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Municipal Reporter



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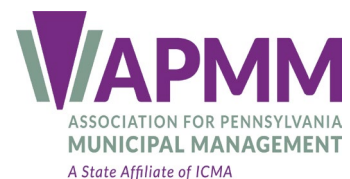
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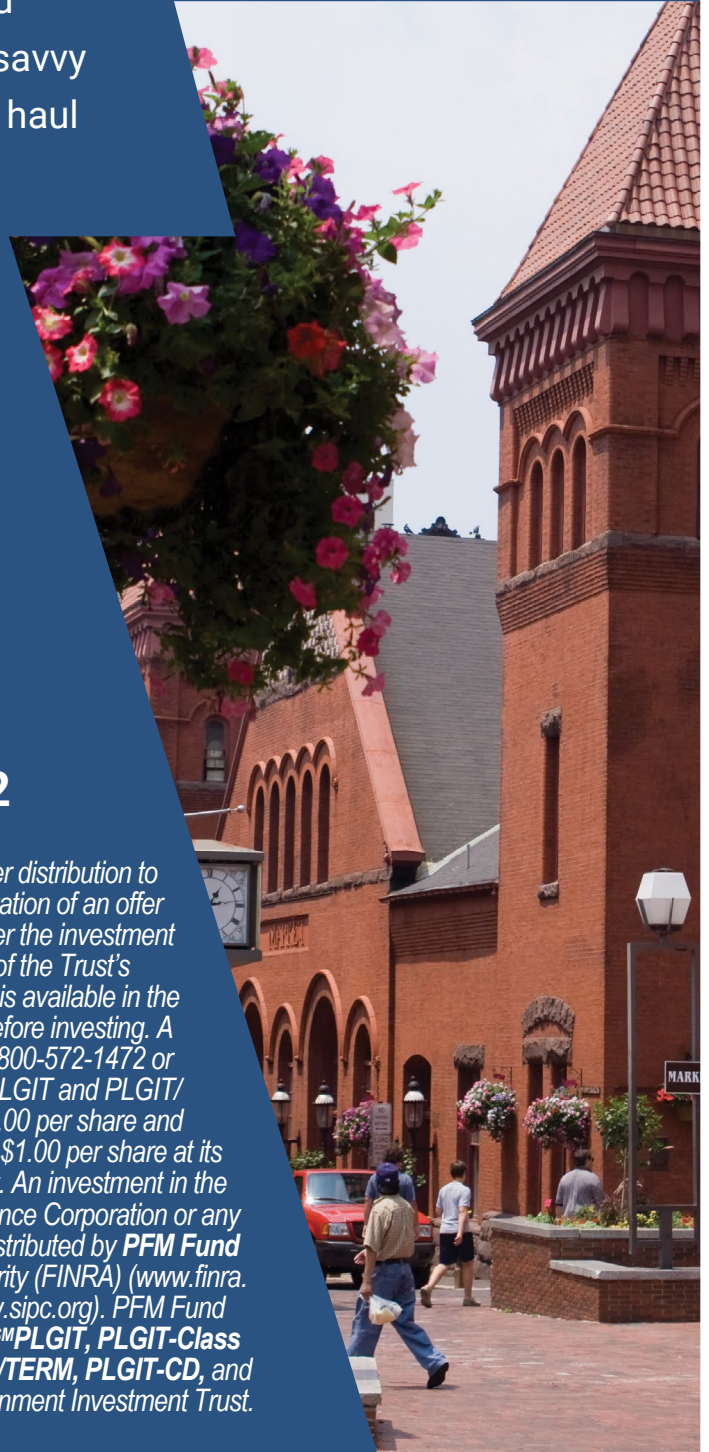
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Our Mission

The Pennsylvania Municipal League strengthens and empowers effective local government through advocacy, education, and support for our members.

The League is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization established in 1900 as an advocate for Pennsylvania's 3rd class cities. Today, The League represents participating Pennsylvania cities, boroughs, townships and home rule communities that all share The League's municipal policy interests. Our Board of Directors oversees the administration of a wide array of municipal services including legislative advocacy (on both the state and federal levels), publications designed to educate and inform, education and training certification programs, membership research and inquiries, programs, and group insurance trusts.

We are continually monitoring the needs of our members and are committed to providing the commonwealth's municipalities with cost-effective programs and services required to meet the distinct needs of their communities.

The *Municipal Reporter* is a publication of the Pennsylvania Municipal League, the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners and the Association for Pennsylvania Municipal Management. It is published six times a year on a bimonthly basis. Opinions expressed by

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DECEMBER 2024 | EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EDITION



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The League President's Message



DEREK SLAUGHTER
MAYOR
CITY OF WILLIAMSPORT



As Mayor, I recognize the critical role of emergency management in safeguarding our city's economic vitality. The recertification of our levee system is the number one priority currently, as it protects billions of dollars in assets, including homes, businesses and vital infrastructure. I want to express my deepest gratitude to our local, county, state and federal partners for their invaluable collaboration on this critical endeavor. I also extend my sincere appreciation to our congressional delegation for their strong support of this project, demonstrated through the allocation of millions of dollars in grant funding. Their commitment to this project is essential for ensuring the long-term economic prosperity of our city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Derek Slaughter".

Derek Slaughter
Mayor, City of Williamsport

The League Executive Director's Message

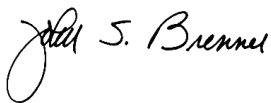
As a child of the 1970s, the TV show "Emergency!" was my favorite. The iconic voice of the dispatcher and the electronic dispatch tones sounded for Station 51, firefighters/paramedics Johnny and Roy rushing to their Rescue Unit to assist with every manner of calamity, and the doctors and nurses at Rampart General all working within a coordinated system to get help where it was needed. This portrayal of the emergency management system gave the average citizen a view inside the work of emergency responders and the often-unbelievable situations encountered by emergency services personnel.

Although times have changed, the coordinated system of emergency management at the local, state and federal levels is more important today than ever before. Technology and hazardous materials have changed the training, and the response needed to emergency incidents in the 2020s. Personnel, career and volunteer have seen dramatic changes over the past decades. Funding public safety and emergency management has changed too, and many more resources are needed as we move through this decade and beyond.

Emergency Management is the theme of this issue of the Municipal Reporter. Planning and practicing emergency management at the local level is absolutely critical to timely and effective emergency response. This issue offers advice from the Office of the State Fire Commissioner and many of our League partners on best practices and resources available to you and your community.

Stay safe and have a wonderful holiday season!

Sincerely,



John S. Brenner



JOHN BRENNER



Executive Director's Video Report





Mark Your Calendar



2025

43rd Annual PELRAS Conference

February 26 - 28

Hershey Lodge and Convention Center
Hershey

2025 Annual APMM Conference

May 19 - 21

Lancaster Marriott at Penn Square
Lancaster

2025 Municipal Leadership Summit

October 1 - 4

Bayfront Convention Center
Erie



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Inside The League

What a whirlwind year 2024 was - not just in the public arena but at The League! As we approach the New Year, we look back fondly on our ample services, training, and support for our members. Thanks to the efforts of the Marketing and Member Services team but also new members to PennPRIME due to our relentless efforts by our staff in the Trusts, The League is stronger than ever.



ABE AMORÓS
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR -
OPERATIONS – CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER

With much regret, yet great admiration along with a profound sense of gratitude, The League tearfully said “thank you” to Debbie Bitting who retired as our Director of Communications. Debbie was an integral part of The League for more than 35 glorious years. Every day, Debbie was a shining light of optimism who not only performed her tasks flawlessly, but also inspired others with her pleasant and calm demeanor. She will be sorely missed not only as a dedicated team member of The League with an exceptional work ethic but as an exemplary human being.

We also enthusiastically welcome Susan Schrack Wood as our new Director of Communications who brings a plethora of experience in communications. Susan is an Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist with solid management experience, especially in television news and an extensive list of awards and accolades for her reporting. She earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism from Syracuse University, which consistently ranks in the top three journalism programs in the nation. Susan has also taught communications and media courses at York College of Pennsylvania, earned two master’s degrees, and is currently working to complete a doctorate program. We are extremely fortunate to have her.

