

Ballot Box Basics

A Tour of State Government

August 2022



Committee of Seventy

Join us in our campaign for better government

Familiar branches

Pennsylvania Constitution

Legislative
Makes laws



General Assembly

- PA House
- PA Senate

Executive
Carries out laws



Governor

- Lieutenant Governor
- Auditor General
- Treasurer
- Attorney General

Judicial
Interpret laws

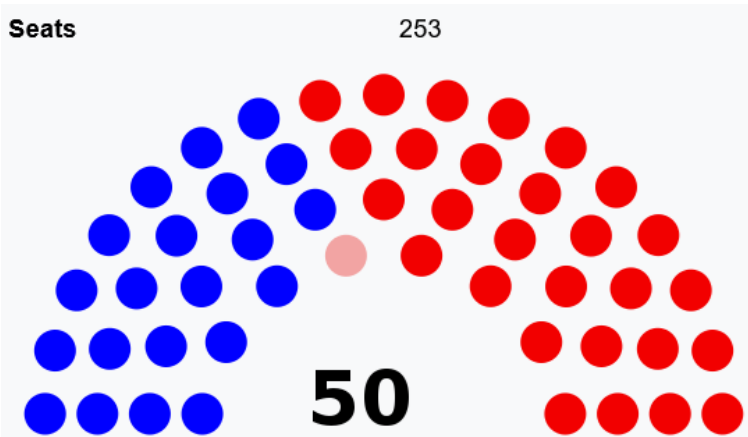


Unified Judicial System

- Appellate Courts
- Trial Courts



State Legislature



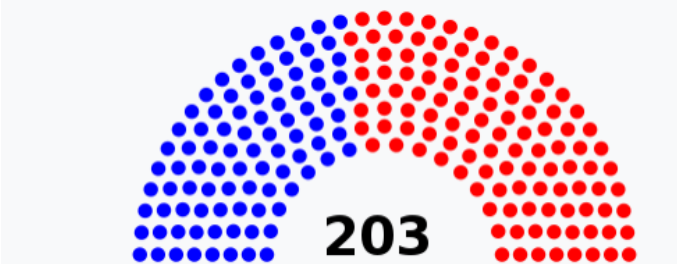
Senate political groups

Majority

- Republican (28)
- Independent (1)

Minority

- Democratic (21)



House political groups

Majority

- Republican (113)

Minority

- Democratic (90)

