

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

“Many municipalities adopted the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax at the maximum rate of \$52 per year and withheld that in one lump sum, which created a tremendous financial burden for many lower-income workers. Under this measure, low-income workers will be exempt and everyone else will see the tax burden reduced to \$1 per week.”

– **Senate Finance Committee Chairman Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)** on Senate passage Monday of legislation he introduced to bring about significant reforms to the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax.

Preview

STATE’S STORM RESPONSE TO BE SUBJECT OF PUBLIC HEARING

A PUBLIC HEARING will be held in Harrisburg on Thursday at 1 p.m. in North Office Building Hearing Room 1 to examine the recent problems with snow removal on Interstate 78 and several other major Pennsylvania highways. The Senate Transportation Committee, chaired by **Sen. Roger Madigan (R-Bradford)**, and the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, chaired by **Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne)**, will lead the hearing. Anyone impacted by the incident is encouraged to email their comments to stormresponse@pasen.gov. Anyone submitting comments should include their name, address and phone number.

COMMITTEE TO HOLD HEARING ON CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

THE SENATE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Jeffery Piccola (R-Dauphin)**, will hold the first of a series of public hearings Thursday to discuss whether a constitutional convention should be convened to reform the Pennsylvania General Assembly and judiciary.

Committee members will hear from experts in constitutional law and representatives of organizations advocating government reform. The hearing is scheduled to be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Duquesne University’s School of Law in Pittsburgh.

BUDGET HEARINGS BEGIN FEB. 26

THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster)**, will kick off public hearings on Gov. Rendell’s proposed state budget on February 26.

Committee members will question Administration officials on funding requests, as well as the governor’s call for \$2.5 billion in new taxes. Video and audio highlights of the hearings will be posted on www.pasenategop.com.

Following the budget hearings, the Senate returns to voting session on March 12.

Review

SENATE VOTES TO REFORM EMS TAX, LIMIT SIZE OF DEDUCTIONS

THE SENATE on Monday approved legislation sponsored by **Senate Finance Committee Chairman Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)** to bring about significant reforms to the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax. Senate Bill 218 would require per-pay period payments, exempt low-income earners, and set specific restrictions on how taxing entities may use revenues raised by the levy. The bill is now headed to the House of Representatives for consideration. [For more on changes to the EMS tax, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.](#)

SENATE APPROVES FIVE-YEAR EXTENSION OF FIRE, EMS GRANTS

THE SENATE approved legislation Tuesday to reauthorize a popular grant program for volunteer fire companies and EMS units.

Senate Bill 10, introduced by **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, would have reauthorized the program for one year. The Senate amended the bill Monday to reauthorize it for five years, providing a valuable safety net for Pennsylvania’s dedicated emergency responders.

Since 2000, the General Assembly has regularly appropriated \$25 million to the PA Emergency Management Agency to provide these grants. The five-year authorization would allow for funding on a steady basis.

Fundraising was among the major issues brought to light during the Senate Resolution 60 Commission, created by legislation sponsored by **Sen. Mike Waugh (R-York)**. Senate Bill 10 was approved by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, chaired by **Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne)**, on Jan. 30. The bill was sent to the House of Representatives.

COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON PLAN TO CLOSE POLICE BARRACKS

A PLAN BY PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE to consolidate operations and close barracks was the focus of a public hearing Tuesday by the Senate Law and Justice Committee, chaired by **Sen. John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)**.

Senator Rafferty and committee members raised serious concerns that closing barracks or even permitting barracks to “go dark” for certain hours each day could pose a threat to public safety. Recently a barracks in Skippack, Montgomery County (one of the fastest growing areas of the state) began partial daily closings without notifying local residents.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIM PROTECTION ACT APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE on Tuesday approved Senate Bill 150, the Sexual Violence Victim Protection Act.

The measure, sponsored by chairman **Sen. Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)**, would require law enforcement agencies to adopt a written policy regarding sexual violence victim protection orders. Authorities would provide the victim of sexual violence with oral and written notice of sexual assault services in the community, and make reasonable efforts to notify a victim of the arrest of the defendant for violation of an order.

In the Spotlight

SENATOR BROWNE’S LEGISLATION would require that the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax be withheld on a payroll-period basis with a maximum deduction of \$1 per week. Employers would be required to send collections on a quarterly basis. It also exempts those earning \$12,000 or less per year from the tax.

Senate Bill 218 would also rename the tax to the more accurate “Local Services Tax” and permit the revenue raised by the levy to be used for the following specific purposes:

- Emergency services including police, fire and emergency medical services.
- Road construction and maintenance.
- Property tax reduction.
- Property tax relief through the homestead/farmstead exemption.

Senator Browne noted that many municipalities adopted the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax at the maximum rate of \$52 per year and withheld it in one lump sum, which created a financial burden for many workers.

Fast Facts

PA STATE POLICE

- State Police provide primary police services for 27% of the commonwealth’s population, accounting for more than 60% of the Pennsylvania municipalities.
- The service covers 85% of the commonwealth’s land area and 66% of state highways.
- State Police operate from 81 stations, 9 Pennsylvania Turnpike installations, and several other locations for administrative and investigative functions.
- The 90 stations are organized into 16 Troop and 5 Area Commands.

Question or comments? Contact the Senate Republican Communications Office at senaterepublicancommunicationsoffice@pasen.gov or call 717-787-6725. Current and archived News Briefs are also available online at www.pasenategop.com.