Communications continues disseminating quality publications along with pertinent information for our members, including our year-end “State of the League” report that includes pertinent information. We also hope to highlight your success stories in ’25. As a reminder, should your municipality wish to brag about a program or initiative that is currently being worked on and you wish to share it, please contact Susan at swood@pml.org. She and our fine Communications Managers will be more than happy to assist you with a submission.

Having completed a certificate program on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) from Cornell University, I was also pleased to have delivered several trainings to member municipalities this year such as the Borough of Phoenixville and Manheim Township, a member of our U•COMP Trust. I also provided a well-attended training at our Municipal Leadership Summit in Scranton. Should your municipality wish to have this in-person training conducted for your elected and appointed officials, as well as staff, feel free to contact me at aamoros@pml.org. I will be more than happy to schedule this much-needed session for you.

Lastly, as the dust continues to settle with election results, we are reminded that we have more in common than not. What divided us during the election should not continue to serve as a wedge moving forward. All year, The League has been fully engaged with Search for Common Ground, an organization made up of public servants, faith leaders and non-profit executives who have consistently met to provide necessary tools and messaging for those communities that experienced difficulties during the election. Search for Common Ground will continue meeting regularly until the presidential inauguration on Tuesday, January 21st.

Happy New Year, everyone!

From Inside The League,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Abe Amorós".

Abe Amorós

Q&A with League Leader

Kendy Alvarez
Mayor
Lewisburg Borough
League Director-at-Large



This Q&A feature section of the Municipal Reporter highlights an individual local leader who has been involved and engaged with their community and The League.



Pennsylvania Municipal
League

Q: Mayor Alvarez, thank you for your service as mayor of Lewisburg. How did you get involved in local government?

This is one of my favorite stories to tell because it reflects solutions to some of the challenges rural communities face in retention of young professionals. The 2013 Lewisburg Ice Festival was the catalyst for my political career. My group of friends were participating in different aspects of the day from the Frosty 5k to the Polar Plunge. Since I wasn't going to run or jump into the cold river, I did the chili cookoff. We won. I also thought of ways the event could have been better and got involved with the organization hosting it. The next year, we won again, and I got involved with the organization hosting the entire festival. And I kept doing that, seeing that things could be better and getting more involved with the organizations in charge. Eventually, that meant the borough.

Q: What leadership advice do you have for other local leaders?

There are clear mandates about what our positions are and aren't, but it does not take into account what you are able to do within that position. Don't limit your impact by how the legislature defines your role.

Q: What has been your most rewarding experience as a municipal official?

I speak to the 1st grade class at Kelly Elementary school every year in September. They do a unit on citizenship. I get to talk to them about being the mayor and getting involved in the community.

Q: What has been the greatest challenge in your position?

Patience. Government does not always move swiftly, and I am an agent of change. When I know we can do better, I want it to be better, but sometimes progress comes slowly.

Q: Thank you for serving on The League Board as Director-at-Large. How has your involvement with The League helped you and your community?

The League Board provided me with a group of colleagues doing amazing things across the commonwealth that I can learn from and with. We may have varying responsibilities based on the local government structure, but we are all looking to make our own communities better. I get to learn from their challenges, mistakes and successes while seeing if and how we can adapt those lessons within our small borough.

Q: What advice do you have for people considering municipal government as a career?

Just do it. I never thought this would be the path I would be on, but it has been incredibly rewarding in my first term. I recently announced that I will run again and that is in part because of the community I've gained in The League board and staff. Having a cohort of people who understand the work, share the passion, and encourage your growth has been transformative.

Q: As a proud mayor, what would you say are some of Lewisburg's greatest attributes?

The people. While a lot of attention is directed at our historic architecture, it is the people who live here that make this the place it is. We joke that we are a Hallmark movie waiting to happen and it isn't because of the physical space (although that plays a part), it is the residents who are full of life, involved in the community, and not afraid to corner you outside a downtown shop to tell you what they think about the job you're doing.

Q: What programs or practices has Lewisburg implemented to address this edition's topic of Emergency Management?

We're utilizing technology to help with Emergency Management while working in collaboration with neighboring municipalities and our regional Emergency Responders. We recently installed an emergency notification system that combines sirens, pre-programmed messages and live messages connected to the phone, text and email alerts available via Code Red.

As a flood impacted community, we did a Flood Mitigation Study and are looking to incorporate floodplain restoration and stormwater management into future projects. From a planning side, we took first floor elevations of structures in the 100-year floodplain as part of the Flood Resiliency Study.

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) is currently collecting first floor elevations from most structures located in the 500-year floodplain. An effort being driven by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), and others, gathering this information will add to the ongoing expansion of the Susquehanna Flood Warning Response System (SFWRS). SFWRS provides community officials and emergency managers with an online tool to assess damages for various levels of flood stage as well as plan response actions associated with each stage. □



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Improving Emergency Management in the City of Lancaster

BY CHRIS DELONG, EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR, CITY OF LANCASTER

As a mid-sized city in south-central Pennsylvania, the City of Lancaster is neither geographically large nor densely populated. However, it is quite diverse and urbanized, making it a challenging area to prevent, protect, mitigate, respond, and recover from natural, man-made, and technological disasters. The City of Lancaster covers 7.4 square miles and has a population of approximately 57,000. However, our services provide critical infrastructure to over 120,000 Lancaster County residents, so our ability to coordinate and communicate with other municipalities and Lancaster County Emergency Management Agency is vital to the success of our emergency management efforts.

The role of emergency management in our city is a collaborative effort to provide a common operating picture for our employees, allowing us to inform and assist our residents. The previous emergency operations plan was no longer meeting expectations and required revision. The last version of the plan lacked sufficient detail on when and how to activate the plan, as well as how to structure coordination efforts. However, several incidents provided informal experiences that highlighted areas in need of improvement for the next version of the plan. A training and exercise component was added to the EOP to test current annexes and improve areas that consistently evolve in our diverse city.

Out of the 32 emergency management core capabilities, three were identified as primary goals: emergency planning, public information and warning, and operational coordination. These capabilities are the most important to focus on because they are involved in all five phases of emergency management: prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

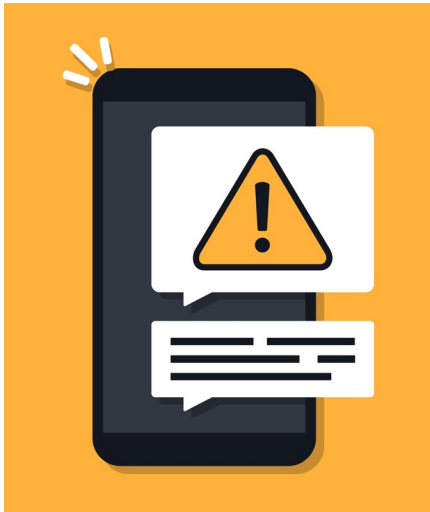
We conducted a citywide audit to determine what planning activities were being implemented and evaluate their effectiveness. This audit helped us chart a path forward for future efforts. While individual bureaus were handling planning activities, there was a lack of clear vision and coordination as a collective. As a result, an emergency planning team was formed, consisting of managers, deputy directors, and directors. This team is responsible for conducting hazard assessments, sharing situational awareness, and writing hazard annexes to support our emergency operations plan. The team also helped revise the city's emergency operations plan to better align with how our municipality conducts day-to-day operations. The planning





team brings together key leaders who directly influence how operations are conducted across all areas of city services. This collaboration ensures that hazards and risks are identified, allowing us to create and train on appropriate plans.

The highest priority was establishing a public information and warning system that would quickly and accurately communicate the right information during an emergency, thereby informing



residents and saving lives. Unfortunately, this was also a key issue identified in past after-action reviews. We already had an established communications team that worked directly with the Mayor and used Everbridge messaging in another area of our city's operations, which proved invaluable. By combining the platform with the personnel, we wrote an emergency communications plan that will be a living document, easily revised when

necessary. Sections of this plan include media relations, public warnings in multiple languages, employee alerting, and the use of alerting platforms.