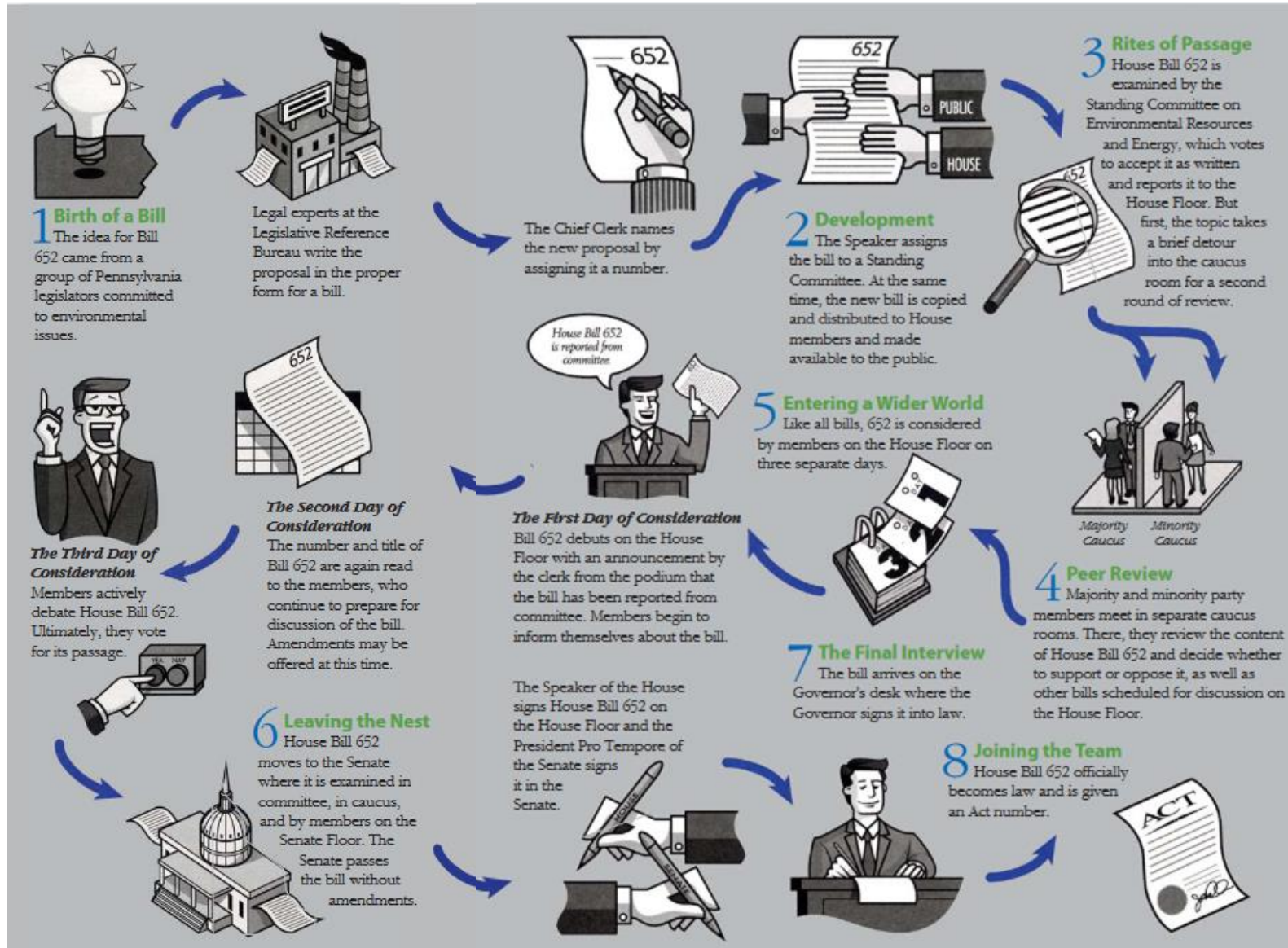
Powers and Duties

- Passes bills and resolutions
- $\frac{2}{3}$ vote to override a governor's veto
- Adopts state budget
- Power of impeachment (House) and conviction (Senate)
- Initiates proposed amendments to the Constitution

