

Senate State Government

06/02/2026, 12:00 p.m., Room 8E-A, East Wing

By Derek Danneker, Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee met to consider several bills.

SB 1150, Prime Sponsor: Sen. Patrick Stefano (R-Bedford) – (PN 1399) Amends Title 65 (Public Officers), in open meetings, further providing for notification of agency business required and exceptions. Revises provisions to allow an agency to add a matter of agency business arising under subsection (b), (c) or (d) to the agenda during the conduct of a meeting if certain conditions are met. Effective in 60 days. The bill was unanimously reported as committed.

Sen. Stefano said his bill would ensure that the public receives meaningful notice before a government body acts. He noted the Pennsylvania Supreme Court previously ruled that agencies can add agenda items with a majority vote, even when those items were not previously posted. He said his bill would ensure that the limited exceptions in the Sunshine Act to allow for emergencies and minor administrative matters remain narrow.

SB 1183, Prime Sponsor: Sen. Lynda Culver (R-Columbia) – (PN 1433) Amends the Solicitation of Funds for Charitable Purposes Act, further providing for registration of charitable organizations, financial reports, fees and failure to file. Raises the thresholds for an audit, review or compilation of the financial reports required to be submitted by charitable organizations that are registered under this act. Effective immediately. The bill was unanimously reported as amended.

A03361, by Dush, provides for a technical change and extends the effective date. The amendment was unanimously adopted.

Sen. Culver said her bill is a practical update to the charitable financial reporting requirements to scale compilation reviews and audits with the size of charities. She stated that if organizations receive less than \$150,000 in annual contributions, a compilation review or audit would be optional. She highlighted that the bill does not remove accountability. Sen. Culver pointed out that small charities in rural areas have fewer accounting firms available to perform auditing services.

Chair Cris Dush (R-Jefferson) said his amendment follows conversations with the Department of State (DOS).

SB 1088, Prime Sponsor: Sen. Jarrett Coleman (R-Bucks) – (PN 1306) Amends Title 38 (Holidays and Observances), providing for observance of First Defenders Day as a legal holiday in Pennsylvania. Designates April 18 of each year as First Defenders Day in Pennsylvania and requires the governor to issue a proclamation annually encouraging all residents, schools and

veterans' organizations to observe First Defenders Day to honor all First Defenders and Pennsylvanians who served in defense of the nation during the Civil War. Effective in 60 days. The bill was unanimously reported as amended.

A02803 by Dush, provides for a technical amendment to move the language to move the observance to a section for special observances. The amendment was unanimously adopted.

SB 857, Prime Sponsor: Sen. Scott Hutchinson (R-Clarion) – (PN 958) Amends the Administrative Code, in powers and duties in general, providing for real property acquisition limitations. Provides that the purchase or trade of land cannot be accepted as a gift or made by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Game Commission or the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission unless the governing body of the county where the land is located approves the acquisition. Provides that municipalities should be given 30 days' notice and opportunity to comment on the acquisition of land before completion of purchase, trade or acceptance of the land. Effective in 90 days. The bill was reported as committed, on a party-line vote, with Democrats voting in the negative.

Sen. Scott Hutchinson (R-Venango) highlighted that several rural counties have a significant portion of their land controlled by state government. He pointed out that state agencies own more than 109,000 acres in Warren County, which is more than 38% of the land in the county. He stated that although the Game Commission says they are providing land for hunters, the number of hunters has declined while the land the commission owns has increased. Sen. Hutchinson remarked that the counties will never be able to collect property taxes from the land that the state owns.

Minority Chair Steven Santarsiero (D-Bucks) said he wants to conserve land for future generations and the legislation would “frustrate that process.”

Sen. Judy Ward (R-Berks) asked if the bill “just allows public input.” Sen. Hutchinson agreed and added that county commissioners would need to confirm the purchase.

Chair Dush noted the Game Commission received an “earful” in a hearing about eight months ago. He pointed out that there is only a small part of Potter County that is taxable due to the large amount of state-owned land. Sen. Dush added that the Game Commission has \$600 million to purchase new land and private purchasers cannot compete.