The final goal established was improving operational coordination, which is achieved by building a network of professionals who consistently share critical information and conduct joint training to foster teamwork. This area is a work in progress, but notable progress has been made in information sharing from the city to neighboring municipalities, partnering organizations, and Lancaster County on a more frequent basis. Writing after-action reviews and following up on improvement areas has also been instrumental. We were able to engage already established relationships to develop feedback mechanisms, such as our business alliance, which meets monthly. In 2024, we had an incident involving our downtown business district, which resulted in a disruption for several hours. We felt that presenting at their monthly meeting would be the best way to inspire feedback, and this proved to be very helpful. We also created an ally in the business community for future collaboration.

Improving emergency management in the City of Lancaster, PA, is a long-term effort that requires a strong vision and the right people, all with a mindset focused on growth and improvement.

The success of emergency management in the City of Lancaster, PA, is not necessarily groundbreaking, but it does prioritize the public as our highest concern. We are committed to being flexible and adaptable in both daily operations and emergency response. By establishing clear goals and having the proper oversight and feedback pathways, we foster collaboration and innovation. As a government agency, we are sometimes limited by financial and staffing constraints. However, our ability to leverage creative mechanisms and partnerships helps build a stronger community for the future. □



The PA Office of the State Fire Commissioner 2024 Year in Review and 2025 Preview

BY THOMAS COOK, PA STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER

As we head into a new year, it's a fitting time to reflect on the progress made in strengthening fire services across Pennsylvania. The OSFC has worked more than ever before to be more visible, responsive, and connected to the municipal and fire services communities by engaging in a strategy that focuses on communication, collaboration, and access to OSFC services. With those goals in mind, this year has been filled with meaningful accomplishments, key partnerships, critical hiring, and legislative progress that reflect our commitment to protecting communities and supporting the dedicated individuals who serve them. Below are some highlights from this year's journey.

Efforts on Firefighter Relief Reform

The OSFC worked closely with the legislature to provide a detailed list of recommendations for reform and, with the help of the State Fire Advisory Board, initiated a much-needed cleanup of the public database on our website that fire departments can use to determine if a particular purchase is deemed an eligible expense.

Strengthening Recruitment & Retention

The OSFC convened statewide work groups to tackle recruitment and retention to identify best

practices. Plus, we filled open positions within our office and worked with the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) to roll out the PHEAA Active Volunteer Tuition and Loan Assistance Program to cover not only degree programs but also firefighter training. We have developed a stronger partnership with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to support fire operations, reflecting our growing emphasis on interagency cooperation.

Enhancing Community Risk Reduction

The OSFC is fully committed to working to reduce fire deaths and improve fire prevention efforts across the Commonwealth. This year, for the first time ever, we offered multiple free Community Risk Reduction (CRR) classes. We partnered with Vision 20/20, a nationwide consortium of leading fire service organizations developed to promote the concept of CRR, offering a three-day data analysis class in October, and we utilized a National Fire Academy Grant to carry out CRR best practices classes in various locations around PA. A CRR Specialist was also hired to support our CRR efforts, including management of the Pennsylvania Fire Incident Reporting System (PennFIRS) program. The Youth Fire Setter and Fire & Life Safety

Education programs are also set to be re-established.

Legislative Milestones

Our legislative efforts have been highly focused this year. The reauthorization of our Fire Company and Emergency Services Grant Program through 2029 was a significant achievement, providing sustained support for essential services and we are continuing to work with stakeholders to refine the program to evolve with the changing fire services landscape. We are also in regular discussions about further Firefighter Relief reform with the legislature, and progress was made on legislation with regards to modular testing, with progress ongoing.

Building Strategic Partnerships

Collaboration with local, state, and national partners is a core strategic goal for the OSFC. Over the past year we have partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry to develop guidelines for junior firefighters. We solidified our relationship with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF), completing a new Memorandum of Understanding and circulating revised Line of Duty Death policies. We have also worked closely with DCED to develop a guide to help fire departments undergo a merger. We expect that guide to be released this year.





Advancing the State Fire Academy

The Pennsylvania State Fire Academy has continued to expand and improve its offerings during a time of transition and continues to provide some of the best fire services training available. We completed an extensive process to secure reaccreditation with the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and are working toward reaccreditation from Pro-Board. These accreditations allow PSFA-certified individuals to take their skills nearly anywhere in the world. We also put our new Mobile Live Fire Training Unit on the road, increasing access to live fire training anywhere in the Commonwealth. New test sites and the formalization of online evaluator training were established as part of our ongoing efforts to maintain high standards for certification while shifting our training and certification processes online, when possible. Our *Academy on the Road* program continues to grow, with the Flashover Recognition Program being one of the most popular offerings, and the program *Structure I* has been updated to the *Engine Academy I* with overwhelming success.

Curriculum Development and Program Expansion

The OSFC boasts 2024 as a time of significant progress in curriculum development. A Passenger Vehicle Rescue program will be an exciting new offering, and we've completed passenger vehicle pilot programs. The development of technical rescue programs, including confined space and trench rescue, has been finalized, with pilots to be scheduled soon. The updated Hazardous Materials Awareness (HMA) and Operations (HMO)

curriculum, which were rolled out in-person by OSFC leadership across PA, reflects the latest NFPA standards, and a pilot of the Hazardous Materials Technician (HMT) program is set for the coming months.

As we look forward to 2025, we remain committed to providing the highest level of service and support to Pennsylvania's fire service community. Together, we will continue to evolve and strengthen our operations, helping to ensure that every firefighter has the tools, training, and resources they need to keep our citizens safe. As we move into a new year, we look forward to continuing our progress and growth as a commission with the mission to support each and every one of you!

Some of our 2025 goals are outlined below:

- OSFC will continue building pathways for better communication with firefighters, fire departments and fire service organizations, as well as municipal officials, legislators, and the Governor's Office to ensure we are moving ahead on issues that matter to the Commonwealth's fire service.
- OSFC will continue building a coalition with organizations, associations, and other state agencies to meet the goal of providing better service to Pennsylvania's emergency services.
- OSFC will work to provide better access to our services and the issues that matter to Pennsylvania emergency services through innovative and modern methods.

- OSFC will further push for regulatory and legislative action items for issues to include the following:
 - Publish regulations and guidelines that improve the process to go from loan application to funding more quickly and with less inconvenience,
 - publish regulations and guidelines to improve the grant process, allowing for quicker decisions, aligning the program with Pennsylvania emergency service needs and,
 - legislative reform to modernize the Relief Association laws and an increase in loan program caps.
- In addition, OSFC will work to garner funding to support programs to:
 - provide education, knowledge and tools to help emergency services better recruit and retain personnel,
 - provide education, knowledge and tools to build a more fire safe Commonwealth and,
 - continue to update and modernize training and certification programs to better prepare responders for the environment in which they operate.

We want to hear from you on these goals and ideas. We do have a State Fire Advisory Board with regional representatives. If you'd like to reach out to your regional contact, you can find them on the [OSFC website](#). You can also contact the OSFC directly with any questions or feedback. □



As Public Safety's Partner, AT&T Connects First Responders Across Pennsylvania

BY DAVID KERR, PRESIDENT, AT&T PENNSYLVANIA & WEST VIRGINIA

In December 2023, AT&T turned on a new cell site in Peters Township – a League member – filling a gap in coverage for the community.

“This new tower will make a world of difference for residents and visitors in the area. Mobile data has become a major quality-of-life issue, as well as a matter of public safety. I am glad to see this project come to fruition,” said State Representative Natalie Mihalek during a special event at Peterswood Park.



This is just one of more than 2,200 cell sites across the commonwealth that include public safety's Band 14 spectrum. Band 14 is a nationwide, high-quality spectrum set aside by the federal government specifically for FirstNet®, Built with AT&T – the only nationwide communications network created with and for public safety. FirstNet is not a commercial offering, but a unique network purposefully developed based upon direct feedback from public safety and overseen and validated by the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority), an independent federal agency.

