

United Methodist Advocacy in Pennsylvania

May 31, 2018

I attended the Pennsylvania Lutheran Advocacy Day near Harrisburg, on May 14. It was a well-organized and constructive event. We United Methodists will be conducting a similar event next year on the weekend of May 18, 2019. It will be a time for UMs from all three Conferences in the state to come together to learn about faith and advocacy, and to interact with state government. We have a great planning team from the Susquehanna Conference. Mark your calendars now and stay alert for coming details.

I would like to draw attention to an important federal-level issue. As a result of proposed cuts to the Farm Bill, the SNAP program is endangered. SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps, provides food-purchasing assistance for low-income people living in the United States. It is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and funded in the Farm Bill. At the end of this report, I have provided contact information to help and encourage concerned individuals to ask for congressional support for SNAP.

In the state government, June is a time to focus on the budget. Consequently, May tends to be a month for lawmakers to attend to miscellaneous issues, tie up loose ends, and to raise new issues that will need budget consideration. Indeed, these things have occurred this month, as well as some notable court rulings.

However, in my mind, the most important development in Harrisburg, in May, has been Senate Bill 22—Legislative Redistricting Reform. Its movement in the Senate State Government Committee is significant, representing progress that few would have thought possible a year ago. This item is first on the list.

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Legislative Redistricting Bill

On May 22, the state Senate's State Government Committee unanimously approved Senate Bill 22 that would pass off the General Assembly's power to map legislative districts to a more independent commission. The bill was introduced last year by Sen. Lisa Boscala (D-Lehigh) and Sen. Mario Scavello (R-Monroe).

The original version of the bill would have given the mapping authority to a completely independent eleven-person citizens commission. However, the bill was amended to give lawmakers final say on who would comprise the commission. The amendment would require the 11 commissioners to be confirmed by two-thirds majority of the House and Senate. The amendment passed the committee unanimously after it was introduced by Sen. Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon).

In the amended version, the Senate and House majority and minority leaders would each recommend two commissioners, who would have to be approved by two-thirds vote from their own respective chambers. The governor would recommend three commissioners who would need to be approved by two-thirds of both chambers.

To be qualified for the position, commissioners must not have held a state or federal government position in the past five years. The application and selection process to become a member of the commission will be outlined in future legislation.

The commission would continue to redraw district lines every decade, based on U.S. Census data. Currently, the congressional district map and the General Assembly district maps are created by different procedures. But, Senate Bill 22 would change both to the same process.

SB22 now moves to the full Senate for a vote.

A recent poll shows that more than two-thirds of Pennsylvanians want an independent commission to draw electoral maps instead of the state Legislature. The poll of 1,150 registered Pennsylvania voters was conducted by TargetSmart and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. It was commissioned by the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center with the League of Women Voters, Common Cause PA and Why Courts Matter Pennsylvania.

Asked if they favor having congressional and legislative district lines drawn by "an independent, nonpartisan commission" or keeping the Legislature involved, 68 percent of respondents said they back an independent commission. Twenty-two percent favored keeping the current process in place.

In the last two years, all three Pennsylvania United Methodist Annual Conferences have produced resolutions favoring legislative redistricting reform. I would highly recommend support of Senate Bill 22.

While the bill as presently amended does not represent the complete vision advocated by leaders in the redistricting movement, it has strong safeguards to protect the independence of commissioners, strict rules for transparency, prohibitions against use of electoral data, constraints on splitting counties and municipalities, and mechanisms requiring broad buy-in among the commissioners for the final map.

Even though the General Assembly would have a role in the appointment process for the new Independent Redistricting Commission, the essential principles necessary for the commission to operate independently remain intact.

Statewide Primary Election Results

In the May 15 Pennsylvania primary elections, state Senator Scott Wagner won the Republican party's nomination to run for governor in the fall election. Wagner was selected over Paul Mango and Laura Ellsworth, receiving 323,635 votes (44.3%).

Jeff Bartos, a Philadelphia businessman, won the Republican lieutenant governor nomination. He defeated three challengers. Bartos received 317,300 votes (46.82%). In the Pennsylvania primary, candidates for governor and lieutenant governor run separately for their party's nomination. However, Wagner and Bartos campaigned as a team. Wagner and Bartos are Trumpian Republicans.

For the Democrats, Governor Tom Wolf was unopposed in the primary and will run for a second term as governor during the fall election.

