

# Legislative Locator

*The Legislative Locator is a Monthly Publication of The Pennsylvania Municipal League*



March 2020

We are in unprecedented times as we confront the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. We remain committed to continuing our mission to strengthen, empower and advocate for effective local government. Please see the resources below for the most up-to-date Coronavirus information, or visit our [website](#) for relevant hyperlinks and information.

## **Pennsylvania Municipal League**

- [COVID-19 Impact on Right to Know Law and the Sunshine Act](#)
- [Working Remotely during the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)
- [Significant Coronavirus Crisis Related Legislation](#)

## **National League of Cities**

- [Coronavirus Response Resources for Local Leaders](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Spearheads Conversations at CCC](#)
- [Managing Through The Coronavirus: What Local Leaders Need to Know](#)

## **PA Department of Health**

- [PA COVID-19 Update](#)

## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

---

---

## **Significant Coronavirus Crisis Related Legislation**

Please [click here](#) to view legislation related to the coronavirus crisis in addition to the summaries below.

## General Assembly Voting Remotely

[Senate Resolution 318](#) is a rule change allowing members to file bills and vote on legislation electronically until July 31 or 10 days after the Governor lifts the emergency declaration he issued in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak on March 6.

[House Resolution 834](#) is a rule change allowing members to now vote by proxy through their committee chairs or caucus leaders outside the Capitol Complex on bills that are considered in committee and on the House Floor.

## Local Government Remote Voting and Permit Approvals During An Emergency

[House Bill 1564 \(PN 3497\)](#), introduced by Representative Joe Emerick, was amended on March 24 to allow municipalities to vote and manage executive, legislative and judicial powers and duties remotely through telecommunication devices without the requirement of a physically present quorum.

Municipalities would be able to implement these powers after the Governor declares an emergency or disaster that would render the conduct of public business dangerous to the health or safety of society. Notice of meetings held by telecommunication device would need to be posted on the municipality's website no later than 24 hours prior to the meeting. Public participation to the extent possible must be allowed. The meeting would need to be either live streamed, recorded or transcribed. Recordings must be made available within 24 hours or draft minutes within 48 hours.

It would be the discretion of the municipality to proceed with existing and pending approval requests during the emergency declaration. The expiration date of an approval that is in effect as of the date of the emergency declaration would be automatically suspended and shall resume on the date following the termination of the emergency declaration.

**Location:** *Passed the House, March 25, 2020*

## COSPONSOR MEMOS

### Local Government Day and Week

Senator Scott Martin has announced intention to introduce a resolution to recognize April 8 as Local Government Day and April 5 through 11 as Local Government Week.

## Liquid Fuels Tax Municipal Allocation Law

Representative Lou Schmidt has announced intention to introduce legislation to amend Title 53 (Municipalities) clarifying municipalities do not need to bid traffic signal maintenance and repair contracts when using liquid fuels funds.

## Commonwealth Ransomware Act

Senator Kristin Phillips-Hill has announced intention to introduce legislation to ensure agencies and political subdivisions of the Commonwealth have strong capabilities to combat and recover from ransomware attacks, including measures to make it illegal to possess, use or transfer ransomware, as well as prohibiting agencies from payment of ransomware.

## Commercial Public Records Request

Senator Michele Brooks has announced intention to introduce legislation to permit local and state agencies to charge search, review and duplication fees when responding to public records made for a commercial purpose.

# LEGISLATION OF INTEREST

## Realty Transfer Tax Exemption for Volunteer Service Providers

[House Bill 732 \(PN 960\)](#), introduced by Representative Christopher Quinn, would amend the Tax Reform Code further providing for exempted transactions of the Realty Transfer Tax.

Specifically, the Realty Transfer Tax would not be imposed upon a transfer of real estate to or by a volunteer EMS company, fire company or fire rescue company. This bill would be applied retroactively to January 1, 2019.

**Location:** *Second consideration in the Senate, March 25, 2020*

## Fire Relief Administration and Loan Assistance Programs

[Senate Bill 908 \(PN 1469\)](#), introduced by Senator Mike Regan, would amend Title 35 (Health and Safety) providing the Office of the State Fire Commissioner greater control over loan assistance programs.

