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

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

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

2. 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.

3. Rites of Passage
   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.

4. 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.

5. Entering a Wider World
   Like all bills, 652 is considered by members on the House Floor on three separate days.

6. 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.

7. The Final Interview
   The bill arrives on the Governor’s desk where the Governor signs it into law.

8. Joining the Team
   House Bill 652 officially becomes law and is given an Act number.
203 State House Districts
PA House: Power 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.*
Unified Judicial System

**7 Justices** hear appeals from lower courts

**15 judges** hear appeals in criminal and most civil cases from the Common Pleas Courts

**459 judges** hear appeals from minor courts and matters involving children and families

**Nine judges** responsible for civil actions brought by and against the Commonwealth and appeals from decisions made by state agencies and the Courts of Common Pleas
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