In the five-candidate Democratic lieutenant governor primary, offering a wide range of choices, Braddock mayor John Fedderman won with 287,89 votes (37.5%). Mr. Fedderman is a progressive candidate in the mold of Bernie Sanders. Among those he defeated were incumbent Lt. Gov. Mike Stack, who came in fourth.

Incumbent Democratic Senator Bob Casey ran unopposed to seek another term as U.S. Senator.

In the Republican senatorial primary, Lou Barletta, with 63.1% of the votes, defeated Jim Christiana.

Mariner East Pipeline Construction on Hold

In a decision released May 24, an administrative law judge stopped work on a 3.5-mile section of a gas pipeline near Philadelphia. Public Utility Commission Judge Elizabeth Barnes ruled that Sunoco Pipeline LP had to stop construction on the Mariner East 2 pipeline in Chester County's West Whiteland Township and halt the use of the existing Mariner East 1 to transport liquid fuels through the area.

Work is nearly complete on the 350-mile-long, 20-inch-diameter pipeline intended to carry propane, butane and ethane from Western Pennsylvania to a terminal near Philadelphia. A second, 16-inch-diameter line is following the same route, and Mariner East 1, which dates to the 1930s, is currently active.

Judge Barnes wrote that Sunoco Pipeline LP has a history of leaks and failures to report spills when they've occurred, causing sinkholes, putting water wells at risk and creating the possibility of a public catastrophe. She determined that there is an "imminent risk to the public" and a need for more study, as well as development of emergency evacuation and notification plans.

Sunoco Pipeline LP released a statement calling the decision a departure from the law and due process procedures. It vowed to appeal to the full Public Utility Commission. The company claimed that Mariner East 1 was deemed to be safe and that work will continue on Mariner East 2 and its companion line in areas outside the 3.5-mile section.

PA to Fund Clean Air with VW Settlement.

On May 10, Gov. Tom Wolf announced that he is establishing Driving PA Forward, a program to administer funds that will be coming to Pennsylvania as a result of the \$118 million settlement with Volkswagen over its automobile emissions cheating.

Volkswagen sold cars for seven years that turned on emissions controls during testing but reduced them during normal driving. VW sold about 600,000 diesel-engine cars in the U.S. with onboard computers that rigged emissions tests. The International Council on Clean Transportation funded on-road testing that found these vehicles produced as much as 35 times the allowable amount of toxic nitrogen oxide, which can cause respiratory problems. The council alerted government regulators.

VW pleaded guilty to criminal charges and must pay fines and settlement fees.

Gov. Wolf said the settlement money will be used to cut air pollution in the state through distribution of grants and rebates to improve air quality. Wolf said eight grant and rebate programs will operate over the next five years. The money will be used to help reduce diesel emissions, including adding exhaust controls, upgrading engines and providing new engines and vehicles. There will be grants for electric vehicle fast-charging equipment and hydrogen fuel cell vehicle supply equipment.

“Red Flag” Gun Legislation

On May 22, House Bill 2227, Extreme Risk Protection, was highlighted during a news conference. The bill would create extreme risk protection court orders, allowing law enforcement and family members to ask a court to temporarily seize guns from a person who might be in danger to themselves or others. The primary sponsor of the bill is Rep. Todd Stephens (R-Montgomery). The news conference followed a House Judiciary Committee hearing, where gun reform advocates and statewide officials testified in support of the bill.

Five states have passed similar “red flag” laws meant to buy time to prevent tragedies like mass shootings or suicides. Extreme risk protection is meant to be similar to domestic violence protection orders that protect domestic violence victims from their abusers.

To receive an extreme risk protection order, law enforcement or family members would need to present “clear and convincing evidence” that someone is a danger of committing suicide or causing serious injury to another person.

The court order would then prohibit the person from possessing, buying or receiving a firearm. A hearing for the order would occur within three days of the order’s issuance. Orders would last between three months and one year, according to the bill.

The day after the news conference, the state Senate unanimously approved a bill that would change how firearms are taken away from those who are the subject of protection from abuse orders issued by a judge. Senate Bill 501, sponsored by Sen. Tom Killion (R-Delaware), would require those convicted of domestic abuse to relinquish their firearms within 48 hours to local police or county sheriff’s office. This bill is now in the House.

