# **Ballot Box Basics**

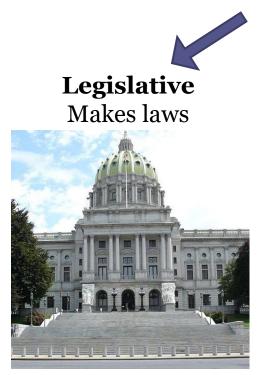
# A Tour of State Government



August 2022

# Familiar branches

#### **Pennsylvania Constitution**



#### **General Assembly**

- PA House
- PA Senate

**Executive** Carries out laws



#### Governor

- Lieutenant Governor
- Auditor General
- Treasurer
- Attorney General

Judicial Interpret laws

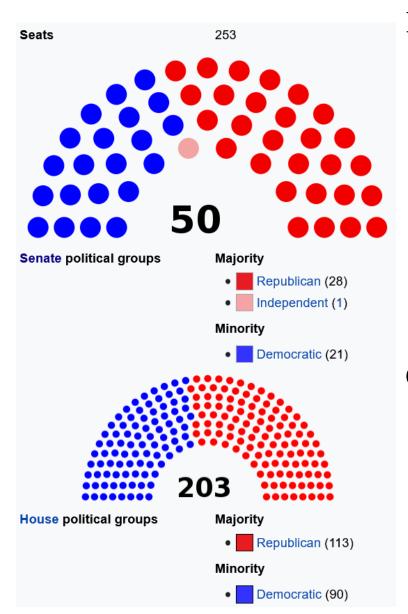


#### **Unified Judicial System**

- Appellate Courts
- Trial Courts



# State Legislature



#### Powers and Duties

- Passes bills and resolutions
- <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> 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



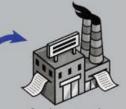
# Lawmaking in a nutshell



1 Birth of a Bill The idea for Bill 652 came from a group of Pennsylvania legislators committed to environmental issues.



The Third Day of Consideration Members actively debate House Bill 652. Ultimately, they vote for its passage.



Legal experts at the Legislative Reference Bureau write the proposal in the proper form for a bill.



#### The Second Day of Consideration The number and title of Bill 652 are again read to the members, who continue to prepare for discussion of the bill. Amendments may be offered at this time.

#### Leaving the Nest

House Bill 652 moves to the Senate where it is examined in committee, in caucus, and by members on the Senate Floor. The Senate passes the bill without amendments.

The Chief Clerk names the new proposal by assigning it a number.



The First Day of Consideration Bill 652 debuts on the House Floor with an announcement by the clerk from the podium that the bill has been reported from committee. Members begin to inform themselves about the bill.

The Speaker of the House signs House Bill 652 on the House Floor and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate signs it in the Senate.



#### Development

The Speaker assigns the bill to a Standing Committee. At the same time, the new bill is copied and distributed to House members and made available to the public.

#### **Entering a Wider World**

Like all bills, 652 is considered by members on the House Floor on three separate days.



Governor's desk where the Governor signs it into law.

House Bill 652 is examined by the Standing Committee on Environmental Resources and Energy, which votes to accept it as written and reports it to the House Floor, But first, the topic takes a brief detour into the caucus room for a second round of review.

**2** Rites of Passage



Caucus Course

#### Peer Review

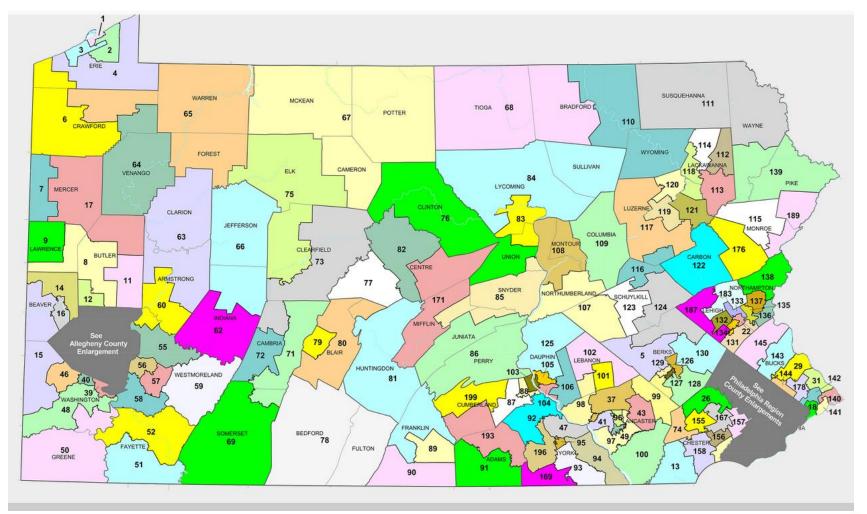
Majority and minority party members meet in separate caucus rooms. There, they review the content of House Bill 652 and decide whether to support or oppose it, as well as other bills scheduled for discussion on the House Floor