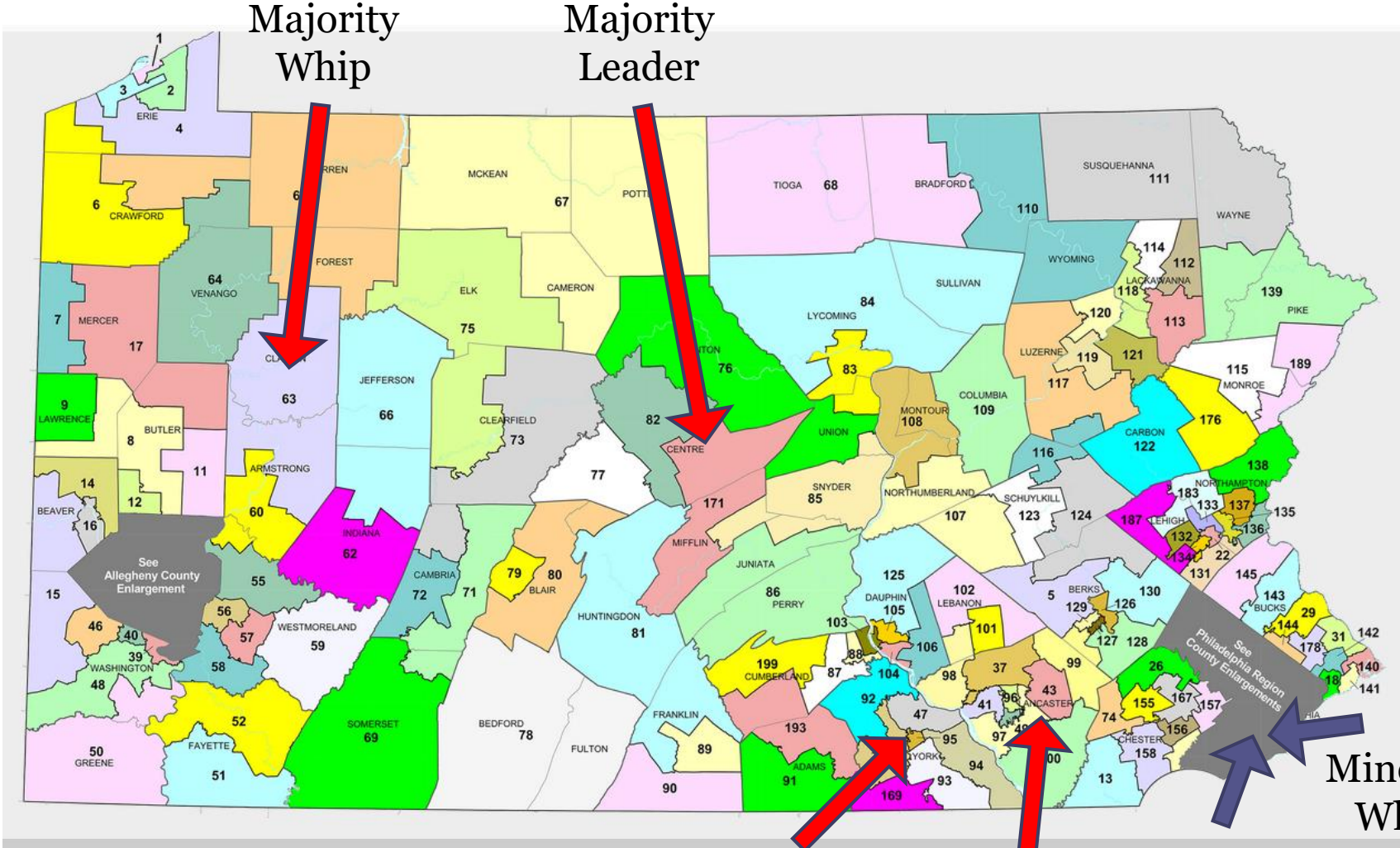
On the ballot every two years

- Senators: staggered, four-year terms
- Representatives: two-year terms
- No term limits