Program to Reduce Gun Violence

On May 8, Gov. Tom Wolf announced a \$1.5 million grant program aimed at reducing gun violence in the state. The governor, in Philadelphia, unveiled the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency is accepting applications for the grants and will start awarding them in July.

Child Protection Reform Plan

On May 16, Auditor General Eugene DePasquale announced an action plan to fix Pennsylvania’s child protection system that six months ago he described as broken. Mr. DePasquale called for cutting paperwork to free up caseworkers and urged the state to pick up more of the cost, so counties don’t let child protection agencies get overwhelmed.

Under present conditions, federal, state and county governments all pay a share of the cost of child protection. DePasquale said this can create problems when, to save resources, county leaders do not fill Children and Youth caseworker positions. Vacancies create more pressure on the caseworkers who remain, overwhelming the system. He suggested that the state could partially solve the problem by picking up the counties’ share of the cost.

DePasquale said the price tag of that move is projected to be about \$90 million. The state spends about \$2 billion on child protection. He observed that the state gives the horse-racing industry \$250 million a year in subsidies. “That’s \$160 million more than I’m asking for,” he said.

DePasquale said the long-term costs and implications of failing to adequately protect children from abuse are substantial. They not only include the abuse children might suffer now, but also the costs and problems that come later if those children are more likely to struggle with addiction issues, rely more on welfare programs or end up in jail.

DePasquale's report included 28 recommendations, but the auditor general said among the most important were reducing paperwork and increasing funding for preventative programs.

Fiscal Reasons to Decriminalize Marijuana

On May 2, during the final day of the Cannabis Learn Conference and Expo in Philadelphia, state Auditor General Eugene DePasquale expressed his perspective on recreational marijuana use. DePasquale said, "One issue kept coming back that made the most sense that could help us make the most progress and solve a huge financial problem for the state. That is to regulate and tax marijuana—legalize it." He has been an ardent voice in the state for decriminalizing cannabis for recreational use.

DePasquale shared the stage with state Treasurer Joe Torsella, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and the city's first assistant district attorney Bob Listenbee.

In 2014, Philadelphia became the first major U.S. city to diminish enforcement for possession of up to an ounce of cannabis for personal use. It became a civil offense, punishable by fines. Kenney was a city councilman when Philadelphia stripped criminal implications from possession.

DePasquale pointed out, if the state designs its adult recreational cannabis program after Colorado, the taxes could generate a minimum \$300 million in additional state revenue annually. "That's a lot of money that can be... put into basic education and drug rehabilitation programs." Furthermore, he said that Philadelphia is saving millions each year by not having to arrest, jail and prosecute possession cases.

Sports Betting in PA

On May 14, the U.S. Supreme Court voted 6-3 to overturn the nation's federal ban on sports betting outside of Nevada. This decision triggered a provision in Pennsylvania's 2017 gambling expansion law that legalizes sports betting provided the court strikes down the federal ban.

The American Gaming Association estimates that Americans illegally wager \$150 billion on sports each year. To take advantage of this revenue source over 30 states are expected to legalize sports betting within five years. The court's decision came in a case from New Jersey, which has fought for years to legalize gambling on sports at casinos and racetracks. In Pennsylvania, it is anticipated that sports wagering will be available by the 2018 football season.

The Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board, which regulates casinos, needs to draft sports-betting regulations, which then must be approved by the board and published in the Pennsylvania Code. The state's licensed casinos must then pay a \$10 million fee—it remains to be seen whether Pennsylvania's 12 licensed casinos will be able to offer a better and cheaper product than "unauthorized" bookies.

Individuals over the age of 21 and within the borders of the state will be able to bet on all professional and collegiate sporting events.

The federal government and all four major U.S. professional sports leagues and the NCAA urged the court to uphold the federal law against sports betting. The leagues argued that a gambling expansion would hurt the integrity of their games. They do not want anyone thinking the outcome of their games could be altered by someone with money. Furthermore, they argued that legalized sports betting will force them to spend a lot more money monitoring betting patterns and investigating suspicious activity.

Mini-Casino Licenses

At its May 2 meeting, the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board did not conduct an auction for a mini-casino license. Board spokesman Doug Harbach said they haven't decided whether or not to continue with the auctions.

The last auction was held on April 18. It was the sixth. It attracted no bidders. As a result, according to the law that created the mini-casinos and allows 10 licenses, the Gaming Control Board must now determine if it is in the state's best interest to continue the auction process. If so, the field of bidders could be expanded.

