



YOUR REPORT

from State Representative

ROBERT FREEMAN

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Addressing concerns about data centers

Over the last several months a proliferation of data center developments have been proposed around the state, including in the Lehigh Valley-Pocono region. There has been growing concern on the part of residents as to what negative impacts such developments could have on communities. Chief among these concerns is the fact that data centers use a tremendous amount of electricity at a time when our electric grid is stretched to the max and electricity rates are already high. Additional concerns include the amount of water they use in their cooling process, the level of noise they generate, their large scale, and potential inappropriate locations near residential areas or on farmland. These are all legitimate concerns that must be addressed.

Many current local zoning and other land use ordinances are woefully inadequate to deal with the onslaught of data center proposals in their communities. They are in desperate need of updating to be in a better position to control data center development.

House Democrats have proposed and passed a series of bills co-sponsored by Rep. Freeman that are designed to address problems posed by data centers. House Bill 2496 would allow municipalities to impose a 180-day pause or moratorium

on data center development in order to allow a municipality to revise their local land use ordinances to be in a stronger position to mitigate the negative impacts of data centers and put in place safeguards including restrictions on the location and placement of such centers. As Chairman of the House Local Government Committee, Freeman was instrumental in guiding HB 2496 through his committee, securing a unanimous bipartisan vote to report the bill to the full House for consideration. The bill passed the House 201-1 and was sent to the state Senate for consideration.

Additional bills include House Bill 1834 which would establish a regulatory framework over data centers under the Public Utility Commission, prohibit the increased cost of electric use by a data center from being passed on to current residential and business rate payers, and ensure that all costs associated with regional transmission facilities, network upgrades, or the regional system caused by data centers are recovered from them alone and do not impact other customers. House Bill 2150 would require data centers to report on their water and electric use. House Bill 2246 would establish the Department of Environmental Protection's authority over water withdrawals by data centers, punish those that release untreated

water back into the environment, and deny permits to those that use too much water. House Bill 2198 would end the sales tax exemption on equipment purchases by centers. House Bill 2151 would require the General Assembly's nonpartisan Local Government Commission to develop model ordinances that municipalities would have the option of adopting to better regulate data centers under local land use regulations. And House Bill 2359 would ban the use of non-disclosure agreements between data centers and local governments to ensure greater transparency of proposed data centers, making sure residents are fully informed about the details of such developments.

Unfortunately, the Republican-controlled Senate has refused to take up any of these commonsense proposals except the provision requiring data centers to report on their water and electric usage which did become law.

Controlling the development of data centers is critical to mitigate the kind of negative impacts they can create. These proposed measures would empower local governments to control data center development and safeguard their communities.

\$1.3 million for Easton area youth safety grants

More than \$1.3 million in state grants were awarded to four different organizations that help serve Easton-area youth. The grants will be put toward programs and activities that help keep kids safe. They were awarded by the School Safety and Security Committee under the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. The following organizations received funding:

- \$500,000 to the Greater Easton Development Partnership for its Safe Routes to School program, a community-based safety and prevention initiative serving school-age youth in Easton's West Ward neighborhood.
- \$494,800 to Community Bike Works for its Easton Bike Club, a bike-based mentoring and violence-prevention initiative serving high-risk Easton Area School District students ages 14 to 18.
- \$232,820 to the Easton Area Community Center to expand its long-standing organized competitive sports and athletic programs serving underserved youth in Easton's West Ward.
- \$79,000 to Wilson Area LINC'S Family Center to launch its Skills Training and Recognition Program, a new evidence-based after-school prevention initiative for approximately 200 intermediate-aged youth in the Wilson Area School District.

Personal Notes...

America at 250

Dear Friends,

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the establishment of the United States of America. Many celebrations were held in recognition of the occasion. I attended and spoke at the Declaration Dinner held in Easton on July 8 to commemorate the date of the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 held on the steps of the Northampton County Court House in Centre Square in Easton. It was one of only three communities that held a public reading of the Declaration on July 8, with Philadelphia and Trenton being the other two.

The Declaration of Independence holds great meaning for Americans, and it is one of the most significant documents of our nation. It is our national birth certificate. It is also one of the most inspiring pieces of civic prose ever written that has imparted to all of humanity the self-evident and universal value of equality. It proclaims and promotes certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness which are the defining aspirations of every member of the human race in their quest for a better existence. To paraphrase the Declaration, it is to these ends that governments are instituted deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed and when government becomes destructive of these ends the people have the right to alter or abolish it, instituting new government based upon these foundational principles and organizing its powers in such form as is most likely to affect their safety and happiness.

Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration, was inspired by the Enlightenment thinking of his era which was characterized by a belief in the power of human reason to better understand the world, challenge entrenched traditional authority, and promote progress, knowledge, freedom, and

happiness. The U. S. Constitution and our Bill of Rights were also influenced by the Enlightenment, providing balance and symmetry to the structure and function of government and safeguarding individual rights against the abuse and arbitrary excesses of concentrated power. Our system of checks and balances was meant to preserve the independence of the legislative and judicial branches to avoid the concentration of power and potential excesses of an overreaching executive branch. Something we have come to be concerned about in our own time.

The Declaration's universal appeal would transcend its own time, inspiring succeeding generations to give fuller meaning to the ideal that "all are created equal." Over time the American experience has seen the abolition of slavery and the expanding of the universal right to vote to all adults regardless of their wealth or status and regardless of their race or gender. Let us remember that these achievements were the result of those who labored to advance the cause of our democratic principles and whose strides on behalf of civil rights created a more just society. We owe it to them to safeguard our freedoms and to sustain our democratic institutions. To do so requires an engaged and informed citizenry to defend our rights and uphold our democracy.

As we mark this 250th anniversary of our founding, let us resolve to be vigilant in the ongoing effort to preserve and protect our rights and to ensure the survival and success of our democracy.

Sincerely,



Bob Freeman

House passes Sunshine Act 24-hour notice bill

The state House of Representatives passed legislation sponsored by Rep. Robert Freeman that would clarify the exceptions to the 24-hour rule for meeting agendas under the Sunshine Act, in response to a decision by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

"My legislation would strengthen transparency at public meetings by ensuring residents have sufficient time to review and understand upcoming meetings that affect their daily lives. An informed and engaged citizenry is essential for a thriving democracy," said Freeman, who chairs the House Local Government Committee.

In 2021, the Pennsylvania General Assembly amended the Sunshine Act to require government entities to make meeting agendas available to the public at least 24 hours in advance.

Recognizing the need for flexibility, the amendments also established reasonable exceptions to the 24-hour rule, including actions related to emergencies; minor matters that arise after the notice is published and do not involve contractual or financial obligations; and minor matters raised by a resident or taxpayer during the meeting.

The 2021 amendments further allow an agency to change its agenda during a meeting by a majority vote, provided the change is announced to those present before the vote.

"Due to the way this section of the Sunshine Act is written, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court interpreted this majority-vote procedure as a valid exception to the 24-hour rule. This allows the 24-hour rule to be circumvented completely by permitting virtually any matter to be considered without giving the public 24-hour notice," Freeman said.

"I believe this runs contrary to the intent of the 24-hour rule and the Sunshine Act, which is to give the public a reasonable opportunity to be informed about matters that will be discussed and voted on at meetings of their local municipalities, school districts and commonwealth agencies. My legislation would clarify the Sunshine Act by explicitly defining the exceptions and limiting the majority-vote procedure to only these specific exceptions."

The House Local Government Committee amended H.B. 2146 to add a new category of exceptions to the 24-hour rule for minor administrative approvals that were inadvertently omitted from the agenda and that, if delayed until the next meeting, would cause hardship.

The bill awaits action by the state Senate.

House OK's Freeman bill to provide workers' comp to firefighters, ambulance corps members injured during fundraising

Volunteers who are injured while organizing or engaging in fundraising activities with volunteer fire departments and volunteer ambulance corps would be provided with workers' compensation coverage under legislation passed by the state House of Representatives, according to prime sponsor Rep. Robert Freeman.

"Without fundraising, many of our volunteer fire departments and ambulance corps would struggle to perform their lifesaving services for their communities. These volunteers shouldn't have to worry about how they'll support themselves and their families because they were injured while trying to support their community," said Freeman, D-Northampton.

The Workers' Compensation Act provides benefits to employees who are injured or become ill due to their job duties. It covers medical expenses and lost wages for workers who are unable to return to work due to a work-related injury or illness.

The act defines the liability of an employer to pay damages for injuries received by an employee, or volunteer, in the course of employment. Volunteers of fire departments and ambulance corps who are engaged in fundraising activities are not currently protected under the act.

House Bill 2087, which passed 199-2, awaits consideration by the state Senate.

\$1.05M in state grants fund area projects

A \$250,000 state planning grant was awarded to Greystone Capital Inc. to complete a comprehensive real estate plan for developing a 54-acre site into a shovel-ready industrial campus in Glendon Borough.

Earlier this year, Rep. Robert Freeman also helped to secure \$800,787 in Local Share Account grants for public safety improvements, emergency vehicle upgrades and community projects throughout his district. The funding is derived from tax dollars generated at the state's casinos.