FirstNet is shaped by the vision of Congress and the first responder community following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. And AT&T is honored to have been selected for the 25-year contract to design, build, and evolve the nation's interoperable wireless network for public safety. As public safety's network partner, we're held to a higher standard than other carriers to deliver for America's first responders. And because it's their own network, FirstNet is designed to properly handle the specific and niche demands of first responders. That means maximum reliability, security, and performance tailored specifically for their needs – like Band 14, their VIP lane that can be cleared and locked exclusively for FirstNet subscribers.

In addition to dedicated spectrum and new cell sites built in areas that were recommended by local and state public safety officials, FirstNet offers public safety agencies a set of specialized, innovative tools, technologies, and features specifically designed for public safety personnel. This includes an entire ecosystem of mission-ready apps and devices, as well as a dedicated fleet of 180+ deployable network assets – available 24/7/365 at no additional charge – that can be dispatched to help meet communications needs during emergencies, large-scale events, and other times when additional mobile broadband connectivity is needed. No other carrier has a fleet dedicated solely and exclusively to first responders, because no other provider has a solemn obligation to serve public safety like we do.

This specialized equipment is managed by the [FirstNet](#)



Emergency Management . . .



[Response Operations Group™ \(ROG\)](#), which is led by a dedicated team of former first responders. As public safety's partner, ROG helps ensure first responders can reliably communicate wherever their mission takes them – and the team was active throughout Pennsylvania in 2024.

During the [total solar eclipse](#) in April, the Erie region fell within the path of totality. To prepare, public safety officials conducted pre-planning sessions with the FirstNet Authority.



After working together with local officials to understand their needs during the eclipse, the FirstNet ROG team at AT&T deployed dedicated portable cell sites from the FirstNet fleet and other solutions to the area. Additionally, working together with state and local officials, AT&T accelerated the timeline for building [a new cell site](#) near a high-traffic area, which was ready in time for the eclipse to support public safety's critical communications.

Today, there are FirstNet users in more than 700 communities across Pennsylvania – from the largest cities to the smallest boroughs – and more are signing on regularly. And looking ahead, AT&T is expanding and enhancing [FirstNet](#) to give the public safety community better access to *their* network.

Setting the stage for first responder innovation over the next 10 years, the FirstNet Authority announced [a series of strategic investments](#) into the network, totaling more than \$8 billion. A network investment of \$6.3 billion will enable AT&T to deliver a standalone

FirstNet 5G core, provide always-on priority and, for first responders, preemption, across all AT&T 5G commercial spectrum bands, and build 1,000 new FirstNet sites across the country over the next two years. The latest network investment of approximately \$2 billion will be dedicated to expanding FirstNet and enhancing coverage where first responders need it, including in tribal, territorial, and rural areas.

FirstNet is transforming public safety communications in Pennsylvania and around the country. The FirstNet Authority and AT&T will continue to work side-by-side with public safety and municipal leaders across Pennsylvania to ensure our first responders have the reliable connectivity they need to protect property and save lives. □





Crisis Communication: Filling the Information Vacuum Before Misinformation Spreads – What We Can Learn from the Drones

BY JOHN STRING, CO-FOUNDER OF ASPIRANT CONSULTING GROUP, LLC

In emergency management, one of the most critical tasks for public officials is ensuring precise, accurate, and timely communication with the public. Emergencies create uncertainty, and when there's a delay in official communication, a dangerous information vacuum emerges—one that misinformation is quick to fill. In today's hyper-connected world, where news and speculation spread across social media in seconds, municipal leaders must be proactive communicators to maintain public trust and manage crises effectively.

The Cost of Delayed Communication

Recent concerns over unidentified drones along the East Coast of the United States illustrate how information vacuums can rapidly lead to confusion and fear. Civilian reports of drones over a wide area—without official explanations or guidance—have left communities to speculate their source and purpose. Television networks and social media have amplified the issue, circulating theories ranging from espionage to hobbyist activity. In the absence of verified information, public perception has been shaped by speculation rather than fact, potentially escalating unwarranted fear and eroding trust in local and national agencies.

This scenario underscores a critical lesson for municipalities: if you don't tell the story, someone else will—and they may not get it right. In many situations, misinformation can spread faster than facts, leading to panic or public backlash against government authorities. The consequences of misinformation can be severe, even leading to public safety risks and eroding trust in governmental agencies. Public officials who take the lead in sharing verified information can avoid such pitfalls and help calm their communities.

The Importance of Fast and Effective Communication

During emergencies, the speed of communication matters. Municipal and Public Safety officials should aim to release preliminary, factual information as soon as it's available, even if all details are unclear. A prompt initial message can:

- **Demonstrate Transparency:** Acknowledging an incident early reassures the public that their leaders are aware of the issue and are working to address it.
- **Set the Narrative:** Sharing verified information early establishes the agency as the trusted source, reducing the influence of misinformation.

- **Build Trust:** Consistent, reliable updates show that officials prioritize public safety, strengthening the community's confidence in their leaders.

There can be a cascade of unintended consequences when we fail to communicate quickly or adequately. Beyond public concern, misinformation can hamper our operations by redirecting resources to address false alarms or correcting rumors. Moreover, the loss of public trust in one emergency can have lasting effects on future events, making it harder for officials to rally support or cooperation when it matters most.

Strategies for Effective Crisis Communication

To prevent misinformation and build public confidence, municipalities must adopt a proactive and systematic approach to communication during emergencies. Here are key strategies:

1. Establish a Unified Command Structure

Clear roles and responsibilities for communication are critical. Municipal leaders, emergency management officials, and public information officers must coordinate messaging to ensure platform consistency. Mixed messages can sow confusion and undermine credibility.

2. Use Multiple Channels to Reach Your Audience

Different segments of the population consume information in various ways. Social media can effectively reach audiences quickly, but traditional methods like local television, radio, and community bulletin boards remain critical for some residents or those without internet access. Municipalities should maintain an up-to-date directory of communication tools and ensure they're ready to deploy across all platforms during an emergency. This includes usernames and passwords for municipal-managed accounts. We can't expect all our staff to be present all the time.

3. Issue Regular Updates

Frequent updates, even if brief, help maintain control of the narrative. For example, a statement as simple as "We are aware of reports of drones in the area and are investigating. There is no immediate danger to the public" can reassure residents while officials gather more details. Timely updates reduce uncertainty and allow residents to focus on official guidance rather than speculating. This





includes setting timelines for updates and sticking to the times.

4. Leverage Social Media Responsibly

Social media is both a tool and a risk in emergency communication. Municipalities should use official accounts to share real-time updates, debunk misinformation, and engage directly with residents' concerns. However, using social media responsibly and avoiding automation or pre-scheduled posts during emergencies is crucial, as they can come across as tone-deaf in rapidly changing situations. Social Media managers should cancel any pre-scheduled posts at the onset of an emergency.

5. Correct Misinformation Quickly

Misinformation spreads faster than facts, especially during emergencies. Municipal leaders must monitor social media platforms and news outlets, addressing false narratives promptly and clearly. For example, if rumors of chemical contamination emerge during a flood, swift and authoritative communication from the municipality can prevent unnecessary fear and panic.

6. Partner with Trusted Voices

Local media, community organizations, and influencers can be invaluable allies in disseminating accurate information. Collaborating with trusted voices ensures your message reaches a broader audience. Community leaders, religious figures, and educators can amplify messages to specific groups, especially in diverse municipalities.

7. Anticipate Community Questions

Consider what questions residents are likely to have during an emergency and address them preemptively in public messaging. FAQs and live Q&A sessions can be especially effective in addressing widespread concerns and maintaining trust.

Learning from the Drone Case: Be Prepared for the Unpredictable

The drone situation on the East Coast highlights the growing complexity of emergency communication. Incidents that would once have been local curiosities now capture national attention, amplified by 24/7 news cycles and viral social media posts. For public officials, the lesson is clear: preparedness isn't just about managing the emergency—it's about managing the message.