Gas Severance Tax

As the month of May began, some lawmakers renewed efforts calling for a severance tax on natural gas extraction. According to proponents, Senate Bill 1000, and its companion House Bill 2253, would give Pennsylvania its fair share of revenues from the natural gas industry.

State Sen. John Yudichak (D-Carbon) and a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers joined Gov. Tom Wolf to announce this legislation at a Harrisburg news conference. "Our citizens demand it, and the industry is ready for it," Yudichak said.

Pennsylvania is the only gas-producing state in the nation without a severance tax. The proposed severance tax would generate an estimated \$248.7 million in the next fiscal year. The current impact fee would remain in place, benefitting local municipalities.

Yudichak pointed out:

- SB 1000 is simple and straightforward—it will implement a severance tax based on the combining factors of both price and production.
- With an effective tax rate of 4 percent, Pennsylvania will remain in a very competitive position relative to other gas producing states.
- Last year, Pennsylvania produced over 5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and by 2030 it is projected to produce more than 30 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Judge Stops State Fund Raiding

On May 17, a federal judge removed a \$200 million revenue source from the current fiscal year's budget plan. U.S. District Judge Christopher Conner sided with the Pennsylvania Professional Liability Joint Underwriting Association and declared the state's attempt to appropriate its money a violation of the U.S. Constitution. Conner said the fund is private property that may not be seized by the government without fair compensation.

"It does not exist wholly to serve the state, nor is it engaged in work otherwise tasked by statute to the state's insurance commissioner," Conner wrote. "That the association's private operations work an incidental public benefit does not render its function a public one."

The association was created by the state in 1975 in the face of a medical malpractice crisis. Presently, it insures about 250 policyholders, with the typical policy lasting one year.

The law that authorized the transfer was part of the 2017-18 Fiscal Code, a significant element in the current \$32 billion budget. The \$200 million transfer law was passed by state lawmakers and signed by Gov. Tom Wolf on October 30. The state claimed to have a right to the money. But, transfer into the state's general fund never took place, because the association obtained an injunction from Conner in November.

I first reported on this situation in August 2017. This was one example of "creative" revenue sourcing by the General Assembly, in an attempt to avoid raising taxes.

Health Insurance

The percentage of Pennsylvanians under 65 with health insurance remained stable last year despite Trump Administration threats to Obamacare and a GOP tax bill that will remove the requirement that everyone have insurance.

In December, the GOP passed a tax overhaul that includes a provision to repeal the requirement that everyone have health insurance. The repeal takes effect in 2019. Insurers have said the repeal will require price increases in the Affordable Care Act's individual insurance marketplace because more young, healthy people will likely choose to go without insurance.

A new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report shows 7.3 percent of Pennsylvania adults under 65, the age at which people become eligible for Medicare, were uninsured in 2017—this is below the national rate of 12.8 percent. Pennsylvania is one of 33 states that have expanded Medicaid to low-income adults.

Potential Changes to State Hiring

On May 22, the Pennsylvania Senate's State Government Committee unanimously approved Senate Bill 1037, sponsored by Sen. Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon) and backed by Gov. Wolf, that would remove hiring powers from the independent Civil Service Commission. State hiring would be placed under the control of the governor's Office of Administration. The bill will go before the full Senate in June.

The purpose of the Civil Service Commission is to insulate state hiring from politics. The State Government Committee disregarded objections by the Pennsylvania Council of War Veterans, questioning the reasons Wolf and Republican leaders have for reducing the commission's powers.

The law, if approved by the full Senate and House and signed by the governor, is supposed to speed the state's adoption of an online job-application system, in an effort to draw more young job candidates to work as Pennsylvania prison guards, social workers, and other positions. Supporters of SB1037 want to simplify and improve hiring so it more closely resembles a private-sector approach.

Folmer's bill would leave the Pennsylvania Civil Service Commission as an auditing and review board with little power to stop partisan hiring. Opponents of the bill warn that gutting the commission and giving its powers to gubernatorial appointees invites a return of the corrupt patronage hiring practices of the past.

New PASSHE Chancellor

On May 21, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education announced that Dr. Daniel Greenstein will assume leadership of the system on September 4. For the past six years, Dr. Greenstein has been a director at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Before that, he was an administrator in the University of California system. Greenstein holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate in social studies from Oxford University.

