance of working closely with Grow PA to develop complementary programs at state institutions, adjusting ESU's Good Neighbors program to align with Grow PA's objectives and expressed optimism for further growth and collaboration. Wubah highlighted Millersville University's strategies to attract and retain students from northern Maryland by leveraging merit scholarships and local health care industry employment opportunities, noting a high acceptance rate for Grow PA applicants and the significance of these efforts in benefiting the local community. Bernotsky reported success with the in-state program and that West Chester is eager to work collaboratively to see how to make adaptations to expand. Driscoll emphasized the need for fine-tuning efforts to better serve students at IUP, particularly in navigating program eligibility and addressing capacity limits in programs like nursing. He stressed the importance of balancing in-state and out-of-state student programs and suggested that expanding capacity might require additional funding or external support.

Chair Martin asked about the engagement of non-traditional students, specifically adults with some college experience but no degree. Driscoll discussed IUP's strategies to reengage former students and attract adult learners, including maintaining contact with students who leave before completing their degrees and utilizing external vendors to locate these individuals. He highlighted IUP's efforts in offering non-traditional programs, such as badges or certificates, to meet industry needs. Wubah shared Millersville University's strategies for engaging non-traditional students, including partnerships for student re-enrollment, expanding online degree completion programs and establishing programs to accelerate graduates' transition into business ownership. He noted the renewal of articulation agreements with over 20 community colleges. Bernotsky talked about West Chester University's approach to addressing the needs of stop-out students, including partnering with other institutions for online completion programs and introducing concierge services to simplify the process for returning students. Long mentioned ESU partnerships with sister institutions to offer online classes and highlighted ESU's focus on underrepresented minorities, Pell recipients and first-generation students. He discussed ESU's development of accelerated pathway programs in health care and education to address local workforce needs. Chair Scott Martin shared his personal experience with alternative educational pathways, emphasizing the importance of awareness about such options.

Sen. Joe Pittman (R-Indiana), Senate Majority Leader, inquired about how universities are working to distinguish themselves in the face of declining demographics and enrollment challenges, within the constraints of the system structure. Wubah discussed Millersville University's strategy of reducing competition with sister Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) institutions by focusing on local recruitment and differentiating its academic strengths, highlighting specialized programs in nursing, emergency management and nationally recognized meteorology to attract both in-state and out-of-state students. Long discussed ESU's focus on expanding work-based learning opportunities for students, aiming to integrate at least one such experience into every academic program to improve retention rates and career success. Bernotsky highlighted West Chester University's strategic approach to competition and program differentiation, emphasizing experiential learning and the university's commitment to affordability and high-quality education. Driscoll emphasized IUP's strategy for competing with other institutions by offering high-quality majors, maintaining competitive costs and providing a welcoming environment. Sen. Pittman highlighted the shift towards career and technical education (CTE) and the need for higher education institutions to adapt their offerings and physical footprints to demographic realities.

Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Northumberland), chair, Senate Education Committee, asked the presidents to share their proudest achievements in supporting students. Driscoll expressed pride in IUP's new program aimed at making the university exceptionally student-centered through the hiring of "navigators" to support students and enhance retention rates. Wubah emphasized the importance of experiential opportunities for student retention and success, highlighting Millersville University's "Made in Millersville" program that allows students to showcase their hands-on experiences. Bernotsky highlighted West Chester University's academic support and advocacy center and the focus of the university on its students, primarily to ensure student success. Sen. Culver asked Wubah about operational reforms at his institution. Wubah described the consolidation of human resources (HR) operations and the implementation of a unified student information system (SIS) platform to improve efficiency and reduce costs at Millersville University. Sen. Culver then asked Bernotsky about the return on investment for supporting PASSHE universities. Bernotsky emphasized the benefits of funding higher education, noting that a significant portion of the budget is directed towards maintaining affordability for students, particularly benefiting those with financial needs at West Chester University. Sen. Culver inquired about strategies to retain students in the state for work. Bernotsky highlighted West Chester University's focus on partnerships, community engagement and early job placement opportunities for students.

Sen. Culver asked Driscoll about capital investments needed for PASSHE campuses. Driscoll discussed the allocation of approximately \$70 million a year for new construction and additional funds for deferred maintenance, emphasizing the importance of targeted investments in areas of excellence. Sen. Culver sought further input on capital investments. Wubah discussed the need for funding to replace Millersville University's outdated science building to continue producing graduates in key fields. Long discussed ESU's deferred maintenance backlog, attributing it to prioritizing scholarships over facility upkeep. He explained the university's decision to avoid debt, which has resulted in minimal financial liabilities but has negatively affected the condition of facilities.

Sen. Lindsey Williams (D-Allegheny), minority chair, Senate Education Committee, asked about the technological needs of universities, particularly in terms of integrating technology and shared services across schools, and how current technology meets these needs. Driscoll highlighted the challenges of outdated systems and inconsistency in technology across universities. Wubah discussed Millersville University's strategic investments in technology, including a partnership with external consultants costing \$120,000 annually and plans to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) literacy into the curriculum. Long highlighted the technology fee at ESU used for upgrading classrooms and the necessity of updating technology post-pandemic. Bernotsky emphasized the growing technology and capital needs at West Chester University and the importance of integrating technology into building design.

Sen. Williams discussed the challenges of maintaining and upgrading educational technology and infrastructure and the impact of stagnant state funding on affordability and student debt. She asked for detailed cost estimates for system-wide upgrades. Long explained that recent appropriation increases were allocated towards student affordability and access but highlighted the need for additional funding for facilities and infrastructure, citing a specific example of deferred maintenance costs. Bernotsky noted that 57% of educational spaces at West Chester University are at high risk due to aging and discussed investments to support Pell-eligible students starting in fall 2026. Wubah emphasized the need for upgrading Millersville University's 60-year-old science building and the efforts to raise funding for scholarships to support students struggling with tuition costs, noting the allocation of \$1.5 million in institutional aid to students. Driscoll stated that at IUP, the top priority would be maintaining low and competitive tuition rates, expanding scholarship support, strengthening student success infrastructure to improve retention and investing more aggressively in high-demand workforce programs such as teacher education and health care.

Sen. Sharif Street (D-Philadelphia) asked about the alignment of curricula with industry needs to support career readiness for both traditional and non-traditional students. Wubah described Millersville University's efforts to align education with career readiness through partnerships with local industries and an upcoming project with GSK involving an \$800 million facility near the campus. Driscoll highlighted that IUP has reviewed all its academic programs in the last two years, placing 13 in moratorium and identifying others for potential partnership, focusing on areas with promising job prospects. Long discussed ESU's focus on hands-on experience through work-based learning at no additional cost, highlighting partnerships with local resorts and industries in the

Poconos and citing a 100% nursing exam pass rate in 2024 as an example of job readiness. Sen. Street emphasized the importance of aligning educational programs with life sciences, hard tech and resorts, along with a general review of curriculum.

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R-Lackawanna) discussed the importance of keeping students in Pennsylvania and highlighted ESU's enrollment growth and the role of hands-on learning in preparing students for employment. She asked for more information on the benefits of a one-time funding mechanism to expand faculty and increase student acceptance in nursing programs. Driscoll explained the growth limitations of nursing programs at IUP due to faculty, clinical rotations and facilities constraints, mentioning efforts to address these challenges, including a PhD in nursing and the need for more clinical partners. He pointed to IUP's receipt of funding from a private donor to study the potential 50% growth in their nursing program. Sen. Brown interrupted, asking how many IUP would have enrolled in the program if they had the faculty and clinicals on the level that they need. Driscoll discussed the challenges of expanding the nursing program at IUP, emphasizing the need for more clinical rotations and the limitations posed by current facilities. He suggested a one-time investment in a simulation lab could significantly benefit the program and highlighted the importance of support programs like chemistry, anatomy and physiology. He stressed the need for a holistic approach to expansion, including enhancing support programs and facilities. Wubah described similar space constraints at Millersville University's Department of Nursing, noting that despite high demand and support from local hospitals, expansion is limited. He noted that 50 nursing students graduated last year and emphasized that with additional funding and space, the university could significantly increase its intake. Bernotsky answered that one-time funding allowed West Chester University to increase its accepted nursing students by 25% for the fall, thanks to the availability of a simulation lab. Sen. Brown emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes to continue building enrollment in nursing programs.

Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D-Montgomery) asked about the impact of federal research cuts on West Chester and IUP, inquiring about measures to support the continuation of vital research activities. Bernotsky explained West Chester University's cautious use of external grant money and its efforts to cover stopped grants with its own funds. She emphasized the importance of pursuing grants and the value of support in this endeavor. Driscoll reported that IUP receives about \$18 million in annual awards and graduates approximately 102 doctoral students annually. He highlighted the careful hiring practices for faculty on grant funds and the engagement of students in research and exploration.

Sen. Cappelletti expressed interest in shifting the discussion towards teaching programs, particularly those related to early care and education, and inquired about the effectiveness of stipends or bonuses for childcare workers. Wubah highlighted the importance of education at Millersville University, noting the production of 210 teachers last year and the popularity of early childhood education. He described a partnership with a program in Lancaster that provided an experimental environment for students, emphasizing the challenge of meeting demand due to a lack of preceptors for pre-service experiences.

Sen. Cris Dush (R-Jefferson) asked for information on property disposition and underutilized buildings from the state government committee and praised Driscoll for his approach to managing the decline in university populations at IUP, particularly highlighting the collaboration with unions and local communities. He asked Driscoll to discuss his approach to facilitating difficult conversations. Driscoll discussed the workforce reduction by 40% and significant cuts in physical infrastructure at IUP between 2019 and 2025, emphasizing the importance of clear communication and honesty about the institution's financial realities during this process. Sen. Dush commended Driscoll for his early and open communication during the consolidation process at IUP and suggested that Driscoll should teach administrators across the state how to handle similar situations. Driscoll acknowledged the complexity of integrating different institutional cultures, especially during the merging of three distinct cultures in each of the two integrations at IUP. He pointed out the differences in situations between IUP and other universities. Sen. Dush acknowledged Driscoll's proactive and transparent approach in handling the challenges at IUP, appreciating the continuous information sharing throughout the process.