The grants include the following:

Easton City: \$75,000 to construct sidewalks throughout the Downtown Business District.

Easton Redevelopment Authority: \$95,437 to replace the roof top air handler at the Crayola Experience building.

Freemansburg Borough: \$175,000 to expand the stage and add seating at the Freemansburg Amphitheater, located at Gerald C. Yob Community Park; and another \$99,396 to construct a Community and Cultural Center.

Glendon Borough: \$25,000 for renovations to the Borough Hall.

Hellertown Borough: \$105,057 to purchase two police vehicles.

Palmer Township: \$95,000 to acquire a mobile incident command trailer.

Palmer Township, on behalf of Palmer Municipal Fire Department: \$25,000 to purchase radio equipment.

Palmer Township, on behalf of the Suburban EMS: \$32,000 to purchase an ambulance.

Wilson Borough: \$48,897 to purchase and upfit a bucket truck for the Public Works Department.

Wilson Borough, on behalf of the Wilson Borough Fire Department: \$25,000 to upgrade the department's analog radios to a new P25 digital radio system.

\$9.75M for area capital projects

In July, \$9.75 million in state grant funding under the Redevelopment Capital Assistance Program (RACP) was awarded for projects in the Easton area, three of which include:

- Palmer Township will use its \$1.5 million grant to construct a new police station with visitor parking, perimeter fencing, covered fleet parking, a sally port, and evidence garage.
- \$5 million was awarded to build a new community facility next to the Shiloh Campus on Canal Street in Easton that will house a gymnasium, health and wellness area, child care facility, counseling center to address mental health needs, and classrooms for job training services.
- ProJeCt of Easton will use a \$2 million grant to renovate a former church at Berwick and Reynolds Streets to transform it into a state-of-the-art educational facility. Upgrades include an elevator, modernized mechanical systems, energy-efficient windows that preserve the building's historic stained glass, a fire sprinkler system, new electrical and plumbing systems, a fortified building envelope, and secure entry points.



Rep. Freeman joined Easton Mayor Sal Panto, Jared Mast from GEDP, and representatives from DCNR and PennDOT for a news conference announcing a \$765,000 grant from the statewide Transportation Alternative Set Aside grant for the Highline trail project in Easton.



Rep. Freeman and Gov. Josh Shapiro at the bill signing ceremony for Freeman's legislation (H.B. 1651/Act 59 of 2025), which expedites the vacancy-filling process for Second Class Township supervisors.



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Ways Rep. Freeman's office can help you

- Property Tax/Rent Rebate forms
- PACE (prescription assistance for seniors)
- PennDOT problems or questions
- CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program)
- Information about PHEAA and PA's 529 College Savings Plans
- Obtaining birth and death certificates
- Tours of the state Capitol
- Certificates of recognition or achievements

lpo.kw.0826

Freeman bill to allow roadside assistance vehicles to use blue safety lights signed into law

Pennsylvania has a new law that would allow more vehicles to use blue safety lights in order to increase the visibility of roadside assistance vehicles, according to prime sponsor state Rep. Robert Freeman.

Previously, state law only allowed vehicles identified as "tow trucks" to operate blue lights while the truck is stationary on the side of the road or highway while responding to a disabled vehicle. Freeman learned about this narrow interpretation of blue safety lights laws from the Northampton County AAA Club.

The new law allows light duty service trucks, such as AAA Club light duty trucks, to display blue lights on their lightbar and taillights while they are stationary on the side of the road rendering assistance. The fleet of roadside assistance vehicles operated by AAA Clubs provide multiple forms of assistance to stranded motorists including fuel delivery, flat tire replacement, and battery replacement. It is imperative that road assistance vehicles be provided with the same opportunity to operate blue safety lights as they carry out their duties in aiding stranded motorists along Pennsylvania roads and highways.

"Roadside assistance workers performing any roadside service while cars quickly pass by are at an increased risk of serious or fatal injuries. They deserve the same protections as tow truck drivers and flashing blue lights would provide motorists with a critical visual cue to slow down and move over."

"The flashing blue lights get the attention of motorists so that they provide ample room to the responders providing roadside assistance," said Freeman. "Although AAA Club light-duty trucks do not have towing capabilities, they regularly pull vehicles out of stuck positions, such as mud, snow or other difficult terrain."

Freeman's bill passed the House unanimously on May 4 and the Senate unanimously on July 11. Gov. Josh Shapiro signed the bill on July 20, making it Act 33 of 2026.



Earlier this year, Rep. Freeman met with fleet drivers and officials from AAA to discuss his legislation that would expand state law to allow more vehicles to use blue safety lights.