Municipalities should consider conducting communication drills alongside other emergency response exercises to prepare for these challenges. Simulated scenarios, like responding to a chemical spill or a cybersecurity breach, can help officials practice issuing timely updates, addressing misinformation, and coordinating messaging across platforms. These drills are

not just a formality, but a necessity, as they can test the effectiveness of communication strategies and highlight areas for improvement. They underscore the need for preparedness in crisis communication, as it is not just about managing the emergency - it's about controlling the message.

The Role of Public Officials as Trusted Messengers

Elected officials and municipal managers play a critical role in emergency communication. Their visibility and leadership can either reassure the public or exacerbate fears, depending on how they handle the situation. Public officials are not just conveyors of information, but also the face of reassurance and credibility. Their actions and words can project confidence and maintain credibility, even in the face of uncertainty, by appearing calm, empathetic, and informed. When leaders speak directly to their communities, it demonstrates accountability and builds a sense of solidarity, showing that the municipality is working as one to address the crisis. This role is not just a duty, but a privilege, as it allows public officials to be the beacon of hope and stability in times of crisis.

Conclusion: Communication as a Crisis Management Tool

For municipal officials, crisis communication is no longer optional; it is essential to emergency management. By filling the information vacuum with clear, accurate, and timely updates, public officials can prevent misinformation, maintain public trust, and ensure their communities stay safe and informed during emergencies.

The drone situation serves as a modern reminder of the challenges public officials face and the power of communication to shape outcomes. As municipalities across Pennsylvania and beyond confront increasingly complex emergencies, effective communication will remain a cornerstone of resilient and well-prepared communities. When the next crisis strikes, having a plan for managing the message may prove just as important as managing the emergency itself. □



Aspirant Consulting Group



Shapiro Administration Encourages Pennsylvanians to Make Preparedness a Priority and “Resolve to Be Ready” this Holiday Season

Resolve to make your family more prepared in the new year and start by giving the gift of preparedness.

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE PA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY AND OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER

The busy holiday season is upon us, and as many are shopping for family and friends, the **Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA)** and **Office of the State Fire Commissioner (OSFC)** encourage you to think preparedness when choosing gifts for loved ones. By giving a gift with preparedness in mind, you’re helping your loved ones “Resolve to be Ready” for emergencies and disasters in 2025.

“The holidays are a time for celebration and fellowship with those near and dear to us,” said **PEMA Director Randy Padfield**. “Purchasing preparedness gifts like flashlights, weather radios, and first aid kits are great options to add to the list, which will help your family or friends be ready for emergencies over the holidays and for months to come.”

One or two simple items given as a gift this season can be the start of an emergency preparedness kit for the home or the car. Some basic kit supplies include:

- Water (one gallon per person for at least 3 days)
- Nonperishable food (enough for several days)
- First-aid kit
- Extra phone charger
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Basic tools
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio
- Manual can opener
- Extra clothes/shoes
- Blankets/sleeping bags
- Hygiene items
- Whistle
- Paper maps

- Trash bags
- Duct tape

In addition, for a car kit consider the following items:

- Jumper cables
- Ice scraper/snow brush
- Shovel
- Kitty litter/sand for traction

While these gifts will help to build a “toolbox” for emergencies, don’t forget to make a plan, communicate it, and practice it so your family and friends are ready when a disaster occurs.

Visit the [ReadyPA website](#) for more lists, pet preparedness, and to sign up for emergency alerts.

“Fire safety is paramount during the holiday season. With live Christmas trees in homes, cooking, candles, fireplaces, and heaters kicking into high gear, the risk for home fires increases,” said **State Fire Commissioner Thomas Cook**. “Practical gifts like smoke and carbon monoxide alarms or a fire extinguisher are excellent ways to show you care as you help to prepare your loved ones for home emergencies.”

Preparing your home to be fire safe should not be overlooked in the busy hustle and bustle of the season. Take the following precautions to reduce the risk of fire:

- have a professional clean and inspect your chimney and vents each year,
- plug space heaters directly into an outlet; never use an extension cord,
- install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and test them at least once per month,

- only plug one heat-producing appliance into an outlet at a time,
- store cooled ashes in a tightly covered metal container at least 10 feet from your home/nearby buildings, and
- use light bulbs that match the recommended wattage of the light fixture.

And be sure to consider the following actions when decorating:

- keep candles at least 12 inches from anything that can burn,
- keep trees at least three feet from heat sources like fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, candles, and heat vents,
- get rid of your Christmas tree after the holiday or when it’s dry, and
- read string light instructions and throw away any strands that are worn or damaged.

Resolve to be ready for a home fire by making a basic plan to evacuate to a designated meeting place outside, and then communicate and practice the plan with your whole family.

Visit the [OSFC Public Safety website](#) for details on making fire safety plan, how to teach children fire safety, how to make you home safer, and seasonal weather safety tips. □



2024 STATE OF THE LEAGUE



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



**League
Executive Director
John Brenner**

The State of The League in 2024 is one of progress and success. Key accomplishments include:

- Board of Directors remain engaged and involved in committees.
- Increased League membership to 144 municipal members.
- 29 Business Leaders Network members, 9 new Business Leaders joined.
- Capitol Conference convened virtually and included presentations from leading state officials regarding public safety, municipal finance, and community development/infrastructure.
- Successfully advocated for amendments to Post Traumatic Stress Injury legislation.
- Convened a Housing Task Force.
- Offered diversity training for municipal staff.
- Completed first year of 2024-2026 strategic plan.
- Quality sessions, keynote speaker and increased attendance in Scranton during the annual Municipal Leadership Summit with our partners the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners and the Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association.
- Delivered high-quality training and professional development opportunities including the PA Construction Codes Academy, PA Training Hub, Tax Collectors, Building Resilience in Communities and the Public Employer Labor Relations Advisory Service. Sustainable Pennsylvania software was upgraded and a successful conference convened.
- Launched The League's 125th Anniversary for 2025.

LEADERSHIP Elected for 2024-25



**League
President**

**Mayor Derek
Slaughter**
City of Williamsport



**League 1st
Vice President**

Centrice Martin
Manager, Ferguson
Township



**League 2nd
Vice President**

**Mayor J. William
Reynolds**
Mayor, City of Bethlehem

Strength Through Engagement.

We Are 144 Members Strong.

1

1st Class City

1

2nd Class City

1

2nd Class A City

43

3rd Class Cities

48

Boroughs

15

1st Class Townships

28

2nd Class Townships

6

Municipalities

2024

STATE OF THE LEAGUE



ADVOCACY

2024 By the Numbers

860

bills tracked throughout the 2023/2024 legislative session

9

Policy Resolutions adopted during the 2024 Municipal Leadership Summit

200+

attendees joined six Capitol Conference webinars throughout 2024

2024 Legislative Highlights

- Achieved a compromise on Post-traumatic Stress Injuries for First Responders – Act 121.
- Provided timely legislative summaries monthly through the *Legislative Locator* and *Municipal Reporter*.
- Integrated a grassroots advocacy platform into our website to more easily engage members in our advocacy efforts
- Hosted an intern to conduct research and aid in our advocacy efforts
- Advocated for our members on a variety of topics including:
 - Housing Affordability
 - Local Government Preemption
 - Advertising Modernization
 - Local Tax Modernization
 - Unfunded Mandates
 - Local Use of Radar
 - Right to Know Law
 - Blight Remediation
 - Public Meetings
 - Retention of Fire and EMS Personnel

SIGNATURE PROGRAMS



sustainablepa.org

135 Certified Sustainable PA Communities

55 are League Members

11 Platinum **55 Silver**
52 Gold **16 Bronze**

Public Employer Labor Relations Advisory Service
PELRAS – our labor and employment law advisory service provides training, a labor newsletter and expert legal help at discounted rates. PELRAS membership currently stands at 329 members.

Your Key to PA Local Government

This free eBook, available at PML.org, is designed to help Pennsylvanians understand how their government is organized and how they can participate as a citizen to support their municipality and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

GrantFinder

The League is pleased to provide members with a no-cost, value-added benefit called GrantFinder. GrantFinder, powered by Lexipol, is a real-time, online searchable database of more than 16,000 federal, state, foundation, and corporate grants available to municipalities and local non-profits.