Sen. Art Haywood (D-Montgomery) shared information from PASSHE Chancellor Dr. Christopher Fiorentino's office about the return on investment for every \$1 invested in higher education and the discrepancy between incarceration and higher education budgets. He asked about the impact on universities if their budget proposals are not fully funded, noting Gov. Josh Shapiro proposed flat funding. Long responded that the university will not reduce student admissions despite potential budget constraints but might extend its deferred maintenance timeline and take other cost-saving measures due to flat funding, effectively acting as a budget cut.

Sen. Haywood asked about the impact of the fee estate grant on university campuses, noting there has been no increase in the grant to match the cost of living. Wubah reported that 33% of their students are Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) grant eligible and emphasized the importance of the PHEAA grant in enabling the university to cover the full cost of tuition for these students, particularly since about 35% of their students are first-generation college students. Long added that about a third of ESU students are under \$30,000, noting the importance of the impact of any changes in the fees. Sen. Haywood asked about universities' use of their own resources for financial aid to make higher education more affordable. Driscoll stated that IUP allocates about \$26 million a year in scholarships and institutional resources, including housing scholarships. Bernotsky reported that West Chester University allocates approximately \$15 million, 15% of the funds received from the state, directly to students and also offers a significant scholarship program for housing costs.

Sen. Judith Schwank (D-Berks) inquired about how universities support students' physical and mental health and address food insecurity and housing for low-income students. Wubah described Millersville University's initiatives, including the Epic Compassion Fund and the Hunger Action Fund, to support students' well-being. Bernotsky discussed West Chester University's Promise Program, which addresses housing and food insecurity and the development of a resource pantry. Long highlighted ESU's food pantry, operated in partnership with a local parish. Sen. Schwank asked if all universities have a health office for mental health and about any increases in usage. Driscoll confirmed IUP's health center includes a Counseling Center and noted the existence of the Center for Applied Psychology and other support services. Sen. Schwank asked if students use those services, which Driscoll confirmed.

Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Berks) inquired about the possibility of remodeling empty buildings to expand nursing programs due to the "enrollment cliff." Wubah pointed to Millersville University's partnership with Thaddeus Stevens College to utilize space and their high housing occupancy rates, indicating no luxury of empty buildings for expansion. Driscoll explained that IUP has demolished outdated and unused buildings to reduce excess infrastructure and is now repurposing and renovating existing facilities to support future growth, including a proposed college of osteopathic medicine. He noted plans to renovate and consolidate space for nursing, allied health and medical programs into shared facilities and integrated simulation labs to promote collaborative training among health care professionals. Bernotsky highlighted West Chester University's housing capacity challenge, noting that despite admitting 3,000 new students annually, there remains a waitlist due to limited housing, preventing the university from accommodating more students.

Sen. Pennycuick asked about the cost of a simulation lab and the price of a mannequin. Driscoll responded that a full-service mannequin costs about \$10,000 with a five-year lifespan and discussed the use of theater students as simulated patients to enhance training. Long cited the total cost of a simulation lab ranges between \$300,000 and \$400,000. Sen. Pennycuick inquired about university collaboration with community colleges for chemistry and anatomy professors to help increase nursing program enrollment. Driscoll discussed challenges due to collective bargaining agreements but highlighted a partnership with Westmoreland County Community College for nursing programs. Wubah discussed an agreement with a local economy pack to ensure nursing courses apply at Millersville University, reducing the time to graduation.

Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) asked Driscoll about the status of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at IUP and highlighted the positive impact of the nursing program on his stepdaughter. Driscoll described the ROTC program as strong, with enrollment in the hundreds and producing 20 to 35 commissioned lieutenants annually, about 10 of whom are nurses. Sen. Vogel celebrated the upcoming osteopathic medicine program. Driscoll noted that the program is now in its third of four accreditation steps, with a vote expected in April to move to a pre-accreditation state, allowing student recruitment for mid-2027 enrollment. Sen. Vogel inquired about the possibility of the universities partnering with county mental health programs instead of creating their own on-site programs. Long explained that ESU recruits students within a 50-mile radius, which means that for mental health services, they would have to return to their counties to receive them. He noted that they have limited counseling services in the region, and if they partner with close counties, some students would not be able to receive their treatment once they are back in their home county. Wubah indicated that Millersville University provides counseling services to students at no additional cost, which is especially valuable during the holidays when some students return to campus to access mental health care. Driscoll discussed IUP's collaboration with the local hospital and county mental health services to offer comprehensive support to students, including a hotline managed by the tri-county agency. Bernotsky shared that West Chester University follows a similar model to IUP, providing on-campus mental health services and partnering with its county for additional support.

Sen. Timothy Kearney (D-Delaware) talked about his experience as an architect working on college and university projects, including a feasibility study for IUP's science building, and advocated for constructing new, right-sized buildings. He expressed appreciation for PASSHE and the potential of certificate programs to meet educational needs in the state.

Minority Chair Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the significant impact of Pennsylvania's investment in higher education. He thanked Long for his assistance at Cheney University. He emphasized the importance of preparing students not only for employment but also to be broad thinkers.

Chair Martin emphasized the critical role of college presidents in fundraising, highlighting Wubah's success with the "Imagine the Impossible" campaign at Millersville University, which raised over \$110 million and more than doubled the endowment. Wubah discussed the importance of fundraising for student retention and success, outlining Millersville's "four Is" strategy and noting the goal to raise over \$1 million in a single day. Long highlighted the importance of engaging alumni and community partners in fundraising for scholarships and shared how fundraising was crucial during the pandemic, with alumni contributing computers and Wi-Fi cards to students. Driscoll expressed appreciation for the opportunity to highlight institutional fundraising efforts, noting that while it may not always be visible, it has a significant impact. He shared that IUP is celebrating its 150th anniversary and has launched the "Impact 150" campaign with a \$150 million fundraising goal. He reported that as of Dec. 31, 2025, the campaign had reached \$102 million, up from approximately \$82 million earlier in the year, with additional progress made since then. He emphasized that this effort is not about competition among institutions but about collective support and that philanthropic

contributions directly enhance student opportunities and academic programs. Bernotsky highlighted the teamwork involved in fundraising at West Chester University, noting the significant roles of deans and senior staff in building endowments to support the university's sustainability.

Chair Martin spoke on the importance of workforce development and the role of higher education in Pennsylvania, mentioning the state's challenges with enrollment growth and infrastructure at universities. He emphasized Pennsylvania's position in higher education funding and the necessity for efficient resource use to benefit students and taxpayers. He praised universities for maintaining low tuition and aligning courses with community needs, while also expressing concerns over previous administrative decisions and the need to adjust institutions for future demands.



### **Senate Appropriations Committee - Budget Hearing with L&I and DCED**

*03/04/2026, 9:30 a.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing on workforce development and job training programs with the Department of Labor and Industry and the Department of Community and Economic Development.

The Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) was represented by:

- Sec. Nancy Walker, L&I,
- Patricia Blumenauer, deputy secretary of workforce development, L&I,
- Ryan Hyde, executive director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), L&I, and
- Christopher Hallock, deputy secretary of safety and labor management, L&I.

The Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) was represented by:

- Sec. Rick Siger, DCED, and
- Mike Hannah, executive deputy secretary, DCED.

Chair Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) opened the budget hearing on Gov. Josh Shapiro's budget proposal, focusing on workforce development and job training programs.

Sec. Walker stated her department is requesting increases in funding for several programs: \$3.5 million more for the Schools-to-Work Program (STWP), \$3.5 million for industry partnerships and an additional \$1 million for OVR.

Sec. Siger detailed three main workforce-focused programs and a fourth allowing for workforce training costs. He mentioned a request for a budget increase to \$12.5 million for Workforce and Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania (WEDnetPA), an additional \$2 million for Career Connect and a budget of \$4.7 million for training. Sec. Siger added that DCED also provides grants through the Pennsylvania First (PA First) for job training, however the funding is more flexible.

Chair Martin asked how workforce and job training programs gauge their success. Sec. Siger emphasized the importance of job retention, company success and regional economic health as indicators of program effectiveness. Sec. Walker discussed her department's strategies for enhancing workforce development, including vocational rehabilitation, STWP, industry partnerships and the apprenticeship program. Chair Martin raised concerns about Pennsylvania's aging population and the need to retain young workers, mentioning the Grow PA program, which requires participants to work in high-demand fields in the state. He asked whether similar commitments are required from participants in the programs. Sec. Walker said she works to determine the needs of the community, emphasizing the role of internships and externships in connecting workers with employers without specific ties to funding. Sec. Siger explained that when DCED provides a grant, they often require an eight-year commitment to retaining those jobs. He stated there is a claw-back for funds in PA First if a company does not create a specified number of jobs. He emphasized keeping "Pennsylvanians in Pennsylvania" as a key strategy.

Chair Martin discussed the success of the Tec Centro Workforce Network, which provides bilingual educational and skills training. He highlighted the success of the program and its expansion. He said the program works to connect individuals to local industries to create family-sustaining jobs. He asked why the governor has continued to remove funding for the program each year. Sec. Siger responded that the Tec Centro Workforce Network has engaged directly for additional competitive funding. He expressed openness

to further discussions. Chair Martin emphasized the importance of the Tec Centro Workforce Network and its impact on communities, stressing the need for certainty in its expansion. Sec. Walker explained the collaborative efforts between her department, the Department of Education (PDE) and other agencies to align programs with workforce needs and educational goals, including regular meetings and consulting with subject matter experts. Sec. Siger discussed his department's role in aligning Pennsylvania's higher education ecosystem with workforce and economic development needs, highlighting a \$3.5 billion investment by Eli Lilly in Lehigh County as an example of successful collaboration. Chair Martin reported that in the first year of Tec Centro Workforce Network, 11,000 young people sought to make a commitment to stay in Pennsylvania and engage in highly-sought after careers. He said he hopes to see the program grow in the future.

Moving to a different topic, Chair Martin asked if the apprenticeship programs in DCED and L&I were duplicating their efforts in any fashion. Sec. Walker explained that the departments have complementary roles in supporting apprenticeship programs, focusing on building and supporting the growth of these programs. She remarked that her department works to sponsor and register programs, while carefully administering grants. Sec. Siger explained his department provides grants as a "force multiplier. He stated, "We're not reinventing the wheel; we're not creating new apprenticeships or something like this. We're really helping these existing programs that want to apply for this funding." Chair Martin asked if the departments coordinate their budgets ahead of time to request certain funds to be a force multiplier. Sec. Siger stated DCED reviews its 88 active programs for effectiveness and coordinates budget allocations with L&I to strategically deploy resources. Sec. Walker added that her department enhances existing programs with additional funding for improvements, like new equipment for a pipe fitting apprenticeship program, to meet evolving industry needs.

