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Below is a summary of key public policy issues impacting the Pittsburgh region's nonprofit sector.

Key stories include:

FEDERAL NEWS

["Senators unveil bipartisan bill to fight opioid epidemic," The Hill, 2/27/18](#)

["Key GOP lawmaker: 'Unlikely' Congress lifts CDC gun research limits," The Hill, 2/27/18](#)

["McConnell, Schumer tap colleagues to explore budget reform," The Hill, 2/27/18](#)

["Study: ObamaCare premiums to rise 18 percent from GOP-backed changes," The Hill, 2/26/18](#)

["Week ahead: House panel begins work on opioid bills," The Hill, 2/26/18](#)

PA STATE POLICY NEWS



Do you have questions about the Pennsylvania state budget?

What is cost to carry or performance-based budgeting?

Check out

PA Budget on the Run

hosted by:

John Denny of Denny Civic Solutions

with special guest,

Donna Malpezzi, Esquire of DMMConsulting

[Click Here to Watch](#)

PA's 2018-19 budget hearings continue.

There are more Fiscal Year 2018-19 state budget hearings in the Appropriations committees of the state House of Representatives and the Senate.

Next up in the House are the Department of General Services, the Liquor Control Board and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, while the Senate will hear from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Thursday, it was a full day of House budget hearings focused on combating opioids in Pennsylvania, with visits from the Department of Health, the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs and the Office of Attorney General. It'll be a day of repeat budget hearings in the Senate, with the Department of Corrections/Board of Probation and Parole, the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board and the Department of Environmental Protection facing a second batch of lawmakers' questions, as all three agencies have already had budget hearings in the House this past week. All Senate budget hearings are held in Hearing Room #1 on the Ground Floor of the state Capitol Complex's North Office Building, while the House hearings are held in the House Majority Caucus Room (Room 140) of the Main Capitol Building. For the Senate's full schedule of 2018-19 budget hearings, [CLICK HERE](#); for the House's full scheduled, [CLICK HERE](#).

Source: Capitolwire: Under the Dome

State, federal GOP elected officials file federal court challenge to PA Supreme Court's implementation of a new congressional map.

Pennsylvania Republican elected officials Thursday initiated a separate legal action in federal court challenging the state Supreme Court's plan to implement a new congressional district map. "Our concerns stem from the attack on the constitution initiated by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court – not the design of a map," said Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman, R-Centre, of [the complaint filed](#)

[in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.](#)

Corman is joined in filing the complaint by state Sen. Mike Folmer, R-Lebanon, as well as Pennsylvania Republican Congressmen Lou Barletta, Ryan Costello, Mike Kelly, Tom Marino, Scott Perry, Keith Rothfus, Lloyd Smucker and Glenn Thompson. Like [Wednesday's application for an emergency stay](#) of the state Supreme Court's order to implement a new congressional map, the complaint argues the state court violated the Elections Clause of the United States Constitution by both striking down a validly-enacted congressional districting plan – the 2011 map - and issuing a substitute plan.

They note the U.S. Constitution's Article 1, Section 4 clearly states, "The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Place of Choosing Senators." The state and federal plaintiffs further claim the state Court created congressional map requirements - which are found nowhere in state law with regard to congressional redistricting - and ordered a new map to be completed by a deadline the Court knew the General Assembly could never meet, all to ensure the Court would be able to draw its own map.

Defenders of the state Supreme Court's actions claim seeking federal court intervention will fail, just as the effort earlier this month to seek a stay from the U.S. Supreme Court failed. They say the state Court's basing of its decision on state law, and not federal law, means federal courts won't intervene. However, in the complaint filed Thursday, the Republicans argue that since a violation of the U.S. Constitution is alleged, the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania would appropriately have jurisdiction in this matter. They go on to request a three-judge panel "as Plaintiffs' action 'challeng[es] the constitutionality of the apportionment of congressional districts' in Pennsylvania."

A three-judge federal court panel in Philadelphia on Jan. 10 upheld the constitutionality of the 2011 Congressional Map in a separate case – a federal one – that sought to invalidate the 2011 map.

Source: Capitolwire: "State, federal GOP elected officials file federal court challenge to PA Supreme Court's implementation of a new congressional map" by Chris Comisac

Senate lawmakers hear from PA State Police.