This bill would transfer the responsibility of the Fire Relief Program from the Auditor General to the State Fire Commissioner. It would also permit the use of funds for facilities, vehicles and equipment for emergency response, recruitment and retention efforts, death benefits for active members and insurance. The legislation would establish the Fire Safety Advisory Committee to review the distribution formula for fire relief funds and provide a recommendation.

The legislation would further rename the Volunteer Fire Company, Ambulance Service and Rescue Squad Assistance Program the Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Loan

Assistance Program. Use of the newly named program would be expanded to paid firefighters and EMS workers. Also, the maximum loan amounts under this program would be increased, and the State Fire Commissioner would form an application review committee to make loan recommendations.

The Volunteer Companies Loan Fund would also be renamed as the Emergency Services Loan Assistance Fund, and eligibility would be expanded to paid firefighters and EMS workers.

A section providing for a referendum would also be added to expand loan assistance.

**Location:** House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, January 30, 2020

## Fire and EMS Grant Program Reauthorization

[Senate Bill 910 \(PN 1470\)](#), introduced by Senator Doug Mastriano, would amend Title 35 (Health and Safety) reauthorizing the Fire and EMS Grant Programs until June 30, 2024.

This bill would make the State Fire Commissioner the administrator of the Programs instead of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. Completed grant applications would be sent to both the Fire Commissioner and the municipality where the emergency service is located. The Commissioner would be responsible for preparing an annual report about the grant programs to be submitted on October 1 of each year to the chairs of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees, as well as posting the report online.

The use of grant money would be expanded to fund recruitment and retention programs, community risk and reduction programs and Volunteer Firefighter Length of Service Award programs. Additional language states if two or more emergency services companies consolidate, then the interest rate on outstanding balances owed to the Volunteer Companies Loan Fund would be decreased from two percent to one percent.

**Location:** House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, January 30, 2020

## Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association

[Senate Bill 932 \(PN 1358\)](#), introduced by Senator Lisa Boscola, would amend Title 35 (Health and Safety) redefining volunteer firefighters' relief associations by clarifying that membership may contain one or more volunteer fire companies or a combination of volunteer and paid departments.

**Location:** First consideration in the Senate, January 27, 2020

## Office of the State Fire Commissioner

[Senate Bill 987 \(PN 1450\)](#), introduced by Senator Scott Hutchinson, would amend Title 35 (Health and Safety) restructuring the Office of the State Fire Commissioner and the Commissioner's duties.

This bill would redefine the duties of the State Fire Commissioner to serve as the primary representative for fire services in the Commonwealth. Other duties would include assisting with recruitment and retention efforts, promoting public education and community risk reduction efforts, gathering data, preparing reports, administering grant and loan programs and developing and coordinating training curricula. This legislation would also alter the qualifications and appointment of the Commissioner, requiring the Commissioner to be someone that has served as chief officer or administrative officer of a fire company. The Commissioner would be appointed by the Governor and approved by a majority of the Senate.

Additionally, the State Fire Safety Advisory Committee would be renamed the State Fire Advisory Board, in which the Commissioner would be chair, and other members include representatives of fire associations as well as nine firefighters appointed by the Governor. Non-voting members of the board include the House and Senate chairs of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees and other organizations representing relevant stakeholders, such as the local government associations.

**Location:** *Second consideration in the Senate, March 25, 2020*



## NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES UPDATE

### New Principles of Home Rule

Home rule is a longstanding legal principle that gives us the power to decide which services we provide, the policies we implement, and the ways we solve problems locally. In 1953, the American Municipal Association (AMA) – which became the National League of Cities (NLC) in 1964 – published the last comprehensive proposed reform of home rule, sparking a wave of state constitutional change in the years that followed.

[Read More](#)

## HOUSE AND SENATE SESSION DAYS 2020

**Senate:**  
April 6-8

**House:**  
April 6-7, 14-16

May 4-6, 18-20

May 4-6, 11-13, 18

June 1-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-26, 29-30

June 1-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-26, 29-30

***\*reminder - session dates are subject to change***



**Remember, you can access all archived editions of the Legislative Locator as well as other member publications, forms and resources in your [Member Dashboard](#).**



**Pennsylvania Municipal League**

414 N. 2nd St, Harrisburg  
Pennsylvania 17101 United States

You received this newsletter as a benefit of your membership in The League, PSATC, or APMM or through your subscription to the Legislative Locator.

[Unsubscribe](#)