Sen. Devlin Robinson (R-Allegheny), chair, Senate Labor and Industry Committee, expressed support for increased investment in apprenticeship programs and asked about the industries and occupations across the state with the most growth in apprenticeship opportunities. Sec. Walker highlighted strategic investments in apprenticeships in areas like robotics, technology and health care, based on data and stakeholder dialogue. Sen. Robinson inquired about expanding apprenticeships beyond traditional fields and which new occupations were being considered. Sec. Walker discussed initiatives to train farm and dairy herd managers and create apprenticeship programs in education to address workforce gaps. She reported that her department has been able to create 19 apprenticeship programs, serving nearly 200 students. "What we can do is we can take a paraprofessional who's always wanted to be a teacher and be able to get them into an apprenticeship program where they roll into that teaching credential, and they're able to fill the needs again, keeping people in school districts, meeting the needs of our local communities," she said. Sen. Robinson asked about the sponsors of the certified teacher registered apprenticeship program and if specific school districts were targeted. Sec. Walker explained that any school district could be a candidate for the program, which is available through a competitive grant process. Sen. Robinson questioned how the certified teacher registered apprenticeship program aligns with traditional teacher training programs. Sec. Walker explained the programs were developed with PDE and confirmed it aligns with traditional programs. Sen. Robinson inquired about collaboration between OVR and registered apprenticeship programs to train and employ individuals with disabilities. Sec. Walker explained her department has worked to create pre-apprenticeship programs to help ensure students are "ready to roll into apprenticeship programs." She mentioned that the programs are "happy to adapt the curriculum."

Sen. Robinson asked Sec. Walker if her department is collaborating with PDE to prepare students for a labor market evolving due to advancements in artificial intelligence (AI). Sec. Siger discussed the importance of Pennsylvania leveraging AI for economic and national security, emphasizing the state's potential in AI infrastructure, manufacturing and innovation. He stressed the collective responsibility to stay ahead of AI's impacts. Sec. Walker talked about the impact of AI on job elimination, transformation and creation, mentioning the importance of training programs and a robust study on AI's impact being conducted with various agencies, including PDE. She highlighted efforts to use AI strategically within the commonwealth to improve job efficiency without eliminating jobs.

Sen. John Kane (D-Delaware), minority chair, Senate Labor and Industry Committee, asked Sec. Walker about OVR, specifically about the number of Pennsylvanians on the waiting list and how the proposed funding increase in the governor's budget would affect this list. Sec. Walker explained the transition to an order of selection due to flat federal funding, resulting in a \$12.5 million loss and operational cutbacks. She reported that 14,104 individuals are currently on the waiting list. She said the additional \$1 million requested in the budget aims to support programs for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired.

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R-Monroe), chair, Senate Community, Economic and Recreational Development Committee, inquired about proactive measures for future workforce needs, highlighting the challenges in recruiting businesses due to workforce issues and the importance of long-term planning for the next 20 years, including AI. She emphasized the need for a stronger communication link with schools to align educational efforts with future job market demands. Sec. Siger emphasized the importance of foundational skills and learning adaptability. He detailed his experience at Carnegie Mellon, where the institution worked to train students for fields that are still developing. He highlighted the success of leveraging Pennsylvania's strengths in life sciences, as demonstrated by the Eli Lilly project, and described focusing on the state's existing sector strengths as central to Pennsylvania's economic development strategy. Sen. Brown acknowledged Eli Lilly's positive impact in Pennsylvania and stressed the need for information sharing and flexibility in educational institutions. She asked about the effectiveness and allocation of the Pennsylvania First program's workforce development grants. Sec. Siger said his team will provide specifics later, however PA First is flexible and can

cover costs related to equipment, capital and workforce training. He said that the program can be paired with WEDnetPA for additional success. Sen. Brown inquired about the WEDnetPA program, noting a \$12.5 million funding increase request and a reduction in the number of companies served. She questioned why fewer companies were being assisted compared to previous years. Sec. Siger explained that the \$12.5 million increase for the WEDnetPA program was to make its budget transparent and separate from the PA First program. He remarked that the number of companies involved in WEDnetPA changes depending on the number of employees they need. He added that the budget impasse affected the program.

Sen. Anthony Williams (D-Philadelphia), minority chair, Senate Community, Economic and Recreational Development Committee, discussed the importance of job training programs, emphasizing the need for inclusivity and alignment with industry needs. He highlighted the economic and social benefits of integrating underrepresented groups into the workforce and called for more targeted efforts in specific sectors. Williams requested data to evaluate the success of these programs in his district. Sec. Walker expressed agreement with Sen. Williams on the importance of job opportunities regardless of ethnicity. Blumenauer noted that most of the department's workforce funding comes from federal investments that are deployed locally through workforce development boards. She pointed out that the Wistar Institute has provided a number of training programs. Sen. Williams highlighted the underrepresentation in workforce development and the challenges faced by the Wistar Institute in connecting with chronically unemployed communities. He emphasized the need for effective engagement with schools in his district. He further discussed the broader issue of outreach and inclusion in beneficial programs across Pennsylvania, including rural areas. Blumenauer agreed with Sen. Williams' concerns and mentioned ongoing efforts to connect educational institutions with organizations like the Wistar Institute through partnerships facilitated by grants. She expressed a desire to further discuss these efforts with Sen. Williams. Sec. Walker discussed the importance of programs like STWP in bridging the gap between students and career opportunities, mentioning plans to increase funding for this initiative from \$3.5 million to \$7 million.

Sen. Williams emphasized the importance of employment for individuals in their 30s in his district, as well as the need for more effective education to improve literacy rates in Pennsylvania. He said he hopes to get his district more connected to training programs in the future.

Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Northumberland) asked if the apprenticeship and training initiatives have been operated in coordination with PDE. Sec. Walker explained that the development of a model for an apprenticeship program leading to certifications was a collaborative effort with PDE and is intended to be implemented across local education area school districts. Sen. Culver said she has been researching the German model of apprenticeship and potentially implementing it in Pennsylvania. She asked how much DCED interacts with PDE and other educational entities when working to attract a new company to the commonwealth. Sec. Siger talked about his work with educational institutions and regional leaders to support workforce development for companies investing in Pennsylvania. He highlighted successful partnerships with companies like Eli Lilly and Johnson & Johnson, emphasizing the importance of workforce solutions. He advocated for further institutionalizing these partnerships for economic development. Sen. Culver said she believes that educational institutions are eager to adapt to the evolving demands of the workforce and facilitate the entry of their students into the job market.

Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Montgomery) raised concerns regarding the shortage of teaching nurses. She noted one state college reported there were "500 applicants for 70 spots." She asked how capacity can be increased. Sec. Walker discussed the health care and nursing shortages across Pennsylvania, emphasizing the importance of STWP and apprenticeships. She highlighted the effectiveness of health care club-driven initiatives and the success of UPMC's grant-awarded programs in meeting the nursing demand. Sen. Pennycuick emphasized that the lack of nurse educators is a key constraint. She inquired about efforts to address this issue, including funding for current nurses to pursue advanced degrees to increase the number of instructors. Sec. Walker agreed that focusing on "train the trainer" programs is important and expressed willingness to explore options for directing funds into this initiative.

Sen. Pennycuick highlighted the importance of exposing children to trades as early as fifth and sixth grade due to the competitiveness of getting into Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) by eighth grade. She inquired about efforts to expand training programs beyond apprenticeships for trades and shared a success story of a young man who became a union electrician and eventually opened his own shop. Sec. Walker discussed efforts by PDE and the State Board of Higher Education to ensure early outreach in middle schools for future career awareness, including apprenticeships. She highlighted the challenge of young people in certain areas not having the basic reading and math skills required for apprenticeship programs and mentioned creative programs aimed at bridging these gaps. Chair Martin discussed a past situation in Pennsylvania where a shortage of nurses led to the closure of a local CTC's nursing program due to the inability to meet regulatory requirements for instructors. He emphasized the importance of removing barriers and finding alternative solutions to support students' career aspirations.

Sen. Timothy Kearney (D-Delaware) remarked that the Trump administration has launched a "mass deportation program," which has caused "widespread fear among undocumented and authorized immigrant workers." He asked what effect this has had on Pennsylvania's workforce. Sec. Walker discussed the negative impacts of federal government uncertainty and indiscriminate law enforcement on the workforce, highlighting how fear affects both documented and undocumented workers, as well as businesses.

She noted that while L&I enforces labor laws without considering immigration status, the widespread fear among workers hampers their ability to communicate with government officials, including her own investigators. Sec. Walker expressed concern over the potential for workers to be exploited due to their fear of government interaction. Sec. Siger discussed the importance of immigrants to Pennsylvania's economy, highlighting their significant contributions across various sectors, including agriculture, hospitality and technology. He mentioned that legal immigrants, who constitute 7.7% of the state's population, are not only filling critical roles but have also started innovative companies like Duolingo in Pittsburgh and are driving technological and economic growth.

Sen. Kearney discussed the significant housing shortage in Pennsylvania, highlighting its impact on workforce growth and business attraction due to the lack of available homes, displacement issues and rising home prices. He inquired about current programs and future plans to expand the housing construction workforce. Sec. Siger discussed the governor's housing action plan, which was released earlier in the year to address Pennsylvania's projected shortage of 185,000 housing units by 2035. He highlighted the importance of increasing the home-building workforce to meet this challenge, mentioning that an average house requires about 24 people to build. Sec. Siger emphasized the plan's strategy to encourage and develop programs to bolster the workforce in home building.

Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) expressed interest in learning more about the agricultural school programs. He highlighted the growth of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) program in Pennsylvania. Sec. Walker described her collaboration with the Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding in expanding agricultural opportunities through various programs such as STWP, pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship programs and industry partnerships focused on agriculture. She said her department has worked with the Department of Agriculture (PDA) to determine where skills gaps exist. Sec. Walker mentioned a \$3.8-million investment in agribusinesses and farms across Pennsylvania. Sen. Vogel discussed the increasing importance of robotics, GPS and other technologies in farming, highlighting their use in tasks like planting fields and milking cows. He inquired about the availability of education on these technologies at more accessible institutions like community colleges and CTCs. Sec. Walker acknowledged the rapid changes in agriculture and technology, crediting her learning to discussions with Sec. Redding. She admitted to not being an expert in the specifics of what community and technical colleges (CTCs) might be doing in this area. Sec. Siger emphasized the importance of recognizing that the robotics and technology sectors extend beyond highly specialized professionals, to include roles accessible to individuals with associate degrees or less formal training. He highlighted Pennsylvania's excellence in robotics and the significance of connecting people to jobs in advanced technology fields without the need for advanced degrees. Sec. Siger mentioned the Community College of Allegheny County's mechatronics department as an example of training opportunities in the state.