Gov. Tom Wolf said Greenstein has the knowledge and expertise to help revamp the system. PASSHE has struggled with state aid cuts, decreasing recruitment and enrollment.

The state system, which enrolls more than 100,000 degree-seeking students, includes Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester universities.

Proposed Six Week Abortion Ban

A group of House Republicans have introduced legislation that would ban abortions after six weeks. The legislation was authored by Rep. Rick Saccone (R-Washington). It would ban abortions after the point at which the heartbeat of the fetus can be detected.

Gov. Tom Wolf said he will veto the legislation if it passes the General Assembly.

Sen. Scott Wagner (R-York), the Republican party-endorsed candidate for governor, would support the legislation. Andrew Romeo, a spokesman for Wagner, said, "Scott is pro-life. He has a 100 percent pro-life voting record that has been praised by the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation and as governor he would continue to fight for the rights of the unborn, which would include supporting the heartbeat bill."

Proposed Criminal Justice Reforms

On May 3, Philadelphia-born rapper Meek Mill, 30, called for reform of Pennsylvania's parole and probation systems at a news conference held at the Constitution Center in Philadelphia. Alongside Mill stood Gov. Tom Wolf and a half-dozen state lawmakers.

Late in April, Mill was released on bail, by order of the state Supreme Court, while serving a two-to-four-year sentence at Chester state prison for a probation violation.

The governor used the opportunity to highlight his wish list of criminal justice reform initiatives, including changing practices that have placed 296,000 Pennsylvanians under supervision for extended years for minor violations and technicalities. Wolf asked for stricter limits on the length of parole and probation terms.

Wolf's list included state funding for the public defender program, increasing access to expungements and passing a justice reinvestment package that would save \$55 million annually by instituting automatic parole for people serving short sentences.

Legislation already introduced includes a bill to limit confinement for probation violations to no more than six months, and another that would limit terms for which judges can resentence people found in violation of their probation.

Immediately after the news conference, the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association issued a statement attributed to Berks County District Attorney John Adams, "We caution against the wholesale elimination of appropriate consequences and accountability in the criminal justice system, cloaked in the concept of reform."

Transgender School Restrooms Ruling

On May 24, a federal appeals court panel ruled that Boyertown School District, near Philadelphia, can allow transgender students to continue using bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their sexual identity. A three-judge panel heard arguments in the case, conferred for less than 30 minutes and ultimately affirmed a lower court decision refusing to halt the school district's transgender student bathroom policy.

Six students, with the help of Alliance Defending Freedom, joined in a lawsuit claiming that the district is violating their constitutional privacy rights by allowing transgender students to use the same facilities designated for the opposite anatomical gender. One of the plaintiffs, Alexis Lightcap, a student at Boyertown Senior High School, said she walked into the women's bathroom during her junior year and saw a transgender student and froze. She said she reported this to a teacher and the principal. The principal told her the district had a new policy for transgender students. "They made me feel like I was the problem for feeling uncomfortable, unsafe and vulnerable with a boy in my bathroom," said Ms. Lightcap.

Lawyers for Lightcap and the other plaintiffs said the school district violated their right to privacy by allowing students with different physical anatomy to be in spaces previously designated for people with the same anatomical gender.

An attorney for the school district said its policy of allowing students to use facilities corresponding to their stated gender is legal and prevents claims that the district violated the rights of transgender students to equal protection. He also noted the district has provided single-stall showers and single-stall bathrooms for students to change for gym class if they feel uncomfortable.

There have been other federal appeals court rulings in favor of transgender students who have made arguments that districts barring them from using the facilities designated for their stated gender violated their right to equal protection

Injunction on Medical Marijuana Research Growers

On May 21, a Commonwealth Court ruling placed a hold on the Pennsylvania Department of Health's plan to license marijuana producers and dispensaries associated with medical school research.

Judge Patricia McCullough issued a preliminary injunction in favor of a group of previously licensed cannabis growers and dispensaries, halting action on the state's medical marijuana research program, until the court can hear further arguments.

The plaintiffs claim that the state changed the rules governing medical marijuana growing and distribution, months after the group invested millions of dollars in licensing and startup costs.