Municipal Utility Alliance

The MUA has successfully enabled local governments to take every opportunity to benefit from the energy markets through competitive pricing.

Pennsylvania Local Government Investment Trust

PLGIT is a financial management trust designed exclusively for local governments, offering a wide array of investment options and cash management services.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Trainings

- Phoenixville Borough – 3
- Manheim Township – 2
- League Virtual – 1
- Municipal Leadership Summit – 1
- League Staff – 1

Other Trainings

- HR training through Alternative HR
- CPR/First Aid
- Utility Services Partner Program
- Homeserve



Pennsylvania Municipal
League

Celebrating Strengthening Communities



2025 marks the 125th Anniversary of The League as an association serving those who serve municipalities in Pennsylvania. The League will be celebrating 125 years of strengthening communities with a number of exciting events planned throughout the year.

2024

STATE OF THE LEAGUE



TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

League Training (Participants)

PELRAS Conference – 502

District Meetings – 262

Southwest #1 - 37 | Southwest #2 - 34

Southeast - 35 | Southcentral - 40

Northwest - 39 | Northeast - 45

Northcentral - 32

Municipal Leadership Summit – 445

Annual Sustainable PA Conference – 72

APMM Training (Participants)

Annual Conference – 262

Executive Development Conference – 68

Contract Training (Events / Participants)

PCCA and Floodplain – 95 / 1,562
(660 archived webinars sold)

PATH – 24 / 395
(236 archived webinars sold)

Municipal Leadership Summit

2023-24 League President Mayor Douglas Baker presided over the largest Summit in a decade of the Pennsylvania Municipal League, Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners and Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association, October 10-13, in the City of Scranton. former U.S. Congressman Charlie Dent gave the keynote address entitled "Navigating Washington In a Polarized, Unsettled Political Environment: Looking At 2025 and Beyond." We thank all of our sponsors, exhibitors and advertisers for supporting the Summit.

[Click here](#) to watch the Municipal Leadership Summit video and plan to join us next year in the City of Erie on Wednesday, October 1 to Saturday, October 4, 2025!

Playground Build

On August 5, through the partnership between the City of Lock Haven, The League, and KABOOM!, along with the generous support of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), First Quality, Highmark, Geisinger and Sons and Daughters of Italy, we built a playground at Hoberman Park in Lock Haven!

[Click here](#) to watch the playground build video!



INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES

This year, our primary focus was the successful implementation of a new CRM system and accounting software. Internally, we prioritized cleaning up our data and fine-tuning processes to ensure The League staff could operate efficiently and effectively. These improvements were essential to laying the foundation for a more streamlined and reliable system that supports both our internal operations and member interactions.

A key achievement was the creation of a new web portal designed to enhance the member experience. This platform allows members to register for events, manage memberships, update organizational records and make payments online, all within a single, user-friendly interface. Additionally, it integrates seamlessly with our Member Dashboard, creating a unified and simplified platform that supports both staff and member needs. These advancements reinforce our commitment to improving operational efficiency and delivering exceptional service to our members.

INSURANCE TRUSTS

PennPRIME Insurance Trusts

Members of both Trusts receive personalized support from attorneys, claims adjusters, loss prevention representatives, underwriters, and other professionals experienced in municipal operations. Both Trusts include a loss control grant program, designed to financially assist our members with safety and risk management initiatives they choose to prioritize. We also develop comprehensive claims reviews and work with our members to facilitate optimal claims management every step of the way. With the depth and array of coverages and services PennPRIME offers, we are truly a one-source provider.

PennPRIME Liability Trust

There are 53 members of the PennPRIME Liability Trust for 2024. The PennPRIME Liability Trust has dealt with a significant challenge for the 2024 renewal that all Insurers of Property are struggling to address: the significant increase in excess insurance rates. The large jump in excess insurance rates has been attributed to major losses in California, Texas, Florida and Hawaii resulting in Excess Carriers raising rates to cover those losses.

PennPRIME Worker's Compensation Trust

The PennPRIME Worker's Compensation Trust has added new members, the Borough of Blairsville and the Borough of Shippensburg. The Worker's Compensation Trust remains stable. There are 40 members of the Trust.

U-COMP is a group Unemployment Compensation Trust for public entities across Pennsylvania. The Trust is comprised of cities, townships of various classes, boroughs, municipalities, housing and redevelopment agencies and transit authorities. It assists the members in lowering their unemployment liability and also educates its members on the latest unemployment legislation.

U-COMP provides great opportunities for dividends, low annual rates and works closely with a third-party claims administrator to assist you with the risks and burdens of an unemployment claim. Our staff provides prompt, personalized, and professional service from the submission to the completion of an unemployment claim.

There are 128 Member of the Unemployment Compensation Trust. Member rates continue to be reduced through prudent management and prompt handling of claims. We continue to work with our third-party claims administrator Experian Employer Services to reduce claims against members.

Corporate Partnerships: 29 Business Leaders Network Members

22 Associate Members



Business Leaders Network

Brown Plus was presented with the 2024 Community Partnership Award during the Municipal Leadership Summit Awards Breakfast on October

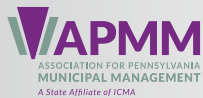
11. Congratulations to Brown Plus for this well-deserved achievement. Brian Marchuck accepted the award on behalf of Brown Plus.



2024 STATE OF THE LEAGUE



SECRETARIAT SERVICES



The Association for Pennsylvania Municipal Management is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association of professional municipal managers and administrators working in Pennsylvania local government.

APMM is dedicated to the promotion of professional and effective local government management in Pennsylvania. There are currently 259 full-time municipal managers and 66 assistant municipal managers and administrators among its membership.



The Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners represents Pennsylvania's first class townships and their elected governing officials before the Pennsylvania General Assembly and the

Commonwealth's various agencies. PSATC is comprised of 58 member townships.

ONLINE PRESENCE • PML.org

Daily Newsfeed

2,570 articles posted | 57 League mentions

Monthly Executive Director Video Reports

Member Dashboard

Civility Pledge for Elected and Appointed Officials

Municipal Job Junction+ (FREE to Members)

176 classifieds posted | 104 League member ads

Social Media Channels

Boosted social media posting, engagement and reach



700 followers



14,192 views



710 followers



3,458 followers

EXCLUSIVE PUBLICATIONS

Legislative Locator

League Link

Membership Directory

PELRAS UPDATE

PELRAS SCOOP

Municipal Reporter

Edition Themes

- » Human Services
- » Diversity
- » Livable Communities
- » Leadership
- » Civility
- » Emergency Management



NATIONAL AFFILIATE



13 Direct League Member Municipalities

Altoona
Carlisle

Easton
Harrisburg

Lancaster
New Castle

Norristown
Philadelphia

Pittsburgh
Pittston

State College
Wilkes-Barre

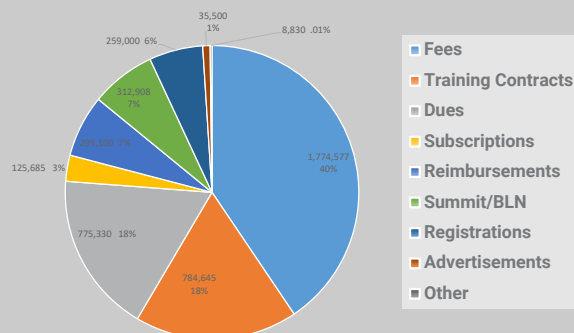
1 Pennsylvania representative served on the NLC Board of Directors

» Philadelphia Councilmember Brian O'Neill - Past President

FINANCE

The League's revenues continue to increase with a 2% increase projected over 2023. This increase enables The League to continue using member-contributed funds to enhance programs and services, focusing on elevating the overall membership experience. Major revenue sources include trust and program fees, training contract reimbursements, and dues. In 2024, The League was once again awarded training contracts through DCED which extend through 2026, and hosted several well-attended events, such as PELRAS and the annual Municipal Leadership Summit. The League continues to monitor expenditures, anticipating a slight increase over prior year due to economic shifts and uncertainty in the market. Notably, The League's net assets have steadily grown, experiencing an approximate 17% increase since 2019.