Sen. Patty Kim (D-Dauphin) praised the revitalization efforts in Pittsburgh and the support for Harrisburg, emphasizing the importance of leadership in these initiatives. She expressed interest in understanding Pennsylvania's strengths and weaknesses from an international perspective and asked where investment should be directed, particularly mentioning higher education as a potential focus. Sec. Siger highlighted Pennsylvania's economic growth and job creation, emphasizing the state's strengths, including its people, research universities, building trades and community college system. He stressed the importance of continuing to develop the workforce to meet business needs.

Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York) discussed Pennsylvania's broadband expansion. She mentioned the conditional approval of the state's broadband proposal by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), contingent on changing the prevailing wage classification. She emphasized the importance of the \$700 million federal funding for broadband to address internet deserts and inquired about the actions the governor and agencies intend to take regarding the acceptance of the federal money. Sec. Siger discussed the progress and challenges related to broadband expansion in Pennsylvania, noting the reduction in unserved and underserved locations and the expected connection of 50,000 new locations by the end of the year. He mentioned the conditional approval of the \$711 million in federal funding for broadband expansion but highlighted the absence of specific language or award conditions from the federal government regarding the prevailing wage classification issue. Sen. Phillips-Hill said the \$700 million was a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." She stated that turning down the money because "we're not willing to make those changes" would be a mistake. She added the federal investment would bring more than 60,000 new jobs to Pennsylvania. "I wouldn't want to lose that opportunity," she said.

Sen. Arthur Haywood (D-Montgomery) highlighted how many of his constituents are underemployed and earning less than they could earn. He reported that Pennsylvania's underemployment rate is 7.3%. He asked how individuals can connect to workforce programs while being unable to visit a CareerLink during the day. Sec. Walker acknowledged the need for flexibility in workforce programs to better serve underemployed individuals by exploring options for evening and weekend access to career resources. Sen. Haywood asked about the impact of raising the minimum wage to honor the current workforce, noting many earn below a living wage. Sec. Walker said she supports raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, highlighting its potential to add \$80 million to the general fund and improve worker dignity. "It's inexcusable in this society that people could work full time and still not be able to pay for basic needs and have to rely on public support," she said.



Sen. Cris Dush (R-Jefferson) inquired about roadblocks to registered apprenticeship programs. Sec. Walker shared her personal connection to disability issues and stressed the importance of accommodating individuals from OVR in apprenticeship programs. Sen. Dush asked whether district offices employ placement counselors. Sec. Walker confirmed that individual counseling is happening. “The issue is just getting the programs to work with OVR,” she remarked. Sec. Walker said the issue is a “personal passion of mine.” Sen. Dush emphasized the importance of trade programs in middle schools and their community involvement.

Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D-Montgomery) highlighted the need for apprenticeship opportunities for individuals reentering society after incarceration. She asked what opportunities and barriers exist for those individuals. Sec. Walker explained how her department has implemented the SkillUp learning program in correctional facilities. She added that formerly incarcerated people are also able to engage with CareerLink services. She highlighted that her department can help individuals obtain certain documents, skills or training they may need to reenter the workforce. She noted that L&I received a \$9.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor for the federal prison system that starts while those individuals are still incarcerated. She added that the department received a \$1.5 million extension grant, which allowed the department to pair people with mentors as they leave the corrections facility. Sen. Cappelletti asked for data on the outcomes of reentry programs, focusing on recidivism rates and job stability. Sec. Walker noted the federal grant programs are in their early stages, but the department will continue to monitor their effectiveness. Sec. Siger discussed DCED’s efforts to increase labor force participation among those exiting incarceration and the broader goal of creating high-paying jobs for all Pennsylvanians, including underemployed communities and people with disabilities.

Sen. Sharif Street (D-Philadelphia) emphasized the importance of job creation and economic opportunities in Pennsylvania, citing the success at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. He asked about coordination between departments to ensure capital investments are paired with job training programs. Sec. Siger highlighted the success of shipbuilding companies in creating jobs and the role of training programs and apprenticeships in providing high-paying opportunities without the need for a college degree. Sen. Street further stressed the importance of training programs for ex-offenders and low-income individuals, mentioning the commonwealth’s investment in such initiatives. Sec. Walker expressed support for programs that offer family-sustaining jobs. Sec. Siger discussed the importance of coordination between federal and state training dollars and companies. Sen. Street invited attendees to tour the Philadelphia Technician Training Institute (PTTI) and mentioned its expansion.

Sen. Jay Costa (D-Allegheny), Senate Minority Leader, asked what role the Innovate in PA program would play with respect to making investments in the biotech and life sciences industries. Sec. Siger said the Innovate in PA proposes to invest \$100 million for several purposes, but one of them is to solve a workforce problem. He explained that as universities see increased investment in life sciences, they will adapt to provide more of those programs. Sen. Costa emphasized the importance of the workforce aspect in the Innovate in PA proposal and asked about the Strategic Early Warning Network (SEWN) program, its success and the need for more such programs. Sec. Walker described SEWN’s role in preventing business closures and layoffs, highlighting its success during the pandemic by assisting a business in Erie. She emphasized the importance of making businesses aware of these free resources. Sen. Costa agreed with Sec. Walker’s description of SEWN and the Steel Valley Authority’s roles in supporting businesses. He emphasized their importance in job retention and facilitating growth or generational transitions.

Sen. Jarrett Coleman (R-Lehigh) addressed Sec. Siger regarding his previous invitations for a joint public hearing to discuss [SB 222](#) and [SB 937](#), along with the commonwealth’s grant awards administration and reporting practices. Sen. Coleman noted Sec. Siger’s office said he was unavailable for the first proposed date and did not respond when other dates were made available. He asked if Sec. Siger would attend a hearing in April or May. Sec. Siger noted the hearing is on workforce development, but his team would follow up. Sen. Coleman emphasized the importance of Sec. Siger’s attendance and testimony at the upcoming hearing. Sec. Siger agreed to discuss the matter with Sen. Coleman.

Sen. Coleman asked for details on how the departments are collaborating with open shop contractors who have established apprenticeship programs. Sec. Siger explained the department’s apprenticeship program, which has a \$3 million budget and offers up to \$200,000 in grants through an open award process to both union and non-union entities. Sec. Walker explained that their grants are competitive, which ensures an equal opportunity for all applicants and supports various sectors, not just building construction trades. Sen. Coleman expressed concerns about taxpayer dollars being spent on luxury suites at Oakmont. He highlighted the need for transparency regarding who was invited to these hospitality suites.

Minority Chair Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the importance of innovative spaces in his district, including the Science Center Corridor, and emphasized the need to ensure that Pennsylvania’s innovation benefits local communities. He asked how the departments can ensure that individuals can be engaged in the innovation. Sec. Siger stated that the drugs and devices that come out of universities need to be manufactured somewhere. He stated that individuals who manufacture vaccines do not need to have advanced degrees. He said the departments need to make sure that workforce training programs are “focused on the community itself.” Chair Hughes discussed the challenge of Philadelphia’s school system having more facilities than students and the need to realign resources to better serve the student population. He emphasized the importance of creating academic institutions that can nurture young talent to integrate into the local innovation sector, highlighting the potential to transform what might be seen as a negative situation into a positive opportunity, ensuring that the benefits of Pennsylvania’s innovation reach all residents. Sec. Walker

discussed the State Board of Higher Education's recent report, focusing on workforce development to ensure local employment opportunities through programs like the Community College of Philadelphia. She highlighted the importance of adapting curriculum and working with schools to maintain a local job pipeline. She mentioned that STWP and apprenticeship programs are effective methods for training and employing both young and older community members. Sec. Walker stressed the significance of starting career education in middle school.

Chair Hughes asked whether the best age range to start preparing young people for the workforce is at the middle school level or in the ninth grade. Sec. Walker emphasized the importance of engaging with children at a young age to inspire hope and aspirations for their future, sharing her personal perspective influenced by her background as the daughter of school teachers. She expressed willingness to collaborate with colleagues at PDE to align early programs with subsequent educational and vocational training opportunities. She advocated for programs that offer training without financial burdens on participants. Chair Hughes reiterated the importance of ensuring that Pennsylvania's residents benefit from the state's innovation, particularly in fields like medicine. He mentioned the proposed Innovate 2.0 initiative, suggesting that funds be specifically allocated to foster innovation at the pipeline level to ensure local communities benefit from statewide advancements. Sec. Siger said, "It's a really important point and a really good idea." He explained that individuals in his department have considered a "challenge grant," where the department poses a challenge and provides a grant to the organization that proposes the best way to solve the issue.

Chair Hughes emphasized leveraging Pennsylvania's innovative talent for the benefit of its residents. He highlighted the concept of a challenge grant within the Innovate 2.0 initiative as a means to foster collaboration among research universities, companies and other partners in the ecosystem, indicating a desire to further discuss this approach.

Chair Martin thanked attendees and stated that "if we continue to get this right... hopefully we can really try to make a dent in some of this demographic decline, too."



### **Senate Appropriations – Budget Hearing with PDE**

*03/05/2026, 9:30 a.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Department of Education.

The Department of Education (PDE) was represented by:

- Dr. Carrie Rowe, secretary, PDE,
- Amy Lena, deputy secretary, Elementary and Secondary Education, PDE,
- Lynette Kuhn, deputy secretary, Postsecondary and Higher Education, PDE,
- Shantè Brown, deputy secretary, Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), PDE, and
- Jessica Sites, director, Bureau of Financial Operations, PDE.