The Senate Appropriations Committee's 2018-19 state budget hearing for the Pennsylvania State Police covered mostly familiar territory, adding little in the way of new information to any of the topics discussed. As expected, there were several questions and comments about Gov. Tom Wolf's \$25 per capita tax on those Pennsylvanians living in municipalities that do not maintain their own local police forces, with the goal of using the \$63 million the tax would be expected to generate to fund up to four new State Police cadet classes to increase the force complement by as many as 100 troopers per class.

Sen. Kim Ward, R-Westmoreland, again floated her idea to allow municipalities the option to contract directly with the State Police to hire additional state troopers to help police those municipalities, and Sen. Scott Martin, R-Lancaster, suggested limiting the tax to certain sizes of municipality – ideas that, as in the past, received a noncommittal, but slightly cold, reception from current State Police Commissioner Tyree Blocker. Noting the tax proposal will get a lot of attention in

the coming months, Senate Appropriations Committee Majority Chairman Pat Browne, R-Lehigh, cautioned the governor's proposal isn't easily defensible on a long-term basis since it isn't directly tied to the state police coverage needs of local communities. Browne said any such proposal needs to answer the questions of "who is paying what and why?" – something he said will require, and get from lawmakers, a more thorough conversation.

Prompted by the recent school shooting in Florida, talk about improved efforts at controlling the purchase of guns was a popular item of discussion during the hearing, with questions and concerns focused on gun purchase background checks (the state does between 600,000 and 700,000 annually, with 5,000 to 10,000 rejections) – but not for every transaction involving a firearm - and mental health screening (about 1,400 to 1,700 of those aforementioned rejections). Also discussed was the State Police body camera pilot program, the enforcement concerns regarding medical marijuana, past State Police Academy issues, overtime costs and the paint scheme of the new police trooper vehicles. The State Police are also scheduled to have a budget hearing before the state House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee on March 7.

*Source: Capitolwire: "Senate lawmakers hear from PA State Police"
By Chris Comisac*

DEP budget hearing focuses on new hires.

The governor's proposal to spend \$2.5 million to hire 33 new employees at the state Department of Environmental Protection was a key focus of questions Monday during the agency's budget hearing. Members of the House Appropriations Committee asked how hiring more inspectors would address a perennial issue for the agency: avoiding delays and backlogs in the handling of environmental permits for businesses. Overall, the department is seeking \$154 million in General Fund support as part of Fiscal Year 2018-19 state budget. The agency is also slated to receive \$219 million in federal funds and \$229 million from special funds. The new employees will be delegated to handle inspections and review of high-hazard dams, support air quality monitoring in gas drilling areas, sewage treatment plant expansion projects and drinking water quality inspections and permits if the General Fund request is approved.

DEP's new hires would also complement efforts to modernize an antiquated paperwork system for handling the flow of permits and other regulatory activities. The modernization project includes starting electronic inspections for oil and gas activity and drinking water inspections with a projected savings of \$12 million by 2020; introducing e-permit forms for applicants for surface mining, oil and gas, air quality, waterways engineering and wetlands, radiation protection and storage tank permits with a projected savings of \$630,000 annually and centralizing the handling of grants on-line for a projected savings of \$150,000 annually.

Source: Capitolwire: "DEP budget hearing focuses on new hires" by Robert Swift

Capitolwire: A now-consolidated corrections system continues to look for ways to reduce its inmate population and recidivism, control its costs.

Unlike during last year's budget hearings, this year the Department of Corrections and the Board of Probation and Parole are working together as a consolidated operation, not as two entirely separate entities operating independently. "It saved

us administrative costs, gave us the ability to increase parole supervision staff – which is critical to public safety,” said Wetzel, who acknowledged a legislative consolidation would have been the preferred route, but stated the governor’s action still accomplished the same thing. Gov. Tom Wolf last year proposed a consolidation of the two agencies, and while the proposal got close to get done by the General Assembly, it never was completed legislatively. Wolf later did a memorandum of understanding consolidating the two agencies through executive, not legislative, action, citing his ability to consolidate “like functions.”

There were several questions during the hearing about the increasing cost of health care for prison inmates, a prime cost-driver for the corrections system. Mental health, Hepatitis-C and opioid treatment, along with the system’s aging population, have been major cost drivers, said Wetzel. He said inmates over the age of 50 tend to have medical costs three times greater than those under 50. Regarding the opioid situation, Wetzel stated the system has experienced a doubling of the population of people entering the correctional system with an opioid addiction during the past ten years, with the system currently spending \$38 million to \$40 million for treatment.