Lawmaking in a nutshell



PA House: Power Districts



Majority Whip

Majority Leader

Majority Appropriations

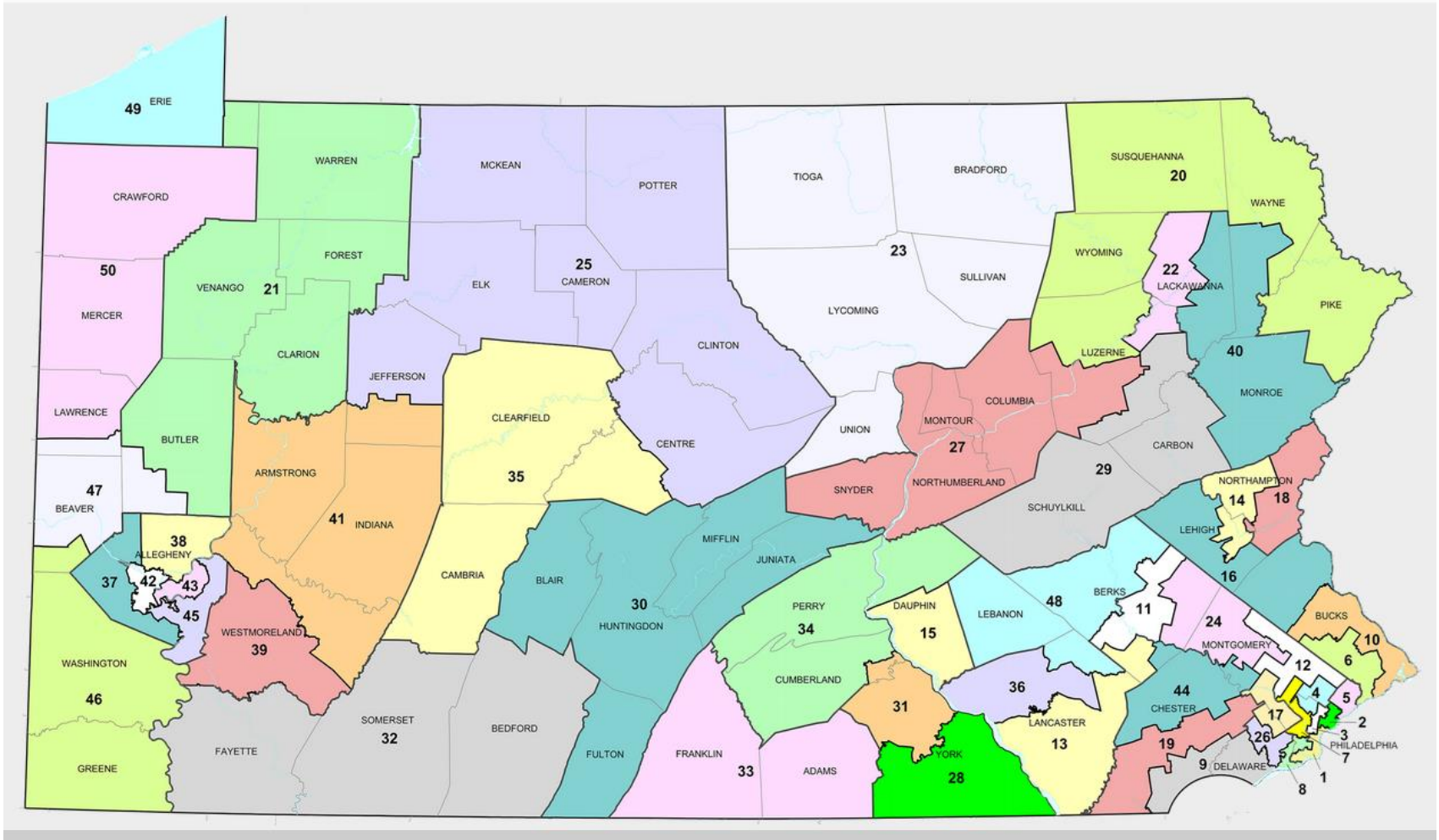
Speaker

Minority Leader

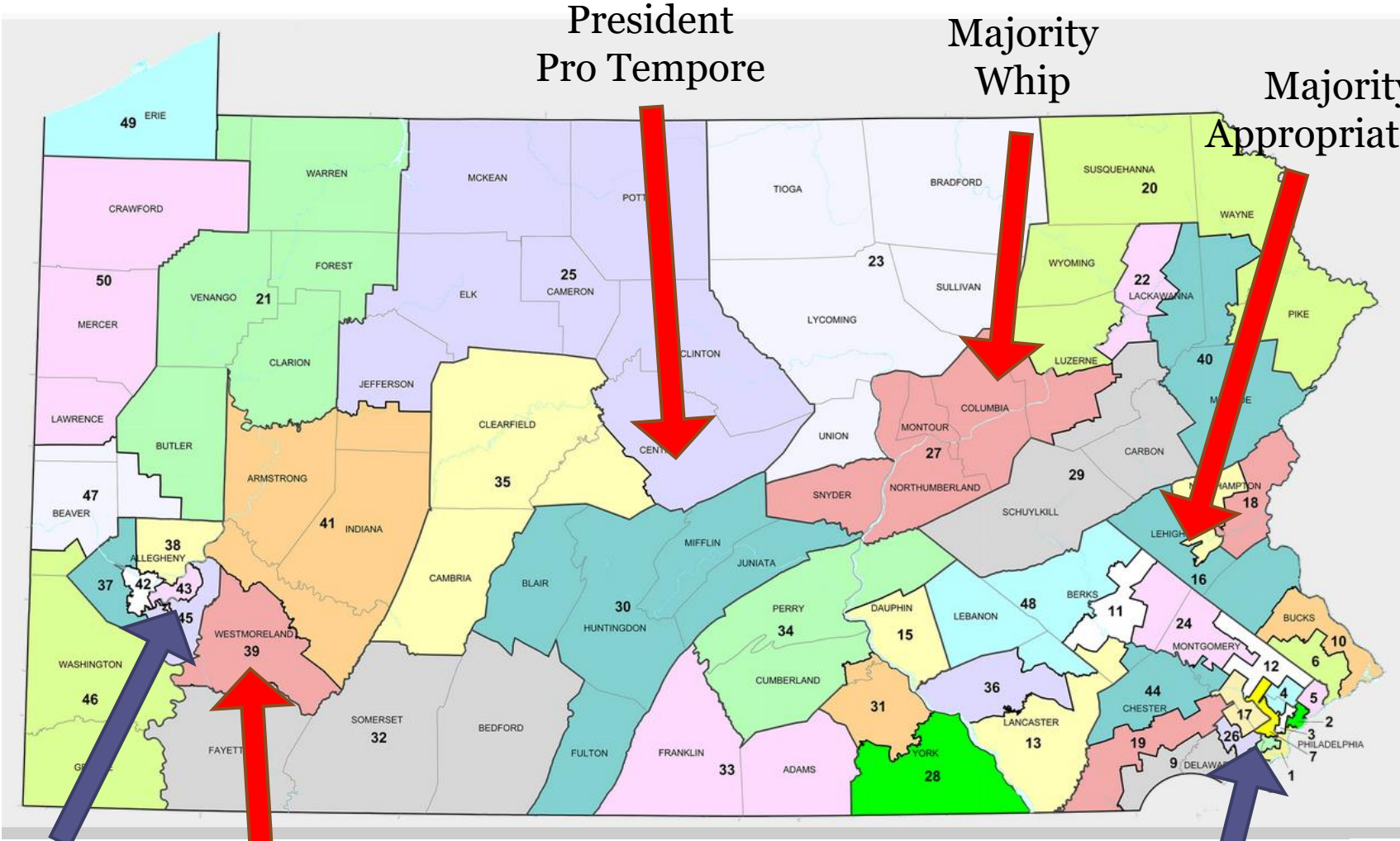
Minority Whip



50 State Senate Districts



PA Senate: Power Districts



President
Pro Tempore

Majority
Whip

Majority
Appropriations

Minority
Leader

Majority
Leader

Minority
Whip



Executive Branch



The Governor leads the executive branch

- Enforces state laws
- Approves or vetoes bills
- Commander-in-chief of PA National Guard
- Appoints cabinet officials
- Submits a proposed budget to the Legislature

The Lt. Governor is the second-ranking officer

- In line to assume powers of the Governor
- Presides over the Senate
- Chairs Board of Pardons
- Various duties as assigned*

On the ballot every four years

- Four-year terms
- Two-term limit

Executive Branch (Row Offices)



The Attorney General is the chief law enforcement officer*

- Prosecutes crimes
- Represents the state and state agencies in court



The Auditor General is the chief fiscal watchdog*

- Conducts financial and performance audits of state agencies and local entities that receive state or federal funding