Chair Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) opened the final day of budget hearings for Gov. Josh Shapiro's fiscal year 2026-2027, focusing on PDE's \$25.9 billion budget. He emphasized the importance of the universal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) requirement for high school seniors and the success of the Grow PA scholarship and grant program, while noting the less successful Grow PA tuition waiver program for out-of-state students. He asked for strategies to improve the program's visibility and effectiveness. He inquired about the cost of vacant seats in educational programs, which could total up to \$90 million. Sec. Rowe discussed funding and attendance uncertainties, explaining that entities need to maintain an 80% or 90% attendance rate to be considered fully funded. She highlighted that operational costs remain constant regardless of student numbers and noted a positive trend in enrollment, with several counties achieving 100% seat occupancy. Chair Martin expressed concerns about childcare deserts and the importance of guaranteeing a certain number of slots to attract service providers to needy areas. He inquired about the anticipated costs for vacant childcare seats based on current enrollments. Sec. Rowe specified the criteria for considering childcare slots as vacant, with lead agencies requiring at least 90% enrollment and non-lead agencies 80%. Chair Martin mentioned that with 3,500 slots, they are looking at \$37.6 million in costs due to under-enrollment. He asked what measures are being taken to ensure providers achieve full enrollment. Sec. Rowe explained that PDE has a program involving pre-K count specialists who work with agencies to increase enrollment, which has reached 88%. She highlighted Berks County's request for an additional 1,100 seats and its achievement of over 95% enrollment, suggesting that rebidding contracts could improve enrollment rates.

Chair Martin requested the full enrollment plans developed by providers to be shared with the committee, acknowledging the issue of late budgets affecting pre-K enrollment. Brown discussed her team's work with pre-K count specialists and providers to develop enrollment plans and address issues with agencies historically under-enrolled. She highlighted a reallocation plan for these agencies and noted that agencies failing to increase enrollment could face reallocation.

Chair Martin explained the law allows a provider 20 days to fill a vacancy after a student leaves, with the possibility of reduced payments or fund returns for unfilled seats, unless the vacancy occurs within the last 21 days of class. He asked if it is common for PDE to reduce payments to providers who fail to fill seats. Brown highlighted the challenges pre-K providers face in maintaining enrollment and staffing, especially due to COVID-19, and the importance of giving providers time to fill vacancies. She noted an uptick in enrollment post-COVID, reaching close to 90% before a budget impasse. Chair Martin inquired about the amount of money recovered from providers paid for vacant seats in the previous year and the number of seats reallocated from underutilized locations to those fully occupied or in high demand. Brown stated she did not have the requested information but would follow up. She confirmed that no seats were reallocated last year but noted that reallocation is being conducted this year with historically under-enrolled agencies.

Chair Martin noted that Bright Futures Learning Centers Incorporated was identified as underperforming with 250 to 300 funded but vacant seats and asked if PDE is investigating this provider. Brown confirmed that Bright Futures Learning Centers Incorporated has been referred for investigation and that PDE is conducting an investigation. Chair Martin inquired about the timing and details of seat reallocation for the next school year. Brown acknowledged she does not have the exact number of seats to be reallocated but confirmed that affected agencies have been informed in writing.

Chair Martin asked if Bright Futures had been paid between \$2.5 million and \$3.5 million annually for vacant seats. Brown stated she would need to verify the exact amount paid to Bright Futures. Chair Martin asked if PDE knows the exact amount that was paid in excess to Bright Futures for vacant seats. Sec. Rowe assured that the requested information regarding payments to Bright Futures could be provided after consulting with their legal team. She emphasized PDE's commitment to transparency and accountability, highlighting efforts to ensure the responsible use of taxpayer money and address issues with providers under-enrolling. Chair Martin inquired if this followed the standard PDE policy, especially when recuperating sizeable amounts. Sec. Rowe discussed the importance of allocating funds based on operational needs and the process of working with pre-K specialists before deciding on fund reallocation, appreciating bipartisan support for this approach. Chair Martin expressed concerns about past misuse of childcare funds in Pennsylvania, highlighting nearly \$10 million in vacant childcare slots and emphasizing the need for accountability and the efficient use of resources. Sec. Rowe agreed with Chair Martin's concerns about recouping misused funds and stated that PDE acts to reclaim taxpayer funds when legal thresholds of fraud, waste and abuse are met, without publicizing the names of the providers involved.

Chair Martin then discussed the importance of attendance in pre-K programs as a measure of program utilization, questioning whether providers are fulfilling the legal requirement to take attendance and address excessive unexcused absences. Sec. Rowe acknowledged that attendance is tracked but argued that engagement is a better measure of readiness for K-12 education, emphasizing working with families to address the root causes of absenteeism. She confirmed that attendance records are reviewed by her department. Chair Martin acknowledged the challenges faced by families but emphasized the importance of meeting requirements for programs funded by taxpayer resources and the efficient use of resources, appreciating the mention of resource reallocation. Brown stated that details for reallocation had been shared with the agencies set to receive it for the upcoming school year.

Minority Chair Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the importance of considering the stories behind the numbers in funding and allocations, noting a specific case where an organization received about \$1.5 million through a bridge loan program arranged by the treasurer. He asked if PDE was aware of this transaction. Sec. Rowe confirmed that the organization did receive a Bridge Loan from the Treasury. Chair Hughes sought confirmation that, since it is a loan, they are not sure if that money will be paid back. Sec. Rowe stated that organizations currently educating students are entitled to funds for their educational activities and speculated that these funds might be used to repay bridge loans but noted that she is not a lawyer. Chair Hughes emphasized the importance of legal expertise in navigating the Treasury's bridge loan program, which amounted to \$1.5 million. He expressed concerns over potential non-repayment and the need to support struggling families.

Chair Martin discussed efforts to reduce funding for cyber charter schools, highlighting the lower costs of cyber education compared to traditional schools, and questioned the subsidy levels for district-operated cyber programs. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the funding disparities between cyber and brick-and-mortar schools, noting that cyber schools have lower overhead costs. Chair Martin focused on public schools outsourcing their cyber programs and questioned whether funding should consider the cost difference when schools contract out services. Sec. Rowe highlighted the disparity in funding between cyber schools and traditional districts, pointing out the lack of equity and differences in student engagement. Chair Martin emphasized the need for equitable comparison in education funding, pointing to disparities such as high-paid superintendents and brick and mortar components in some schools. Sec. Rowe stated that cyber schools are only allowed to provide face-to-face instruction under specific circumstances. Chair Martin

discussed the challenges with the funding model for cyber charter schools in Pennsylvania, suggesting a new approach where funding goes through the state and advocating for a broader discussion to ensure fairness and respect for parental choice in education.

Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Northumberland), chair, Senate Education Committee, emphasized the importance of education for both students and taxpayers, arguing that strong educational foundations are essential for individual success, economic strength and community prosperity. She highlighted structured literacy as a major priority from the previous year and stressed the importance of strong leadership and proper implementation in schools. She noted that other states, such as Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, have made significant literacy gains and asked what lessons Pennsylvania can learn from those states and how their strategies might be applied locally. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing literacy and shared insights into the “Mississippi miracle,” noting the significant fourth-grade literacy improvements in Mississippi. She criticized Mississippi’s approach of holding back students due to its negative long-term impacts on student success and graduation rates. She added that emulating Mississippi’s model might not be the best strategy due to the temporary boost in scores that did not sustain as students aged. Sen. Culver suggested that the approach should involve taking the best practices from each state. Sec. Rowe highlighted the positive aspect of coaching for teachers implementing structured literacy and mentioned a plan involving coaching that has been pitched in various places.

Sen. Culver expressed concern about Gov. Shapiro’s decision to zero fund the structured literacy program for the 2026-2027 budget year and asked whether PDE had requested funding for the program. Sec. Rowe responded, pointing to a recent legislative action that mandates schools to survey their literacy programs, which will help determine the financial requirements for widespread implementation. She discussed the Ready to Learn Block Grant, which permits schools to allocate funds for structured literacy. Sen. Culver highlighted the significance of libraries in supporting educational efforts and the importance of career and technical education (CTE) due to increasing workforce demand and student interest. She noted the budget includes additional funding for discretionary grants and CTE operations but expressed concerns about whether these funds are sufficient to address waiting lists and ensure students have access to programs that will enable them to be successful. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the concern regarding wait lists for CTE programs, explaining that while increased funding can help by enabling the hiring of needed teachers, the main issue often lies with infrastructure and space limitations. She noted that they are exploring other solutions to these challenges. Sen. Culver emphasized the importance of providing additional capacity for CTE through innovative partnerships with businesses and raised concerns about school districts using state CTE subsidy increases to reduce their own contributions instead of enhancing CTE programs. She suggested the possibility of amending the law to ensure that subsidy increases are used to supplement and improve CTE programs.

Sen. Lindsey Williams (D-Allegheny), minority chair, Senate Education Committee, discussed the challenges in CTE, including high demand and waitlists, aging infrastructure and difficulty in recruiting educators. She stated that she is working on legislation to alleviate some pressures, specifically a change to the timing of the end-of-program exam. She asked the secretary to share details about this initiative. Sec. Rowe discussed legislation that would allow students to take the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) exam in 11th grade instead of 12th, aiming to reduce waitlists for CTE programs by allowing new students to fill vacated seats. She discussed exploring ways to engage students during their senior year and noted bipartisan support for reimagining this period. Sen. Williams shared her appreciation for libraries, mentioning her involvement in securing a \$5 million increase in public library funding the previous year. She asked how PDE utilizes its federal library funding and the potential impact of its elimination on public libraries. Sec. Rowe explained that federal funding supports the subscription to Power Library, which provides equal access to information and research resources across the state. She emphasized that losing this funding would be devastating for both public and school libraries.

Sen. Williams discussed the need for adequate special education funding and inquired about the progress on additional data collection for special education expenditures. She opposed further delays to the reconstitution of the special education funding commission, noting the increase in special education costs post-COVID-19. Sec. Rowe welcomed the chance to discuss the stress on public education sectors due to rising special education costs. She emphasized the need for ongoing dialogue about the funding formula and the importance of involving practitioners in these discussions.

Sen. Williams emphasized that families are struggling to obtain necessary services in schools due to insufficient funding. Sec. Rowe agreed on the importance of including advocacy groups in discussions about education, highlighting their role in representing families and contributing valuable insights. Sen. Williams asked for data on the increase in student participation in school meal programs since their inception, emphasizing the importance of expanding universal school meals. She expressed pride in the collaborative work done to ensure access to school breakfast and eliminate reduced lunch in 2022. Sec. Rowe highlighted the importance of meeting students’ basic needs by serving nearly 92 million breakfast meals in the past year, an increase from the previous year, under Gov. Shapiro’s plan. She emphasized that ensuring students do not worry about their next meal is crucial for their educational engagement.

Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) asked about Gov. Shapiro's intentions regarding the federal Working Families Act, specifically if there is a plan to opt into the program, which offers a \$1,700 tax credit for education, including scholarships and support for students with disabilities. Sec. Rowe highlighted the importance of the Education Freedom Tax Credit for both public and private school students. She noted that they are waiting for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to finalize the rules before deciding whether Pennsylvania will participate in the program, noting the urgency of making a decision within less than a year to avoid losing funds to other states. Sen. Vogel inquired about the current guidelines for handling ransomware attacks in schools and if there are protocols for when schools pay to recover their information. Sec. Rowe discussed the challenges schools face with ransomware attacks, noting that insurance often does not cover these attacks and that schools must have separate plans, which include mandatory safeguards. She added that schools must notify PDE about attacks and the importance of having their own information technology (IT) personnel for cybersecurity issues. Sen. Vogel asked if PDE is assisting school districts in enhancing their IT infrastructure. Sec. Rowe talked about the challenges of managing IT resources in school districts, including the need for maintenance and updates due to the increasing reliance on technology. She stated that basic education funding from the state could help offset some of these costs.

Sen. Judith Schwank (D-Berks) inquired about the impact on PDE following the federal dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and its current and future implications. Sec. Rowe described the challenges caused by reductions in ED's staff, leading to slower response times and difficulties in providing technical advice and resources. She noted issues arising from the transfer of some programs to the Department of Labor (L&I), causing confusion due to differing regulations and laws.

Sen. Schwank asked if the state has seen any loss in funds as a result. Sec. Rowe reported several issues with the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Sites added that they are awaiting approximately \$100 million in drawdowns and noted no significant decreases in regular grants or Title I or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grants, except for a minor decrease in one of the Title programs due to the formula used. She emphasized that the most significant impact is related to administration and highlighted delays, particularly with \$100 million still pending. Sen. Schwank discussed the impact of federal funding on summer school programs, specifically mentioning the "teachers in the parks" program that relies on federal support. She asked about PDE's plans for implementing guidelines for a cell phone ban or leaving it to school districts to manage. Sec. Rowe answered that if the cell phone ban is enacted, PDE will provide guidance and address concerns such as where phones should be stored and rules about phone use on buses. Sen. Schwank expressed interest in the budget allocation for school nurses, highlighting their critical role in addressing students' physical and mental health needs across multiple schools. Sec. Rowe explained that the funding for school nurses comes from the basic education funding, with a \$50 million increase proposed by Gov. Shapiro. She highlighted the Rise award at PDE, which recognizes non-teaching professionals in schools. Sen. Schwank stressed the importance of investing in health centers within schools, especially for students in large districts like the Reading School District.

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R-Lackawanna) asked for details on the budget allocation for CTE, questioning why more funds are directed towards grants rather than subsidies, given existing waiting lists. Sec. Rowe explained that the \$3.8 million or \$4 million allocated will fully fund the subsidy for CTE and noted that subsidy funds are not used for capital expenditures, such as adding more classrooms. Sen. Brown asked for clarification on whether discretionary grant funding could potentially be used for capital projects to expand educational access. She then raised concerns about school climate, referencing a recent conversation with a parent frustrated about a bullying case and the school district's response. She emphasized that parents, students and teachers want environments built on accountability, respect and character development. She asked what specific initiatives, leadership efforts and training programs PDE is implementing to help school districts create safer and more productive learning environments. Sec. Rowe explained that bullying is a complex issue. She noted that PDE has an office dedicated to social-emotional learning, student well-being and school climate and that PDE offers schools assistance with climate surveys that gather feedback from students and parents to identify problem areas such as bullying hotspots and trends. She emphasized that the survey data belong to the schools and are not used by PDE for punitive monitoring. She highlighted a state hotline for parents and others to report bullying or intolerable school situations so the department can route cases and provide support and resources.

Sen. Brown followed up by asking whether school districts are widely aware of the climate survey and how PDE communicates its availability. She stressed that more leadership and support may be needed from the state to help districts address bullying effectively. Sec. Rowe responded that schools generally know about climate surveys, but some districts have been hesitant to use the free service because they worry that participating could trigger state monitoring or funding consequences. She explained that PDE has worked to reassure schools that the survey is purely supportive and intended to help communities better understand and address their own school climate issues.

Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York) questioned the cost and substance of the State Board of Higher Education's newly adopted strategic plan for postsecondary education. She noted that approximately \$6 million was spent to develop the report and asked when the plan's six goals would be completed. She expressed concern that the 27-page report fails to address the demographic decline in college-age students, which has already led to campus consolidations such as the significant enrollment drop at Penn State's York campus and multiple college closures across Pennsylvania. She argued that the plan does not discuss "right-sizing" the state's higher education system despite clear demographic pressures. Sec. Rowe responded that the strategic plan is intended to be a long-term, evolving framework rather than a document with a fixed completion timeline. She noted that Pennsylvania faces

challenges such as low rankings in credential attainment and affordability, and that the 21-member board will continue developing strategies to meet the plan's broad goals through ongoing discussions and implementation efforts. Brown added that the plan's six goals are meant to guide the next phase of engagement by the board, which will focus on examining the decentralized higher education system and developing strategies through continued collaboration.

Sen. Phillips-Hill reiterated her concern that the report does not directly address the root causes of enrollment challenges, arguing that spending millions on a report without confronting demographic realities leaves critical policy questions unanswered.

Sen. Art Haywood (D-Montgomery) asked for updates on adequacy funding, efforts to remove lead from pipes in schools, and shared a story highlighting the impact of discrimination on students. He inquired about how students are coping in colleges with past discrimination and harassment. Sec. Rowe emphasized the Shapiro administration's commitment to student well-being and equity, detailing regulations for lead testing in water and the use of adequacy funding in Pennsylvania.

Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Berks) raised several issues related to workforce development and education. She first asked about the teacher shortage in Pennsylvania, noting the success of the state's student-teaching stipend program that helps aspiring teachers afford living expenses during their placements. She highlighted the importance of exposing middle school students to career pathways earlier, particularly because career and technical centers (CTCs) often lack sufficient space for all interested students by eighth grade. Sec. Rowe explained that the exact size of the teacher shortage is difficult to determine because it is constantly changing. She said Pennsylvania certifies about 5,500 teachers each year, with an additional 900–1,000 entering from out of state, bringing the total to roughly 6,500 new teachers annually. She added that, however, about 7,000 teachers leave the profession each year due to retirement, career changes or other reasons, leaving the state with an estimated annual shortfall of about 500 teachers.

Sen. Pennycuick then asked about the possibility of expanding a Taiwan educator exchange program to Pennsylvania school districts. She explained that the program — currently active in 13 states — would allow Taiwanese teachers to come to the United States to teach STEM and Mandarin Chinese, with the Taiwanese government covering most costs. She added that participating districts would only pay about \$40,000 per year, while American educators could travel to Taiwan for cultural and language exchange opportunities. Sec. Rowe said she would be interested in learning more about the proposal and asked what was currently preventing it from moving forward. Sen. Pennycuick suggested that the primary obstacle may simply be the lack of a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) between PDE and Taiwanese officials, and she proposed discussing the issue further after the hearing.

Sen. Pennycuick asked about unlicensed commercial driver's license (CDL) training centers operating in Pennsylvania. She noted reports that more than 1,200 training providers exist in the state, while only 40 are officially licensed, raising concerns that many may be improperly claiming exemptions. Sec. Rowe confirmed the numbers and explained that some providers appear on the federal registry despite not being properly licensed in Pennsylvania. She suggested that the issue may be partly due to incentive structures, noting that obtaining a license costs more than \$8,000, while the penalty for operating without one is only \$2,500, making noncompliance financially tempting for some operators. She added that PDE works with federal authorities to remove unqualified providers from the registry, but the process can be lengthy due to due process requirements. Brown added that legislative changes to the Private Licensed Schools Act could help address the issue. She noted that PDE has begun working more closely with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to verify whether training providers listed in the federal system are actually licensed in Pennsylvania, which should help reduce fraudulent listings in the future.

Chair Martin appreciated PDE's efforts in reforming the private licensing system.

Sen. Timothy Kearney (D-Delaware) highlighted the positive impact of increased K-12 funding, using the ninth-grade academy in the William Penn School District as an example of significant academic growth, and asked about the broader impact of legislative investments across the state. Sec. Rowe responded by detailing the positive outcomes of targeted investments in education, citing the Pottstown School District's success with adequacy funding in reducing suspensions, decreasing problematic behaviors, and improving attendance and academic performance. Sen. Kearney then addressed the issue of the state's old school infrastructure and sought advice on how to proceed with improvements despite limited support from the governor's public school facility improvement grant program.

Sen. Cris Dush (R-Jefferson) asked Brown when they became aware of the investigation into Bright Futures. Brown stated she could not discuss the Bright Futures issue further due to the ongoing investigation. Sen. Dush then asked when the referral for the investigation was made and when parties were notified. Brown replied that the referral was made at the end of 2025. Sen. Dush inquired if a list of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (Pre-K Counts) providers was supplied to the Treasury. Brown specified she did not supply such a list and was not asked to provide one. Sen. Dush further asked if recipients under the balanced budget or budget bridge loan were required to have a valid contract with PDE. Brown confirmed that recipients would have signed an agreement as part of a current agreement that is renewed yearly over a five-year term. Sen. Dush questioned whether the Treasury was aware of the recipients operating under a valid contract. Sec. Rowe stated that PDE does not have knowledge of what the Treasury was aware of. Brown added that there was confusion because they did not provide anything to the Treasury. Sen. Dush asked if the

Treasury was notified about the investigation after it was made. Brown specified that it is not standard practice to notify the Treasury when making a referral. Sec. Rowe explained that the Treasury, which is responsible for paying bills, was not notified about certain issues because it was assumed that no bill should be sent if it wasn't meant to be paid. Sen. Dush noted the Treasury would not have been aware of the investigation or pending change to the contract unless they had inquired about it. Brown stated that if asked, they would have provided a list of all current pre-K providers and that she would not have taken a certain action regarding notifying relevant parties of a referral.