2024 PROJECTED REVENUES





U-COMP
Unemployment Compensation Trust



Unemployment Basics: 101 and Unemployment Claim Management

SUBMITTED BY ELIZABETH HENRY, TRUSTS MEMBER SERVICES MANAGER

Base Year Employer

An individual's Unemployment Compensation (UC) claim may be based on earnings from one employer, or several employers, depending on when the claim is opened. This employer is the 'base year employer.' The base year employer(s) are responsible for the charges of the unemployment claim. This means as a base year employer, wages were paid to that UC claimant on a date within the base year.

How Benefits are Calculated

The amount of benefits a claimant is eligible for is calculated by the earnings made during the "base year" of the claim. The base year of a UC claim is a 12-month period. Each base year has four quarters, three months in each quarter. The base year starts based on when the claim is filed, the first four of the last five completed quarters.

When a claim is filed in one of the months in purple, the green shaded area is the base year.

OCT NOV DEC	JAN FEB MAR	APR MAY JUN	JUL AUG SEP	OCT NOV DEC	JAN FEB MAR			
	JAN FEB MAR	APR MAY JUN	JUL AUG SEP	OCT NOV DEC	JAN FEB MAR	APR MAY JUN		
		APR MAY JUN	JUL AUG SEP	OCT NOV DEC	JAN FEB MAR	APR MAY JUN	JUL AUG SEP	
			JUL AUG SEP	OCT NOV DEC	JAN FEB MAR	APR MAY JUN	JUL AUG SEP	OCT NOV DEC

When a claim is opened, the effective date is always the Sunday of that week.

To Qualify for Benefits

A person must be both monetarily and non-monetarily qualified. The base year is what is considered for monetary eligibility for a claim. A person's actual last day and related circumstances are important when it comes to "non-monetary" eligibility. Examples of "non-monetary" benefits include professional

development opportunities, wellness programs, additional paid time off, volunteer time off. The actual last day at work is not considered when reviewing the base year; the timing of the paycheck is the important factor.

Unemployment Claim Management – Start to Finish

Prepare yourself by documenting conduct and build a path to discharge. The employer must be able to prove the discharge was warranted to deny claim benefits. Become familiar with the terms Protestable claims and non-Protestable claims. Most often Protestable claims involve misconduct. Misconduct equates to the deliberate / willful / intentional disregard of the employer's interest. Examples may include insubordination, sexual harassment, violation of Company Policy, theft, failure to follow Supervisor's instructions, attendance, drug/alcohol policy, fighting, sleeping on the job. Non-Protestable claims involve poor performance, inability to complete work assigned, inefficiency, unsatisfactory work performance.

Progressive discipline helps build a path to disqualification. This path should include a verbal warning and a minimum of two written warnings, preferably referencing the Company Handbook when appropriate. The verbal warning should state the policy violation and explain to the employee how they violated the policy. Document and date the incident and the verbal warning provided. At a certain point a written warning is warranted, be mindful of your terminology, keep it short and simple, include the violation and provide a plan for improvement. Explain what is going to occur should the behavior continue. Allow the employee to provide a written response. Everyone should sign and acknowledge that the warning has been given, if the employee refuses to sign, have a witness sign-off. Enforce the action consistently.

As the path to disqualification is being developed, continue to collect proof of violation and document all actions for termination of employment should it occur. Obtain witness statements which may include pictures, emails, text messages. Prepare yourself for a possible termination meeting.

In advance of the termination meeting, review termination with Human Resources. Confirm the essential points that should be covered in

the meeting. Give the employee and employer witnesses notice of the meeting. At the meeting set the appropriate tone, tell the truth and clearly establish the termination. Protect yourself by scheduling an exit interview with the employee, clearly outline in writing the employer's perspective on the separation. Obtain signatures on the separation report and allow the employee an opportunity to make a statement regarding the separation. Keep all documents regarding the employee's work history organized in the personnel file by date.

Should a Hearing occur, the following interested parties will attend: State Agency i.e. PA Labor and Industry Referee – makes decision, Claimant – may engage Counsel, Employer – may engage legal or non-legal representative specializing in unemployment, also, the witness may attend the hearing to provide “1st Hand” Testimony. Hearing etiquette includes being on time, be prepared, dress appropriately, be an active listener, wait your turn, keep answers simple, watch your language – *you are being recorded!*, tell the truth, do not guess, do not use extreme statements, support your answers with facts and ask for clarification if you do not fully understand a question.

Finally, the Hearing Decision. The hearing decision is not issued at the hearing, instead it is issued in writing. The hearing may be appealed. It may only be overturned if there is an error in the law. And finally, no additional information will be allowed. □

For further information on U•COMP, contact:

Elizabeth Henry
Trusts Member Services Manager
ehenry@pml.org
717-236-9469, ext. *250

PSATC President's Message



DENNIS ARTHUR
COMMISSIONER
TINICUM TOWNSHIP



firstclasstownshipa.org

Public Safety: The Hidden Heart of Township Government

In my 19 years as a commissioner, I've come to realize that public safety isn't just one aspect of township governance, it's woven into nearly everything we do. When you look closely, you'll find that public safety touches virtually every department in Tinicum Township.

Consider our fire company, which responds to over 500 calls annually. While many might think firefighters only battle blazes, they're our first line of defense against a broad spectrum of emergencies: gas leaks, downed power lines, vehicle accidents and carbon monoxide threats. Beyond emergency response, the fire company does tremendous work serving as educators conducting vital fire safety demonstrations and school presentations to prevent disasters before they happen.

Public safety extends far beyond emergency services. Our health inspector safeguards community wellness through annual inspections of restaurants and drinking establishments, ensuring proper food handling and storage. In our hotels and motels, regular cleanliness and hygiene inspections protect both residents and visitors. The fire marshal meticulously verifies that public buildings maintain modern fire suppression systems, working tirelessly to prevent potential tragedies.

Even departments you might not associate with safety play crucial roles. Our public works department works to ensure there are properly working traffic lights for safe street crossing and traffic control. We partner with the school district to station crossing guards who protect our children.

Lastly, consider our wastewater treatment plant—while rarely thought of as a safety service, it's fundamental to public health, preventing contamination of our rivers, streams and oceans.

When we step back and examine township governance, we see that public safety isn't just about emergency response, it's about creating an environment where our community can thrive with peace of mind. From the water we drink to the roads we travel, from our children's walk to school to our evening dining experiences, public safety is the foundation upon which our quality of life is built.

Happy Holidays,

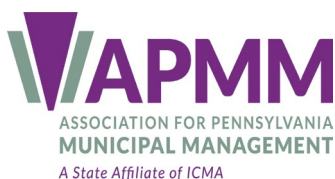
Dennis R. Arthur Sr.

Dennis Arthur

APMM President's Message



DAN SANTORO
MANAGER
CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP



APMM.net

Greetings APMM Members and Colleagues!

This month's magazine theme is Emergency Management, for those of us who have chosen to serve our communities, whether elected or appointed, few responsibilities rival the critical importance of emergency management. Whether responding to natural disasters, infrastructure failures, or public health crises, municipal officials must remain at the forefront of preparedness, response, and recovery. An effective emergency management strategy is not merely an operational necessity; it is an obligation to safeguard our communities, protect lives, and ensure continuity in the face of disruption.

From a municipal manager's perspective, emergency management is a multi-faceted challenge that requires proactive planning, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement. By embedding emergency readiness into daily operations, we not only improve our ability to respond to crises but also foster public trust and resilience within our communities. Here are some key insights to strengthen emergency management practices:

Foster Partnerships - Emergency management is inherently interdisciplinary, requiring collaboration across agencies, departments, and jurisdictions. Municipal managers should prioritize relationships with emergency responders, regional planning organizations, state and federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Formal agreements like mutual aid agreements can significantly

bolster resource availability and coordination during crises. For example, a pre-established partnership with neighboring municipalities could mean the difference between a delayed response and having the resources necessary for a full and robust response.

