

Monthly Report of Legislation Milliron Goodman is tracking for PBA.

Pennsylvania lawmakers are in summer recess until mid-September. The state House returns to Harrisburg on September 17 and the state Senate on September 23.

Here's a look back at the noteworthy happenings during the past month:

Education

After years of political gridlock on charter school reform, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf [announced](#) he would use his executive power to hold charter schools to "the same ethical and transparency standards of public schools."

Gaming

As gambling continues to expand across the state, the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board has [introduced](#) a new program to help problem gamblers. The VGT Self-Exclusion Program allows individuals to voluntarily choose 1-year, 5-year, or lifetime bans for this gambling activity. VGT establishments and operators must refuse wagers and deny gaming privileges, check cashing, player club membership, complimentary goods and services to any self-excluded person. They must also ensure that self-excluded persons do not receive targeted mailings, promotions, player club materials or other promotional materials relating to VGT activities. The program is modeled after the Self-Exclusion Program that has assisted thousands of persons by allowing them to voluntarily ban themselves from gaming in Pennsylvania's casinos. A similar program has also been implemented for internet-based gaming (iGaming).

The state Gaming Control Board voted unanimously to [grant](#) Stadium Casino LLC — owned by the Maryland-based Cordish Companies — a mini casino license for which they paid more than \$40 million in July 2018. Board members also granted the casino a license to operate table games. Live! Casino Pittsburgh — as Cordish calls the project at www.livecasinowest.com — is expected to open next year. As a mini casino, it will feature 750 slot machines and 30 table games. The second floor will house a restaurant and bar area, an events center, and an entryway connected to the on-site parking garage, casino officials said during the hearing.

Health, Human Services and Public Safety

Governor Tom Wolf will [sign](#) an executive order that introduces nearly two dozen new initiatives and reforms to try to reduce gun violence and make communities in Pennsylvania safer. The order will direct the creation of new state offices focused on violence prevention and reduction, expand programs that promote safety, refocus departments on combating gun violence, and increase collaboration and data sharing among the public, government agencies, and other states. Wolf is asking lawmakers in the GOP-controlled Legislature to pass safe storage legislation to reduce the number of accidental shootings; a "red flag" law, or Extreme Risk Protection Order Act, that allows weapons to be temporarily confiscated from individuals at risk of harming themselves or others; and universal background checks on all gun purchases. A recent Philly shooting prompted Gov. Wolf to [delay](#) the signing ceremony.

Governor Tom Wolf and health agency secretaries [announced](#) a decrease in opioid drug overdose deaths from 2017 to 2018 and provided an update on efforts moving forward, including tuition and loan financial assistance for substance use disorder medical practitioners, a new hotline to help grandparents and other guardians access resources, and upcoming free naloxone distribution days on Sept. 18 and 25.

Governor Tom Wolf [signed](#) an executive order making sweeping changes to Pennsylvania's systems that provide protections and support to vulnerable Pennsylvanians. The executive order establishes an Office of Advocacy and Reform, maintained by the governor's office with an executive director that includes a new Child Advocate position and integrates the Long-term Care Ombudsman; and a Council on Reform to support this effort by looking at protecting vulnerable populations from three perspectives:

prevention and diversion, protection and intervention, and justice and support. Both the Council on Reform and the Office of Advocacy and Reform will identify reforms needed for Pennsylvania to better protect and support individuals relying upon services and assistance from the commonwealth. Sen. Lisa Baker and Sen. Judy Schwank released a [joint statement](#) commending Wolf's actions.

Property Taxes

School property tax elimination talks start in Harrisburg (again). Pennsylvania lawmakers have talked about reducing or eliminating it for decades by increasing or expanding other taxes but have been unable to generate a bill that could pass the House and Senate and get the governor's signature. Most proposals involve increasing state sales and income taxes, to varying degrees. One new plan also includes adding a tax on retirement income. A bicameral, bipartisan workgroup of lawmakers along with administration officials are meeting informally to discuss possible pathways to lead to a new way to fund public schools. The Senate Republican Policy Committee recently [held](#) a workshop meeting in York.

Technology

The Senate Communications and Technology Committee is holding a series of public hearings on improving access to high-speed broadband internet in the Commonwealth. The hearings focus on the importance of high-speed internet access for Pennsylvania residents, farmers, doctors, emergency responders, local elected officials, students, teachers, and employers. The Committee held a hearing focused on job creation and local government perspectives on Aug. 7 in Indiana County with Sen. Joe Pittman (R-Armstrong/Butler/Indiana/Westmoreland); a hearing focused on emergency response and medical perspectives is scheduled for Sept. 3 in Monroe County with Sen. Mario Scavello (R-Monroe/Northampton); and a hearing focused on the benefits of high-speed internet for agriculture and education will be held on Sept. 5 in Fayette/Somerset County with Senator Pat Stefano (R-Fayette/Somerset/Westmoreland). After the hearings, the committee will hold a recap hearing at the state Capitol when the Senate reconvenes in September 23.

Transportation

High tolls on the Pennsylvania Turnpike do not violate the right of truckers and other motorists to travel between states, a federal appeals court [ruled](#), upholding a lower-court dismissal of a lawsuit against state agencies and officials.

The state House Transportation Committee [held](#) a public hearing on license plate bills. House Bill 317 would regulate automatic license plate readers, or ALPRs, and House Bill 1509 would create a new 2-in-1 license plate sticker to prove a car's inspection and registration.

Senator Joe Pittman, R-Indiana, will soon introduce [legislation](#) to expedite the timeframe reducing the amount of funding diverted each year from essential transportation improvement projects to support State Police operations.

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