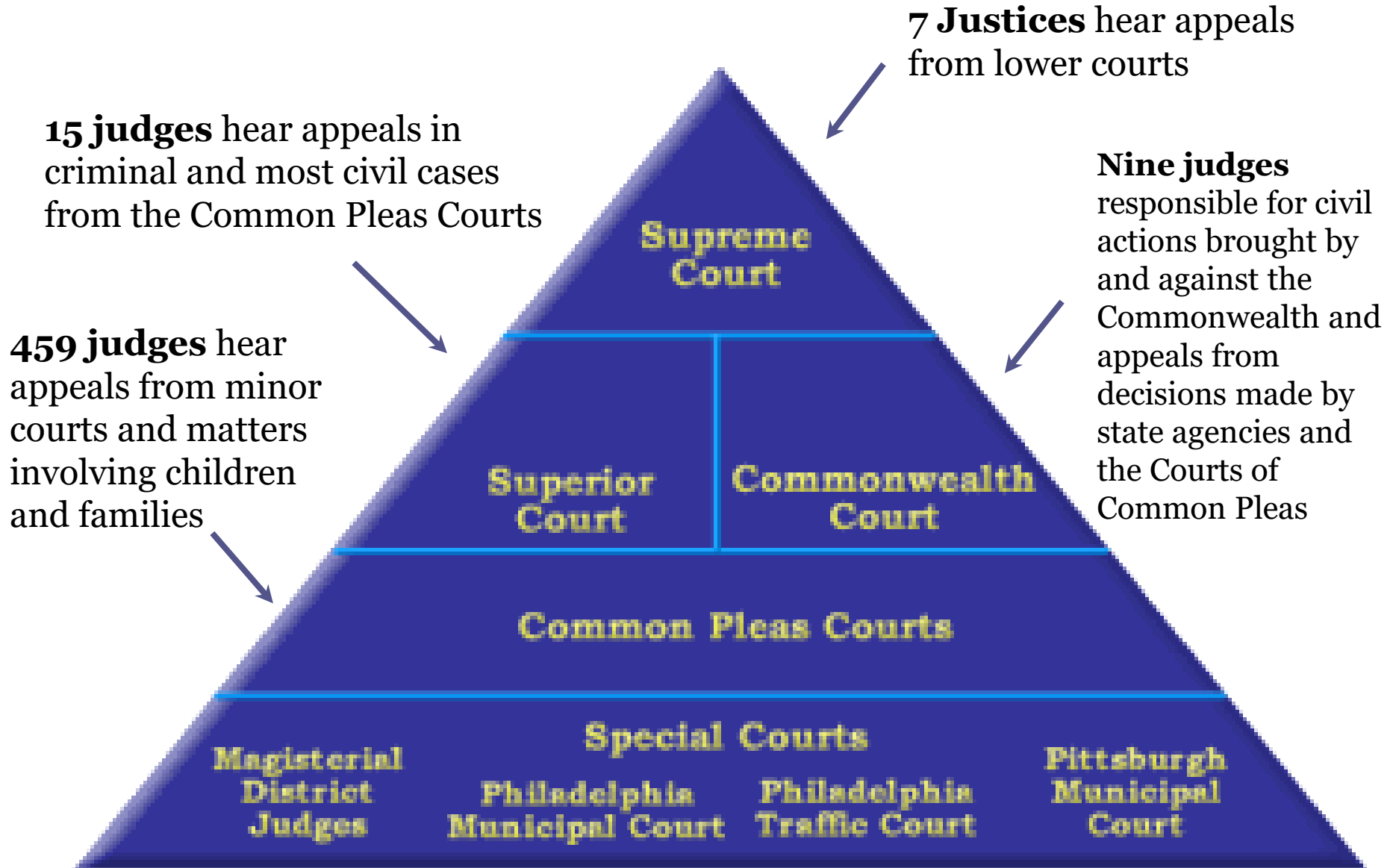
The Treasurer is the chief financial officer*

- Oversees \$150 billion in state assets
- Administers various other programs (eg, unclaimed property)

*On the ballot in presidential election years.
Four-year terms with no limits.*



Unified Judicial System



Local Government

- **Counties**
 - Governed by three elected county commissioners
 - Elected row offices: Clerk of Courts, Controller, Coroner, District Attorney, Board of Jury Commissioners, Prothonotary, Recorder of Deeds, Register of Wills, Sheriff and Treasurer
 - Duties: Assessment, elections, planning, human services, etc.
- **Municipalities**
 - Boroughs, townships and cities
 - Duties: transportation, police and fire protection, trash and recycling, building codes, land use, recreation, etc.
- **School Districts and Municipal Authorities**
- **Home Rule**
 - State law empowers localities to determine their own structure of government but within the confines of state law that apply uniformly statewide



How the branches interact

(Un)dated ballots

- 1) 1937 Election Code: “The elector shall then fill out, date and sign the declaration printed on such envelope.”
- 2) **Legislature** passes and **Governor** signs Act 77 of 2019, which creates the Mail-in Ballot. Use of mail-in voting explodes in 2020.
- 3) **County Boards of Elections** have been interpreting this part of the Election Code differently
- 4) **PA Supreme Court** rules 4-3 that undated ballots would be counted in a 2020 judicial race
- 5) **Dept of State** instructs counties to count undated ballots going forward
- 6) Several **County Boards of Election** do not count undated ballots in 2022 primary
- 7) **Governor/Dept of State** sues the several counties
- 8) **PA Commonwealth Court** orders the counties to count the ballots



Unaddressed reforms

- Independent redistricting commission and criteria
- Election Code modernization and fixes
- Campaign finance limits and enforcement
- Ethics enforcement and gift ban for lawmakers
- Lobbying disclosure and loophole fixes
- Open primaries and electoral reform (eg, ranked choice)
- Merit selection of judges



What we can do



www.fixharrisburg.com



www.seventy.org