The debate over mandatory minimum sentences got a little play during the hearing, but nothing compared to past hearings including last year’s budget hearing. While Wetzel has cautioned lawmakers about enacting additional mandatory minimum sentences, given their additional correctional costs (from an increased inmate population), he noted his primary concern has been with regard to non-violent drug-related mandatory minimum sentences.

Inmate population has been on the decline, which allowed the system to close a SCI Pittsburgh last year (saving around \$80 million), but when asked about potential future prison closures, Wetzel said there’s no expectation of another closure in the near term. He mentioned new mandatory minimum sentencing with regard to fentanyl-related offenses would go into effect in the coming months and his system is estimating that could increase the inmate population by at least 800 individuals, which said was nearly equal to the size of a new prison.

Pennsylvania’s declining correctional system inmate population has allowed the Commonwealth to contract with the state of Vermont to house some of that state’s prisoners, charging that state roughly \$72 per day per inmate, which works out to about \$26,000 per year per inmate.

As of last week, there are 260 inmates from Vermont being housed at SCI Camp Hill, according to Vermont’s Department of Corrections. On May 1, 2017, Vermont finalized a three-year contract which allows up to 400 Vermont inmates to be housed in two facilities — SCI Camp Hill and SCI Graterford – with Vermont paying for beds for a minimum of 250 inmates. The contract requires Vermont give Pennsylvania six months’ notice before inmates are moved and the contract is dissolved. Some questions about the future of the contract, or at least where the Vermont inmates are housed, have been raised by Vermont officials following the three deaths, since October, of Vermont inmates who had been housed in SCI Camp Hill.

The budget hearing’s questions also turned to another cost-driver for the state’s correctional system: overtime. Wetzel said his agency has been doing a much better job of managing the system’s personnel complement, employing things like centralized hiring, as well as overtime, through extensive monitoring at all levels. Even with getting a better handle on overtime, Wetzel acknowledged there are other increasing costs that simply come with an employee complement of 16,000 people, like labor contract pay increases and pension contributions. When asked if

the system anticipates adding to that complement during the next year, Wetzel said it's unclear, given that SCI Phoenix – which is replacing Montgomery County's Graterford Prison - is scheduled to become operational this summer

Source: Capitolwire: "A now-consolidated corrections system continues to look for ways to reduce its inmate population and recidivism, control its costs."

By Chris Comisac

LEGISLATION

- [HB 2111: Amends Title 65 re executive session](#)
- [HB 2112: Amends Title 18 re large capacity ammunition](#)
- [HB 2113: Amends Unfair Insurance Practices Act](#)
- [HB 2114: Amends PA Election Code re election districts](#)
- [SB 980: Act re general fund expenses](#)
- [SB 981: Supplement re agricultural colleges](#)
- [SB 982: Supplement re University of Pittsburgh](#)
- [SB 983: Supplement re Temple University](#)
- [SB 984: Act re UPenn appropriations](#)
- [SB 985: Supplement re Lincoln University](#)
- [SB 986: Act re PSP, PGCB & Attorney General approps](#)
- [SB 987: Act re PUC appropriations](#)
- [SB 988: Act re Workers' Compensation appropriations](#)
- [SB 989: Act re professional licensure board approps](#)
- [SB 990: Act re Consumer Advocate appropriation](#)
- [SB 991: Act re Small Business Advocate appropriation](#)
- [SB 993: Act re SERS appropriation](#)
- [SB 994: Act re PSERS appropriation](#)
- [SB 995: Act re capital budget](#)
- [SB 996: Act re capital budget](#)
- [SB 1052: Amends Workers' Comp. re remedy](#)
- [SB 1055: Amends Amber Alert re law enforcement](#)
- [SB 1056: Amends Tax Reform Code re net income tax](#)
- [SB 1057: Amends Dog Law re Lost & Found Dog Registry](#)
- [SB 1025: Amends PA Drug & Alc. Abuse Act re consent](#)
- [SB 1026: Amends Title 23 re mandatory reporting](#)
- [SB 1058: Amends Fiscal Code re consumer protection](#)

Prepared By:



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