SB 599, Prime Sponsor: Sen. Cris Dush (R-Cameron) – (PN 605) Amends the Pennsylvania Election Code, in county boards of elections, further providing for expenses of county boards and of primaries and elections to be paid by county, expenses of special elections and boards to be provided with offices; in voting by qualified absentee electors, further providing for date of application for absentee ballot and for voting by absentee electors; and, in voting by qualified mail-in electors, further providing for voting by mail-in electors. Specifies offices as primary offices located in the county seat under section 305 (b) throughout the language of the bill. Effective immediately. The bill was reported as committed, on a party-line vote, with Democrats voting in the negative.

Chair Dush said his bill would eliminate ballot stuffing by eliminating drop boxes. He commented that drop boxes were created by “judicial fiat out of thin air.” He pointed out that nearly 1,000 ballots appeared without video evidence during an election. “This legislation rolls back the language, which was interpreted by the Supreme Court to allow drop boxes, so that we can work on a more comprehensive policy,” he said.

Chair Santarsiero questioned the purported 1,000 votes that Chair Dush referenced. Chair Dush explained that the Republican party found 300 ballots and the district attorney found 600 ballots. He stated that the district attorney said he would not prosecute those cases because he could not identify all the parties that were stuffing the ballots but going forward he would.

Chair Santarsiero lauded the work of elections officials to ensure that every valid voter who casts a ballot is counted. He suggested the General Assembly should pass legislation to more easily facilitate ballot boxes. “This is all part of making it easier, regardless of whether a voter is a Democrat, Republican or not affiliated with either party, to be able to cast their vote and ultimately have it counted in whatever election they choose to participate in,” he said. Chair Santarsiero noted the percentage of voters in the United States lags behind other democratic nations. “It’s incumbent upon us as policymakers at the state level to give the counties the resources they need to be able to make the voting process as open and as accessible and as simple as possible, and respectfully I believe that this would do the opposite of that, so I have to oppose this legislation,” he said.

Sen. Anthony Williams (D-Philadelphia) asked if Chair Dush would like to see more people vote. Chair Dush said the desire of the bill is to ensure that only qualified voters can cast a ballot.

Sen. Williams stated that abolishing the drop box in Pennsylvania would decrease the number of people who could vote. He said there are ways to leverage technology to ensure the security of drop boxes, and there is no logic behind the legislation. He stated that people don’t trust the franchise of voting because some elected officials are making it harder to vote.

Chair Santarsiero stated that if there was proof that the ballots in Lehigh County were invalid, the local board of elections would have notified someone. “We want to make it easier for people to have access to these drop boxes in order to make it easier for them to vote, and I think this does the opposite of that,” he said.

Chair Dush emphasized the need for security in elections. He pointed out that the founders of the United States established a republic, not a democracy. “The judicial branch overstepped their authority, and unfortunately, the executive branch is complicit in allowing it to happen through DOS,” he said.

Chair Santarsiero noted the United States has an indirect democracy, but it is a democracy. He said the claim of voter fraud has proved to be untrue. He said the ballot box system has worked well for more than six years. He said that voting is fundamental to democracy.

Chair Dush said there is “no question” that the ballots in Lehigh County were not legal and were counted anyway. He said there have been other cases of voter fraud in the commonwealth. He

said the General Assembly should eliminate ballot boxes to allow the legislature to determine if the state should have ballot boxes. “It is not the judiciary’s role to come in and say this is how we’re going to run elections or any other operation of government,” he said.

Sen. Williams noted Chair Dush did not respond to his suggestion that the General Assembly pass legislation to increase the security of ballot boxes. He stated that the commonwealth has moved forward with ballot boxes and the legislature should embrace the practice. He added that illegal voting still occurred at polling locations before ballot boxes proliferated.

Chair Dush remarked that the courts created allowances for ballot boxes, not the legislature. He said the General Assembly should decide for themselves if they should be allowed.