#### O Joining the Team

O House Bill 652 officially becomes law and is given an Act number.

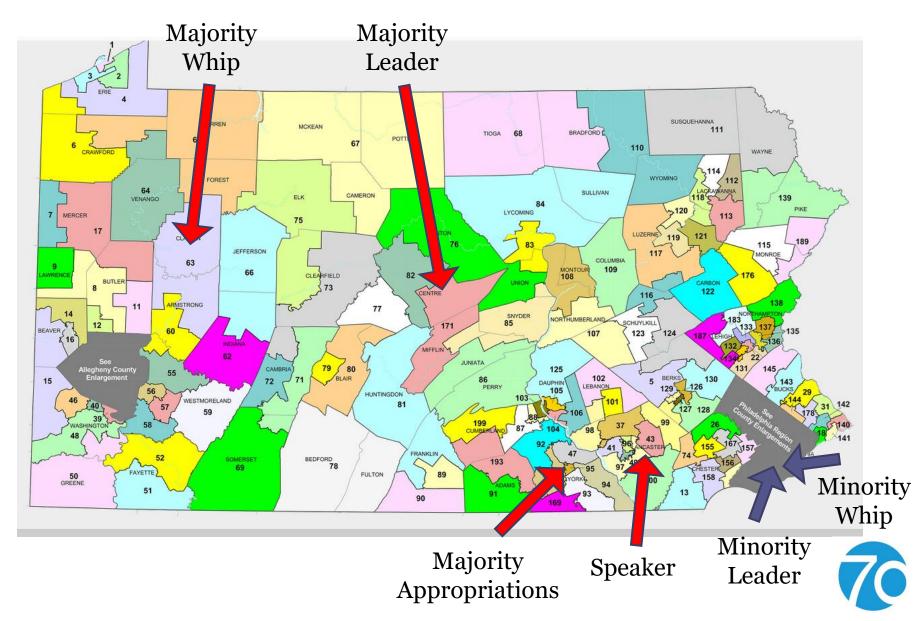


## **203 State House Districts**

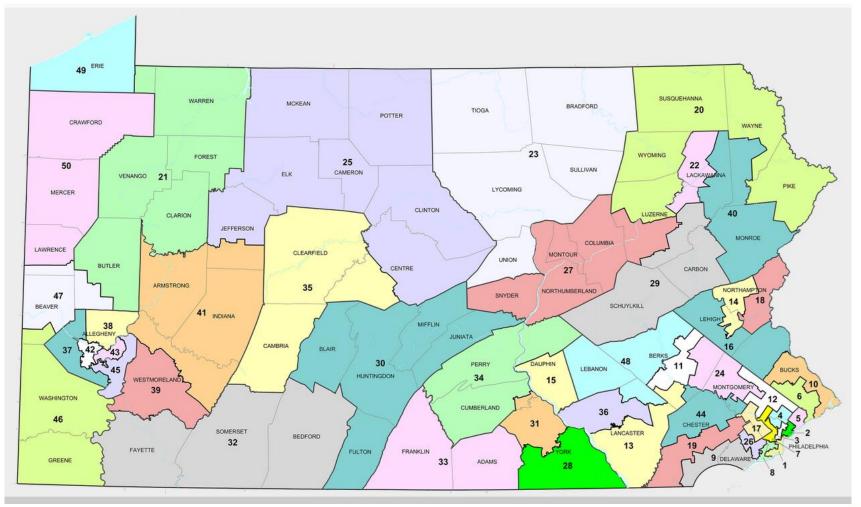




# **PA House: Power Districts**

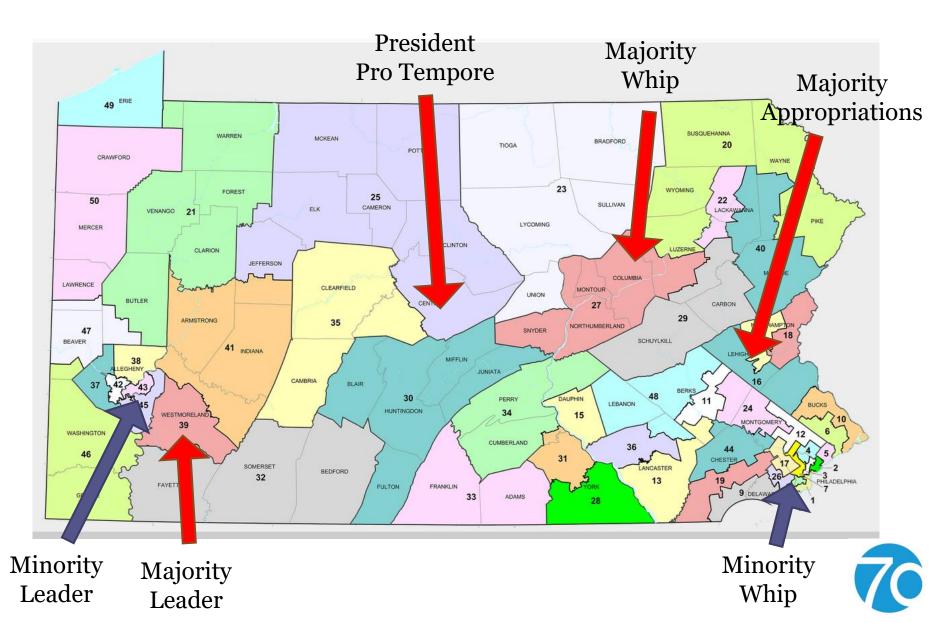