Earlier in May, Gov. Tom Wolf certified eight Pennsylvania medical schools to conduct research in conjunction with the state's medical marijuana program, clearing the way for the schools to negotiate deals with "clinical registrants" (CRs), that could then apply for grower-dispensary licenses. Regulations issued in March called for the state to begin to accept applications for such licenses. Under the regulations, each CR would be able to have one grow room and up to six retail dispensaries.

A group of 11 original licensees filed a petition seeking an injunction to halt licensing CRs. Their lawyer argued that the state's regulations governing CRs ran counter to the intent of the law. The plan to issue grower-dispensary licenses to CRs, it was argued, would create a group of super licensees poised to flood the market for medical marijuana.

A spokeswoman for the Pennsylvania Department of Health said officials aren't backing down on their commitment to medical marijuana research.

Gov. Tom Wolf first signed the medical marijuana bill in April 2016. Dispensaries first opened this past February.

Fair School Funding Lawsuit

On May 7, a lawsuit that could change the way schools are funded in Pennsylvania cleared a legal hurdle. A panel of Commonwealth Court judges dismissed some of the state's objections to the suit.

Plaintiffs in the suit are the William Penn School District in Delaware County, along with other petitioners, contending that Pennsylvania's school funding formula is unfair and unconstitutional. The court overruled the claim by Republican lawmakers that the plaintiffs had not proven that the current funding system caused harm to students. However, the judges want to hear more from the plaintiffs.

Lawyers for House Speaker Mike Turzai (R-Allegheny) have argued that students have "no fundamental right to equal education" under the state constitution.

Maura McInerney, an Education Law Center lawyer representing the plaintiffs commented, "I think it's very clear to almost everyone other than the legislature that education is an important right."

The lawsuit was first filed in 2014. It alleges state officials have "adopted an irrational school funding system that does not deliver the essential resources students need and discriminates against children based on where they live and the wealth of their communities."

According to federal data, Pennsylvania has the nation's largest gap in funding between wealthy and poor school districts.

Twenty AGs Back Lawsuits by Family Planning Groups

On May 15, Pennsylvania's Attorney General, Josh Shapiro, and 19 other attorneys general joined in support for lawsuits challenging the Trump Administration's rule changes they say will reduce access to family planning services.

The changes would shift federal family planning funds toward organizations that stress abstinence. The AGs filed a brief in Washington federal court that supports lawsuits by groups that promote birth control. The lawsuits target proposed rule changes announced in February by the Department of Health and Human Services for about \$260 million in family planning grants.

Planned Parenthood groups in Wisconsin, Ohio and Utah, and the National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association filed the lawsuits saying the rule change violated terms of the Title X statute adopted by Congress in 1970.

The supporting brief was signed by AGs from California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia.

States Sue Administration Over Vehicle Emission Standards

On May 1, Pennsylvania and 17 other states sued the Trump Administration over its attempt to "reconsider" greenhouse-gas-emission rules for the nation's automobiles.

In April, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt said he would revisit the Obama-era rules, which aim to raise efficiency requirements to about 50 miles per gallon by 2025—or 36 miles of real-world driving per gallon (about 10 miles over the existing standard).

In the lawsuit the states contend the EPA acted "arbitrarily and capriciously" in changing course on the greenhouse-gas regulations.

Following is the list of states participating in the lawsuit: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

How to Support the SNAP Program

Please use the Senate Farm Bill call-in-line to leave a message for Senator Pat Toomey and Senator Bob Casey. Ask them to support a strong Farm Bill and oppose cuts to SNAP.

It's quick and easy:

1. Call **1-888-398-8702** (Toll Free)
2. Enter your zip code when instructed
3. Push #2 to reach Senator Toomey's office
4. Leave your message (see suggestion below)

Then:

5. Call **1-888-398-8702** (Toll Free)
6. Enter your zip code when instructed

7. Push #1 to reach Senator Casey's office
8. Leave your message (see suggestion below)

Message Suggestions:

- I'm a constituent calling from (give the name of your municipality) to ask the Senator to oppose cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). I would like to ask him to protect Farm Bill funding and strengthen federal nutrition programs.
- Cuts to SNAP will increase hunger.
- I'm asking my Senator to protect federal nutrition programs and ensure a strong Farm Bill that will help farmers, rural communities, and the people SNAP serves—including children, seniors, military families and veterans.

Dai Morgan
United Methodist Advocacy in Pennsylvania