

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP)

The PNA generally supports the bills that would expand Pennsylvania's anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) law, which provide early defense motions to citizens, media companies or other organizations sued in an attempt to shut down legitimate petitions for government redress. SLAPPs have become an all too-common tool for intimidating someone attempting to exercise their right of free speech.

Local Government Transparency

The PNA will continue to work with legislators, their staff and representatives from local government organizations to promote transparency provisions embedded in various local government codes and to preserve these provisions that foster public trust and accountability.

Taxes

PNA opposes the taxation of advertising and newspaper circulation. Sales and circulation taxes stifle the free flow of information, with a high administrative cost and limited return. Taxing advertising adversely impacts businesses, consumers and the economy.

Educate
Advocate
Participate



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Issues to Discuss
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Topics of Discussion With Legislators



Right to Know Law

PNA has been actively involved in Right to Know Law (RTKL) reform efforts, playing a significant role in the 2002 amendments and 2008's comprehensive overhaul of the Law. We continue to advocate for additional reform and greater transparency in government. In particular, the criminal and non-criminal investigation exceptions are often used to shield even the most basic documents relating to traffic incidents, routine inspections, and agency decisions from public view, and several other exemptions are applied or have been interpreted by the courts in an overly restrictive manner. PNA supports efforts to increase transparency to government records and the accountability that necessarily follows.

Public Notices

Public notices inform citizens about life-changing events planned by local governments, including tax increases, home foreclosures, zoning changes and much more, before those actions are taken. **PNA opposes any bill that would remove public notices from newspapers of general circulation and place them on government websites.**

Pennsylvania's newspapers remain the most read, most reliable place to read and establish legal proof of public notices, with nearly **8 in 10 of Pennsylvania adults reading a newspaper in print or online each week**, and 87% of Pennsylvanians agreeing that keeping the public informed about government activities through public notices is a worthwhile use of government funds.

Further, there remains a significant digital divide in the Commonwealth, with **over 20% of Pennsylvanians not using the internet at all**. For those who do, Pennsylvania's newspapers have already funded and supported a statewide, searchable, public notice website, www.publicnoticepa.com, for well over a decade, at no additional cost to government or taxpayers.

Finally, moving public notices to government websites will **cost millions in taxpayer dollars**, including significant, ongoing technology, personnel, cybersecurity and related costs.



Sunshine Act

PNA believes that additional reform of the Sunshine Act is necessary. Pennsylvania's newspapers are filled with examples of agencies improperly excluding the public, and very few examples of meaningful enforcement. Agencies routinely meet in executive session without sufficient explanation or oversight, and many engage in "informal discussion" behind closed doors, eliminating public access to any meaningful conversation about agencies' planned actions.

Across Pennsylvania, Sunshine Act compliance is a problem for citizens trying to understand government decisions and participate in government meetings, and enforcing the law is difficult, at best. Enforcement problems are the result of the Sunshine Act's burden of proof. The Act is silent on the burden of proof, and the courts have interpreted the law to place the burden of proof on the public. The Sunshine Act should be amended to **add burden of proof language that mirrors the RTKL**, where the burden of proof lies with the agency denying public access, rather than the public.

In addition, we would like to see an amendment requiring all government agencies to provide detailed meeting agendas in advance of public meetings. A major barrier to public access and participation at public meetings is the lack of information that will be discussed.