



# TRANSPARENT TIMES

A Publication of the Pennsylvania House  
State Government Committee  
Representative Daryl D. Metcalfe, Chairman

DECEMBER 2011

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## PUBLIC INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Recently, the House State Government Committee held a public hearing on the issue of public corruption and legislation that would create a Public Integrity Commission. If enacted, HB 1200 (sponsored by Representative Curt Schroder) would replace the State Ethics Commission, which is the agency currently tasked with investigating cases of public corruption.

Existing functions and duties of the State Ethics Commission would be transferred to the Public Integrity Commission. Additionally, the Public Integrity Commission would differ from the State Ethics Commission in the following ways:

- The Commission would have the authority to access criminal history and other records through the Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network.
- The Commission would have the authority to investigate most cases of public corruption. The Pennsylvania State Ethics Act currently limits investigatory authority to cases involving conflict of interest and other specific crimes involving public corruption.
- The Commission could grant immunity orders to obtain necessary testimony to investigate public corruption.
- The Commission would consist of seven commissioners appointed by the Governor, from a list of 15 candidates selected by a bipartisan

nominating committee comprised of elected officials and private citizens.

At the hearing, Representative Schroder testified, "We must establish a new framework that prevents and roots out those who would corrupt our system." He further stated that the Public Integrity Commission would be "charged with investigating public corruption at all levels and all branches of state government."

Expanding upon the issue of investigating public corruption across all branches of government, John Contino, Executive Director of the State Ethics Commission, stated that the Commission does not currently have the authority to investigate corruption within the judicial branch of government. Judicial precedent specifies that it is unconstitutional for the courts to be subject to investigations by the State Ethics Commission. Citing the recent cases of judicial corruption being investigated in Luzerne County, Chairman Metcalfe responded, "The judiciary is part of the problem. The courts have failed to police their own ranks."

Chairman Metcalfe ended the hearing by stating, "We will be working with the sponsors and other concerned members to see what can be done to strengthen our current law to stop cases like the ones recently being prosecuted from happening in the future."

# WELFARE THEFT BY ILLEGAL ALIENS

Public benefits are one of the three main incentives that draw illegal aliens to the United States and Pennsylvania. Over the past eight years, Pennsylvania's General Fund appropriation for the Department of Public Welfare has ballooned by well over \$4 billion a year. A significant portion can be attributed to fraud in the system.

The Auditor General's office recently uncovered \$3.3 million in public benefits given to ineligible recipients, including illegal aliens. Theft of benefits by ineligible recipients, including illegal aliens, shows a complete failure of the previous administration to protect the taxpayers of Pennsylvania. A systematic change is necessary to ensure that future administrations do not turn a blind eye to illegal aliens who are trying to steal from the taxpayers by taking advantage of the welfare system.

To address the issue of public benefits fraud, the House State Government Committee recently passed Senate Bill 9, the Proof of Citizenship for Receipt of Public Benefits Act. Legislation to address the issue of public benefits for illegal aliens has also been introduced in the House by Representatives Ron Marsico and Scott Perry. The amended version of Senate Bill 9 utilized language from House Bill 809, sponsored by Representative Scott Perry.

Senate Bill 9, sponsored by Senate Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, would require any individual applying for benefits to provide certain state or federally issued forms of identification and sign an affidavit that he or she is a U.S. citizen, legal permanent resident or lawfully present in the U.S. according to federal law. Furthermore, an agency that administers public benefits must verify the legal status of every non-citizen applying for benefits through the federal Systematic Alien Verification of Entitlement (SAVE) program. Senate Bill 9 would also create a new criminal offense for illegal aliens who possess or use an electronic benefits card.

At the meeting, Representative Krieger explained, "We are all here to represent our constituents. My constituents, both Republican and Democrat, think this legislation is common sense. This is designed to do nothing more than fix this abuse." Chairman Metcalfe agreed with Representative Krieger and noted, "I believe there have been many illegal aliens getting public benefits under the previous administration's 'close your eyes and authorize' mentality."

With the successful passage of Senate Bill 9, the State Government Committee has reported, to the floor of the House, a total of six bills to protect the lives, liberty, property and jobs of legal Pennsylvania residents.

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