Sen. Dush asked about the significant increase in the budget for school food services. Sec. Rowe confirmed a significant rise in student participation in the universal free school breakfast program. Sen. Dush asked for financial calculations and assumptions for the school food service appropriation for the 2025-2026 year due to an increase in food costs. He highlighted concerns over executive-level salaries at the State Board of Higher Education and questioned the justification for adding two new job positions since the circulation of a co-sponsor memo by Sen. Phillip-Hill and Sen. Langerholm to repeal the State Board of Higher Education. Sec. Rowe responded that she appreciated the effort, but that since it has not passed yet, the focus remains on making sure that the plan is executed and that they have enough capacity to react.

Sen. Devlin Robinson (R-Allegheny) acknowledged his role as the primary sponsor of the structured literacy bill and emphasized the importance of literacy, questioning if the budget proposal includes requests for additional resources for the new literacy program under Act 47 and plans to contract with outside consultants for its implementation. Sec. Rowe pointed to a vacancy request to support structured literacy, indicating the department's search for federal and outside funding for coaching and implementation. Sen. Robinson questioned why PDE and its consultant, West Ed, have denied his office's requests for chat logs from the Reading Literature Leadership Council's public Zoom meetings, which should be public under the Sunshine Law. Sec. Rowe assured compliance with the law regarding the release of chat logs and committed to investigating the issue further. Sen. Robinson asked for guidance on the next steps for obtaining the chat logs. Sec. Rowe confirmed that she will share the next steps and will update on the progress of obtaining any logs, should they exist.

Chair Hughes returned to the discussion on "right-sizing" higher education, exploring the concept of either reducing offerings or expanding access to include non-traditional students. Sec. Rowe addressed the issue of working-age Pennsylvanians with some college education but no degree, expressing interest in encouraging their return to higher education and highlighting the benefits of obtaining a degree. Chair Hughes discussed his work with the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) to assist paraprofessionals in becoming teachers, emphasizing the importance of encouragement, financial support, and guidance on new technologies. Sec. Rowe highlighted the success of programs that help paraprofessionals become certified teachers, mentioning that over 145 special education teachers have completed the program. She talked about the "Grow Your Own" and teacher apprenticeship programs aimed at increasing teacher diversity and representation, attributing their success to supportive budgets.

Chair Hughes raised concerns about educational challenges in third and fourth grades, emphasizing the importance of literacy and the "Read to Succeed" program. He stressed the need to address outdated and underutilized school buildings in Philadelphia, referencing a meeting with Gov. Shapiro to discuss school infrastructure problems. Sec. Rowe spoke about her discussions with SDP Superintendent Dr. Tony B. Watlington Sr. on the relationship between community needs and school district buildings, including the impact of charter schools. She mentioned SDP's participation in the Supporting America's School Infrastructure (SASI) Grant to address infrastructure needs with federal funds and PDE's support. Chair Hughes highlighted the state's responsibility in addressing outdated and underfunded school infrastructure, referencing the 2016 PlanCon Reform Commission hearings. He called for a deeper investigation into SDP's problems and opportunities, emphasizing the need for 21st-century learning environments.

Sen. Culver discussed funding disparities in Pennsylvania's school districts, noting that 300 districts were set to receive 9% of funding increases while 200 would get only 5%. She asked for an explanation of this disparity and sought ways to support the schools receiving less funding. Sec. Rowe shared her positive experience visiting a school that had implemented efficiency measures, highlighting the school's adjustments to transportation schedules and efforts to educate more students within their facilities. Sen. Culver expressed concern about the potential closure of rural schools due to funding disparities, questioning why 200 schools are only receiving 5% of the funding share and seeking solutions to assist them. Sec. Rowe explained that the adequacy fund targets historically underfunded schools to bridge their financial gaps, explaining that schools not receiving as much from this fund are funded through other means to ensure a quality education experience. Sen. Culver cited declining standardized test scores throughout the state and asked how PDE plans to rectify this and ensure that the funds are being used successfully. Sec. Rowe discussed the impact of new standards and tests in Pennsylvania, noting initial drops in student scores but highlighting improvements in graduation rates, math scores, and achievements of English language learners over three years. She mentioned the governor's request for the state board to evaluate these standards and tests, emphasizing maintaining rigor. Sen. Culver expressed concern about students not being workforce-ready upon graduation and showed interest in further discussions, given her role on the State Board of Education.

Sen. Phillips-Hill asked about the number of students in Pennsylvania's K-12 schools and higher education institutions. Sec. Rowe stated that she does not have the number but agreed to follow up. Sen. Phillips-Hill inquired about enrollment numbers for state-related or State System of Higher Education institutions. Brown attributed decreasing enrollment in higher education to demographic trends but admitted to not having exact numbers. Sen. Phillips-Hill criticized Brown for not knowing the enrollment numbers in higher education within Pennsylvania. Brown replied that she could provide detailed information per sector. Sen. Phillips-Hill asked about the number of employees at the State Board of Education. Sites reported that there are four filled positions at the State Board of Education and discussed the potential filling of a fifth position, two additional approved positions, and one more authorized position. Sen. Phillips-Hill inquired about the total number of positions and current employees at the State Board of Higher Education, noting two filled positions. Sites detailed the staffing structure of the State Board of Higher Education, including an executive director, an economic and workforce development finance director, and an administrative officer, with one position vacant.

Sen. Phillips-Hill inquired about the status of vacancies, specifically the Associate Director of Information Systems and Strategic Analysis position. Sec. Rowe stated that the positions for director of academic and workforce development are filled. Sen. Phillips-Hill detailed the staffing structure of the State Board of Higher Education, mentioning that it includes directors and associates across four positions. Sites corrected her previous statement, indicating there are actually eight positions within the State Board of Higher Education. Sen. Phillips-Hill emphasized the need for clarity on the number of students in higher education to inform taxpayers, contrasting it with the 1.7 million students in K to 12 education. Sec. Rowe explained that the State Board of Higher Education focuses on aligning higher education with workforce needs through a decentralized approach, while the Office of Post-Secondary Education handles compliance and certification as mandated by Pennsylvania Law.

Sen. Vogel expressed concerns about the limitations of PCCD grants, which require the creation of new programs for each new grant, making the process difficult for schools. Sec. Rowe responded by expressing PDE's willingness to assist with grant administration and mentioned a potential cell phone ban in schools, though she was unsure if it had been signed into law. Sen. Vogel then discussed the need for a mandatory minimum penalty for cell phone ban violations in schools and the importance of budget predictability, suggesting that schools should be informed of their minimum adequacy funding to aid in budget planning. Sec. Rowe agreed on the importance of budget predictability.

Sen. Dush raised concerns about the increase in school district reserves across the state, from approximately \$4.8 billion in 2019 to a projected \$7.1 billion in 2023-2024, alongside rising property taxes. Sec. Rowe noted that reserve balances are a lagging indicator and mentioned safeguards that prevent school districts from raising taxes above a certain limit if their reserves exceed a specific percentage. She acknowledged the concerns about tax increases and emphasized the need for transparency and efficient use of funds by school districts. Sen. Dush discussed the importance of certifying instructors and expressed interest in allowing Intermediate Units (IUs) to handle the certification process. He asked about progress in giving IUs this capability, emphasizing the importance of certifying individuals from the job market. Sec. Rowe explained that they were successful in relaxing the school code to allow more flexibility for individuals entering CTE, taking into account some life experiences of applicants. Sen. Dush expressed his desire to disseminate information to the seven counties he represents, aiming for the IUs and school districts within these counties to start benefiting from the discussed changes. He requested assistance to ensure this information is shared effectively.

Sen. Kearney discussed the diversity and concerns within his district, particularly at Upper Darby High School, where over 80 languages are spoken. He highlighted the fears among immigrant families regarding safety and potential federal immigration enforcement on school campuses. Sen. Kearney asked about the steps the department has taken or plans to take to ensure student safety and inquired about any statewide policies regarding access to school campuses for immigration officers. Sec. Rowe addressed concerns regarding law enforcement presence on school campuses, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). She added that while most school districts likely have policies in place for such situations, the challenge lies in ensuring widespread awareness of these policies. She emphasized the importance of having emergency contact information beyond the parents, to prepare for situations where a parent might be detained while their child is at school. Sen. Kearney inquired about policies regarding the sharing of personal information. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of understanding the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) within schools, particularly regarding what information can be shared with law enforcement or ICE. She suggested that school districts ensure staff know to defer questions to the principal or solicitor to avoid legal issues.

Sen. Coleman discussed a situation where a student from his district was denied access to a regional CTC because they were enrolled in a charter school. He raised concerns about equitable access to CTE programs for students in charter or homeschooling situations. Sec. Rowe addressed the issue of equitable access to CTE programs, explaining that the choice to attend a cyber school limits access to CTCs due to funding mechanisms and governance structures that tie CTCs to school districts, not charter schools.

Sen. Coleman raised concerns about continued poor academic performance in the Allentown School District despite significant increases in funding. He argued that although the district has received over \$100 million in additional funding over the past decade, student performance has continued to decline. He questioned whether simply providing more money will solve the underlying problems. He reiterated a previous issue about CTCs, suggesting that students should not lose access to these opportunities if they leave an underperforming school district. He believed students attending Charter Schools should still be able to access CTC



programs. She indicates that legislators may look into policy solutions to ensure those opportunities remain available to all high school students. Turning back to Allentown, he asked what solutions exist beyond funding to improve outcomes. He added that many teachers report feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities outside of teaching, including addressing students' social and family-related challenges. Sec. Rowe suggested personalizing instruction for students, especially in high-need areas, and emphasized the need for more resources, including money for adequate school facilities and qualified instructors. She proposed conducting a root cause analysis to identify impactful changes and cautioned against solely focusing on test scores as indicators of success. She highlighted the importance of understanding factors contributing to student absenteeism and truancy.

Sen. Coleman expressed concern about the proficiency levels in the Allentown School District, noting that less than half of the students are proficient in reading. He acknowledged the role of teachers in providing quality education and emphasized the importance of using tax dollars efficiently.

Chair Martin emphasized concerns about potential misuse of child care funding, noting that one provider had far fewer enrolled children than available slots. He argued the state should ensure accountability and reallocate funding to areas where families genuinely need child care services. He highlighted the growing demand for CTC programs, sharing a personal example of his son being waitlisted for a welding program due to limited program capacity. He stressed the importance of expanding CTE opportunities and removing bureaucratic barriers so students can pursue high-demand trades such as welding, nursing, and other skilled professions. He questioned PDE about a change in projections for declining public school enrollment. He noted that earlier data projected a decline of about 108,500 students by the 2028-2029 school year, but newer projections showed a decline of about 58,500 students. He asked why the projections were revised and what methodological differences led to the change. Sec. Rowe responded that PDE reviewed the projections after hearing the senator's earlier remarks referencing them and determined adjustments were needed to ensure the data more accurately reflected current trends. She stated that PDE aims to maintain transparency and would follow up with additional clarification. Sites noted that the discrepancy may relate to differences between enrollment data and average daily membership figures, which are calculated differently.