# **50 State Senate Districts**





# **PA Senate: Power Districts**



# **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

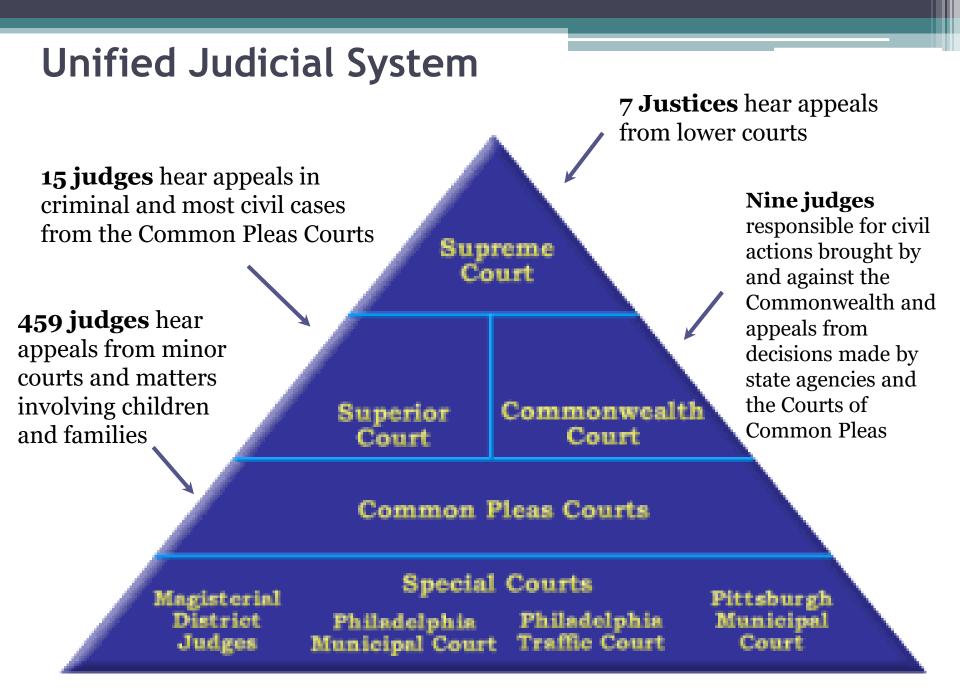


#### The Treasurer is the chief financial officer\*

- 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.\*





# 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

