

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"The savings are negligible compared to the risk faced by the public."

– **Senate Law and Justice Committee Chairman John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)** on legislation approved by the Senate that would halt a Rendell administration plan to close up to 66 state police barracks across the state after regular business hours.

Preview

STRONGER SUNSHINE LAW, ONLINE STATE SALARY LISTING ON SENATE AGENDA

THE SENATE is expected to vote this week on two bills that are part of Senate Republicans' ongoing commitment to make government at all levels more open and responsive.

Senate Bill 467, sponsored by **Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster)**, would significantly increase the penalties on public officials who intentionally violate the state's Sunshine Law, which governs public meetings.

Senate Bill 729, sponsored by **Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi (R-Delaware)**, would require the state Treasurer to post salary information for all officers and employees of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of state government on an official Internet website.

Review

SENATE HEARING REVIEWS COLLEGE CAMPUS SECURITY PLANS

MEMBERS OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, questioned higher education officials Wednesday about the status of their campus security plans and encouraged them to share information with one another about any improvements needed to make their campuses as safe as possible.

The hearing comes in the aftermath of shootings at Virginia Tech University, which has sparked widespread discussion regarding security on college and university campuses.

Committee members urged all of Pennsylvania's colleges and universities to review their campus security plans and recommend any improvements. Witnesses at the hearing included representatives of Pennsylvania's community colleges, the State System of Higher Education, state-related universities and private and independent colleges.

SENATE APPROVES RAFFERTY BILL TO KEEP STATE POLICE BARRACKS OPEN

THE SENATE approved legislation Tuesday sponsored by **Senate Law and Justice Committee Chairman John Rafferty (R-Montgomery)** that would halt an administration-backed plan to close up to 66 barracks across the state after regular business hours.

Senate Bill 318 would ensure that the barracks are open to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Senator Rafferty introduced Senate Bill 318 after learning that the Pennsylvania State Police were operating a test-pilot program at the Skippack barracks in Montgomery County in an effort to save money. Senate Bill 318 was sent to the House of Representatives for consideration. For more, please see *In the Spotlight*, below.

COMMITTEE APPROVES ANNUAL EDUCATION SPENDING REPORTS

THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE approved legislation Tuesday that would require the Department of Education to annually provide detailed information on the administration's key spending initiatives, sending a strong signal that the General Assembly needs clear reports on the effectiveness of these programs before legislators appropriate additional state funds.

The committee, chaired by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)**, approved five bills that would require the Department of Education to provide the General Assembly with annual reports on the operation of the educational assistance tutoring program, the "Classrooms for the Future" laptop computer program, the "Science: It's Elementary" program, the "Project 720" high school initiative, and the E-Fund program.

Senator Rhoades said: *"The governor has asked the General Assembly to spend a total of \$182 million on these programs next year. Before we take that step, we just need to be certain that these programs work for the schools and students they are designed to serve."* For a list of bills and sponsors, please see *Fast Facts*, below.

SEN. WAUGH'S BANK ROBBERY LEGISLATION APPROVED BY SENATE

LEGISLATION SPONSORED BY **SEN. MIKE WAUGH (R-YORK)** that would ensure that robbery of a financial institution is treated as a felony of the second degree -- regardless of the method used -- was approved by the Senate on Tuesday.

Senate Bill 331 amends Title 18 (Crimes and Offenses) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes regarding robbery of a financial institution, which contains sections pertaining to “robbery” and “robbery of a motor vehicle.” Currently, bank robberies are simply grouped with other “robberies,” which, if no bodily harm was done but property was taken, are classified as third-degree felonies.

Sen. Waugh’s legislation addresses the specific action of taking or removing money of a financial institution, and classifies such a robbery as a felony of the second degree.

Due to the increased use of notes and verbal threats to carry out bank robberies, the bill includes language to give prosecutors the tools they need to prosecute offenders, regardless of the method used by robbers, whether with a note or a gun. Senate Bill 331 was sent to the House of Representatives.

SENATE PASSES BILLS TO CONSOLIDATE LAWS, CLARIFY USE OF DEADLY FORCE

THE SENATE approved two bills sponsored by **Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery)** to consolidate correctional system laws and clarify when corrections officers can use deadly force.

Senate Bill 73 would consolidate into one body of law all laws pertaining to prisons, probation and parole. The codification would repeal obsolete acts (some of which date to 1819), modernize terminology, and clarify and organize laws by subject matter. The goal is to improve accessibility of the laws to the public.

Senate Bill 623 would also clarify the powers of corrections officers regarding the use of deadly force when there has been an escape from a correctional institution and an escapee poses a danger and resists capture. The measure is consistent with current Department of Corrections policy. The bills were sent to the House of Representatives.

SEN. REGOLA INTRODUCES MEASURE TO REPEAL UNIFORM CONSTRUCTION CODE

RESPONDING TO DISSATISFACTION WITH THE UNIFORM CONSTRUCTION CODE (UCC), **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)** is again introducing legislation to repeal the mandate.

Senator Regola introduced legislation last session to repeal the UCC, created by Act 45 of 1999, and restore the prior standards. This session, his bill to repeal the law is Senate Bill 832, and the measure to restore the prior standards is Senate Bill 833.

The **Senate Labor and Industry Committee, chaired by Sen. John Gordner (R-Columbia)**, will hold a joint hearing on the UCC with the Senate Local Government Committee, chaired by Senator Regola.

“At a minimum, we need to make sure that there is an exemption for weekend ‘home improvement projects,’ a fee structure that does not exceed the total cost of the project, prompt action on permits, and a right vested in property owners to hire their own inspectors,” Senator Regola said.

In the Spotlight

UNDER THE ADMINISTRATION’S PILOT PLAN, state police barracks in Skippack, Montgomery County were open only between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. After these hours the barracks “went dark” and all calls and visitors were directed to an automated call center, which then forwarded them to a centralized dispatch center.

Sen. Rafferty’s concerns were shared by the Pennsylvania State Troopers Association at a recent public hearing. They strongly opposed any plan to expand the pilot program statewide.

“I understand that the administration is looking to cut costs, but I am more concerned about public safety and ensuring that calls and requests for assistance are handled quickly. The savings realized are not worth jeopardizing lives and putting the public at risk when they need help right away,” said Sen. Rafferty.

Fast Facts

BILLS REQUIRING REPORTS ON EDUCATION PROGRAM SPENDING

- Senate Bill 805, sponsored by **Sen. Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon)** – Educational Assistance Program
- Senate Bill 806, sponsored by **Sen. Pat Browne (R-Lehigh)** – Classrooms for the Future
- Senate Bill 807, sponsored by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)** – Science, It’s Elementary
- Senate Bill 808, sponsored by **Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill)** – Project 720

Question or comments? Contact the Senate Republican Communications Office at senaterepublicancommunicationsoffice@pasen.gov or call 717-787-6725. Current and archived News Briefs are also available online at www.pasenategop.com.