Chair Martin discussed broader demographic challenges, including declining birth rates and shrinking school enrollment, arguing that Pennsylvania must begin "right-sizing" education infrastructure to reflect changing student populations. He pointed to examples such as school closures and consolidations as difficult but necessary steps for financial efficiency. He expressed support for workforce development initiatives like the Grow PA program, which directs financial aid toward students pursuing high-demand careers and encourages them to remain in Pennsylvania after graduation. He argued that such programs help address workforce shortages while reducing student debt. He raised concerns about a reported \$10–\$15 million budget shortfall in the Lancaster School District caused by overspending in the prior year. He asked whether PDE was monitoring the situation and offering assistance. Sec. Rowe stated that the department is aware of the issue and that its budget office is working with the district to identify the causes of the overspending and determine steps to stabilize finances and prevent similar problems in the future.

Chair Martin thanked PDE and the committee members for their work and effort during the budget hearing and the past two weeks. He urged policymakers to focus less on political disputes over funding allocations and more on improving educational outcomes and ensuring that policies prioritize the needs and opportunities of students and families.



## **Bullet.in.Points**

### **GOVERNOR'S OFFICE: PROCLAMATION OF DISASTER EMERGENCY**

The Governor's Office published the Proclamation of Disaster Emergency from Feb. 22, 2026. Additional information is available on the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

## Cosponsor Memos

### HCO3213 - Eligibility Requirements for the Grow PA Scholarship Program

#### Sponsor

Rep. Jim Rigby (R)

#### Summary

Aims to update the eligibility requirements for the Grow PA Scholarship Program by permitting students studying sign language interpretation and translation to be eligible for grants.

#### Intro Date

03/04/2026

#### Last Action

03/04/2026 H - Cosponsor memo filed

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### HCO3219 - Health Services Reimbursement Reform and School Nurse Staffing Ratios

#### Sponsor

Rep. Lisa A. Borowski (D)

#### Summary

Aims to establish a staffing ratio of one certified school nurse for every 750 students.

#### Intro Date

03/05/2026

#### Last Action

03/05/2026 H - Cosponsor memo filed

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### HCO3220 - Creating an Experienced-Based Certification Pathway for Student Services Professionals

#### Sponsor

Rep. John C. Inglis (D)

#### Summary

Aims to require PDE to issue a provisional certificate to qualified individuals who are employed by a school entity but have not yet completed all coursework required for full certification.

#### Intro Date

03/05/2026

#### Last Action

03/05/2026 H - Cosponsor memo filed

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## SCO1603 - AI Road Safety Monitoring Systems in School Zones

### Sponsor

Sen. Camera Bartolotta (R)

### Summary

Authorizes municipalities, by ordinance, to use automated AI road safety monitoring systems in school zones and establishes a \$40 civil penalty with a 30-day warning period upon implementation.

### Intro Date

03/02/2026

### Last Action

03/02/2026 S - Cosponsor memo filed

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## SCO1607 - Removing Barriers to Career & Technical Education

### Sponsor

Sen. Lindsey Marie Williams (D)

### Summary

Considers allowing Career & Technical Education (CTE) students to take the NOCTI exam before their senior year.

### Intro Date

03/03/2026

### Last Action

03/03/2026 S - Cosponsor memo filed

## Basic Ed Bill Actions

**HB46 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in duties and powers of boards of school directors, further providing for kindergartens and providing for pre-kindergarten programs; and, in pupils and attendance, further providing for age limits and temporary residence and for definitions.**

### Sponsor

Rep. Tarik Khan (D)

### Summary

(PN 25) Amends the Public School Code, in duties and powers of boards of school directors, further providing for kindergartens to assert that the board of school directors in all school districts shall establish and maintain kindergartens, allowing districts to establish an age policy and directing them not to deny kindergarten to a child who is five years of age or older on the first day of the school year and adding a section to provide for pre-kindergarten programs; and, in pupils and attendance, further providing for age limits to be between the ages of five and 21 and for the definition of "compulsory school age" to mean between the ages of five and 17. Establishes that the number of kindergartens in any one district shall be fixed by the board of school directors and shall be open during the school year. Requires kindergartens to be available to all children residing in the school district who are of the fixed age. Provides that kindergarten teachers shall be certified per the rules and regulations prescribed by the State Board of Education. Asserts that the board of school directors in all school districts shall establish and maintain pre-kindergarten programs which shall be an integral part of the elementary school system and be kept open for not less than two and one-half hours each day for the full school term. Establishes that the number of pre-kindergarten programs in any one district shall be fixed by the board of school directors and shall be open during the school year. Requires the board of school directors to appoint and assign teachers to the pre-kindergarten programs who shall be certified per the regulations promulgated by the State Board of Education. Effective in 90 days.

### Intro Date

01/10/2025

### Actions

01/08/2025 H - Introduced

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01/10/2025 H - Referred to House Education

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03/03/2026 H - Discussed during budget hearing with the Department of Education House Appropriations

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**HB564 - An Act amending Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, providing for mental health crisis response; and imposing duties on the Department of Human Services.**

### Sponsor

Rep. Tarah Probst (D)

### Summary

(PN 1831) Amends Title 35 (Health and Safety), adding a chapter to provide for mental health crisis response; and imposing duties on the Department of Human Services (DHS). Provides definitions. Directs DHS to implement a campaign, subject to available funding, to promote awareness and encourage the appropriate use of the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline and provide information about suicide prevention. Requires DHS to consult with the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP), 988 crisis call centers within the commonwealth, suicide prevention advocacy groups, mental health crisis counselors and other individuals with lived experience of mental health or substance use crises on the campaign. Outlines specified materials and resources to be used for the administration of this campaign and provides design and advertisement guidelines for posters. Requires DHS to complete and submit a report with specified information to the chairmen and minority chairmen of the House Human Services Committee and the Senate Health and Human Services Committee within 180 days of the effective date of this subsection as well as an updated report with the specified information within one year of the initial report submission date. Effective immediately. (Prior PN: 568)

**Intro Date**

02/12/2025

**Actions**

07/14/2025 H - Third consideration and final passage

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07/23/2025 S - Referred to Senate Health and Human Services

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09/10/2025 H - Press Conference on Suicide Prevention Day

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10/21/2025 H - Press Conference Held - 988 Public Education Campaign

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03/04/2026 H - Discussed during budget hearing with the Department of Human Services House Appropriations

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**HB2267 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in school health services, providing for possession and use of prescribed pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Tarik Khan (D)

**Summary**

No summary available yet.

**Intro Date**

03/05/2026

**Actions**

03/05/2026 H - Introduced

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**SB1192 - An Act amending the act of June 27, 2006 (1st Sp.Sess., P.L.1873, No.1), known as the Taxpayer Relief Act, in taxation by school districts, further providing for public referendum requirements for increasing certain taxes.**

**Sponsor**

Sen. Jarrett Coleman (R)

**Summary**

(PN 1464) Amends the Taxpayer Relief Act, in taxation by school districts, further providing for public referendum requirements for increasing certain taxes. Revises provisions to require all proposed school district tax increases be put to a referendum. Effective in 60 days.

**Intro Date**

02/27/2026

**Actions**

02/27/2026 S - Introduced

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02/27/2026 S - Referred to Senate Finance

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## Higher Ed Bill Actions

No Higher Ed Bill Actions this week.

## Upcoming Events

### **WEDNESDAY – 03/11/2026**

#### **10:00 AM, [House Appropriations](#)**

*Budget Hearing, House Chamber*

Budget hearing with the state-related universities.

#### **1:00 PM, [House Appropriations](#)**

*Budget Hearing, House Chamber*

Budget hearing with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and community colleges.

### **MONDAY – 03/16/2026**

#### **10:30 AM, 2026 Big 33 Capitol Celebration**

*Press Conference, Main Capitol Rotunda*

### **THURSDAY – 03/19/2026**

#### **10:00 AM, [Independent Regulatory Review Commission \(IRRC\)](#)**

*Commission Meeting, 8th Fl. Conference Room, 555 Walnut St., Harrisburg*

Public hearing on the following regulations: No. 3463 State Board of Medicine #16A-4960: Education and Volunteer Services; No. 3464 State Board of Osteopathic Medicine #16A-5337: Education and Volunteer Services; No. 3405 Department of Agriculture #2-194: Milk Sanitation; No. 3433 Unemployment Compensation Board of Review #12-120: General Requirements; No. 3476 State Board of Pharmacy #16A-5434: Immunization Updates.

### **MONDAY – 03/23/2026**

#### **10:30 AM, Music in the Schools Month**

*Press Conference, Main Capitol Rotunda*

#### **1:30 PM, Teach Plus PA**

*Press Conference, Main Capitol*

### **TUESDAY – 03/24/2026**

#### **11:30 AM, Celebrating National School Choice Week**

*Press Conference, Main Capitol Rotunda*

#### **1:00 PM, Brown Bags and Big Voices Hearing from PAs Children**

*Press Conference, Main Capitol Steps*

## In the News

[02/27/2026 - PSERS: Notice of Class Action Settlements](#)

[02/27/2026 - JSGC: Instructional Output and Faculty Salary Costs of the State-related Universities: Data 2024-25](#)

[02/27/2026 - JSGC: Information Disclosure of the State-related Universities: Data 2024-25](#)

[03/02/2026 - Pennsylvania State Grange and Foundation to Offer Scholarships](#)

[03/03/2026 - House Dems: Universal Pre-K helps economy, children and parents](#)

[03/03/2026 - Senate Republicans: Key Points from Senate Budget Hearings with Public Utility Commission, State University Presidents](#)

[03/05/2026 - Pennsylvania Students Encouraged to Explore Civics with the Supreme Court of Pa Historical Commission](#)

[03/05/2026 - SENATOR LINDSEY M. WILLIAMS TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION AIMED AT REDUCING CAREER AND TECH ED WAITLISTS](#)

[03/05/2026 - Key Points from Senate Budget Hearing with of Education](#)

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.

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