Invest in Training and Preparedness - Preparedness hinges on comprehensive training and practice. Municipal managers should ensure that emergency operations plans are not static documents but living tools, updated regularly to reflect new risks and lessons learned. Investing in scenario-based exercises can help teams practice under pressure and improve decision-making. In my community, we hold an annual training exercise centered around disaster scenarios for our annual community days event which draws in more than 50,000 people over three days.

Leverage Technology and Data - Modern technology can be a game-changer in emergency management. Geographic Information Systems (GIS), for example, enable detailed risk assessments, evacuation planning, and real-time tracking during emergencies. Social media platforms are invaluable for communicating with residents during crises. Municipal managers must embrace these tools to enhance situational awareness and response capabilities.

Prioritize Communication - Transparent and timely communication is essential during emergencies. Municipal managers serve as a critical bridge between elected officials, emergency responders, and the public. Establishing



clear communication channels before a crisis ensures that residents and stakeholders receive accurate information when it matters most.

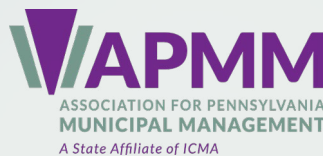
Emergency management is not just a specialized function; it is a core responsibility of municipal leadership. By prioritizing preparedness, fostering collaboration, and leveraging innovative tools, municipal managers can lead their communities through crises with confidence and care.

As we close out this year, I wish all of my colleagues a happy and healthy holiday season and a prosperous new year! Finally, don't forget to register for the APMM Executive Development Conference Scheduled for February 5-7, I hope to see you all there!

Sincerely,



Dan Santoro



We're thrilled to announce two exciting conferences for 2025!

- **Executive Development Conference**

Dates: February 6-7, 2025

Location: Omni Bedford Springs Resort

Prepare for two days of dynamic leadership development in an inspiring setting.

- **2025 Annual Conference**

Dates: May 19-21, 2025

Location: Lancaster Marriott at Penn Square

Don't miss our premier event featuring cutting-edge industry insights and unparalleled networking opportunities.

[Click Here to Register and Learn More](#)



Proactive *beats* reactive.

Taking steps to prevent labor and employment issues is a far better strategy than trying to mitigate them after the fact. We partner with municipalities in every corner of the Commonwealth, helping them address potential risks and create work environments where people and public service can thrive. We'd like to do the same for you.

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Legislative Status Report STATE



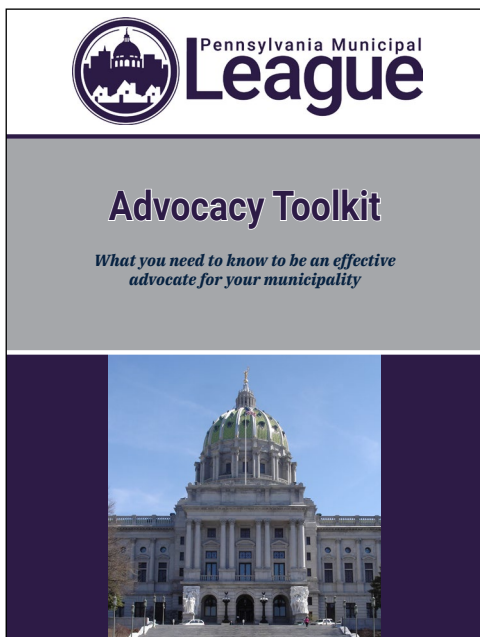
PREPARED BY AMY STURGES, LEAGUE DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – ADVOCACY – asturges@pml.org

KAITLIN ERRICKSON, GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MANAGER – kerrickson@pml.org

All legislation can be found on the General Assembly's website:

legis.state.pa.us

Legislative Update



The League's Advocacy Toolkit

As a local official, you are in a unique position to represent your community's interests not only locally, but also at the state level.

Whether you are writing a letter, making a phone call or meeting with your state representative about an issue important to your municipality or the greater League membership, you need the right tools to communicate effectively.

The League encourages local officials, elected or appointed, to review our Advocacy Toolkit and use the resource to prepare for your own local advocacy efforts in the year ahead.

Please view the Advocacy Toolkit [here](#).



Pennsylvania Housing Survey

As you may know, the Shapiro Administration signed Executive Order 2024-03 in early September, directing DCED and DHS to develop a strategic housing plan for the state. The report is due to be completed by fall 2025. Please find the Executive Order [here](#).

DCED has created a housing survey to begin collecting data and public input. Please feel free to share this survey with any colleagues, staff, or community members.



Take the Housing Survey

2025 Local Government Center Awards For Local Government Excellence

Nominations for the 2025 Governor’s Awards for Local Government Excellence are now open. Each year, the Governor’s Awards for Local Government Excellence are presented to local government leaders who have demonstrated exceptional dedication to improving public services through innovative projects or initiatives. [Submit your nominations](#) for the 2025 Governor’s Awards for Local Government Excellence now through January 15, 2025.

General Assembly’s 2025/2026 Leadership

Senate

Democratic Leadership
(Minority)

Leader	Jay Costa
Whip	Tina Tartaglione
Appropriations Chair	Vincent Hughes
Caucus Chair	Maria Collett
Caucus Secretary	Steve Santarsiero
Caucus Administrator	Judy Schwank
Policy Chair	Nick Miller

Republican Leadership
(Majority)

President Pro Tempore	Kim Ward
Leader	Joe Pittman
Whip	Ryan Aument
Appropriations Chair	Scott Martin
Caucus Chair	Kristin Phillips-Hill
Caucus Secretary	Camera Bartolotta
Caucus Administrator	Lisa Baker
Policy Chair	Dan Laughlin

House

Democratic Leadership

Speaker	Joanna McClinton
Leader	Matt Bradford
Whip	Mike Schlossberg
Appropriations Chair	Jordan Harris
Caucus Chair	Rob Matzie
Caucus Secretary	Tina Davis
Caucus Administrator	Leanne Krueger
Policy Chair	Ryan Bizzarro

Republican Leadership

Leader	Jessie Topper
Whip	Tim O’Neal
Appropriations Chair	Jim Struzzi
Caucus Chair	Martina White
Caucus Secretary	Clint Owlett
Caucus Administrator	Sheryl Delozier
Policy Chair	David Rowe

Cosponsor Memos

With a new legislative session beginning in January, members are circulating memos for co-sponsorship of legislation they plan to introduce or reintroduce. The following are reintroductions of legislation from the last session.

Local Use of Radar

Senator Greg Rothman has announced his intention to introduce legislation authorizing local police to use radar for speed enforcement.

Expanding the Use of Red Light Cameras

Senator Greg Rothman has announced his intention to introduce legislation authorizing local police to use radar for speed enforcement.

COLA for Municipal Police and Fire Personnel

Senator Tracy Pennycuik has announced her intention to introduce legislation providing a cost of living adjustment (COLA) for municipal police officers and firefighters based on the number of years the officer or firefighter has been retired. The COLA increases would be distributed based on the below information:

- \$75 a month, if on January 1, 2024, the retiree has been retired between 5 to 10 years;
- \$150 a month, if on January 1, 2024, the retiree has been retired between 10 to 20 years; and
- \$300 a month, if on January 1, 2024, the retiree has been retired for over 20 years.

Providing Greater Municipal Taxation Flexibility

Representative Ismail Smith-Wade-El has announced his intention to introduce legislation providing municipalities with the option to levy a payroll tax while increasing the earned income and local services tax as well.

Limitations on Liability: Catastrophic Claims

Senator Wayne Langerholc has announced his intention to introduce legislation increasing the current limitations on liability under the PA Sovereign and Governmental Immunity Law for both municipalities and the state only for catastrophic claims.

Senior Property Tax Freeze

Senator Lisa Boscola has announced her intention to introduce legislation to freeze property taxes for seniors that are 65 years or older, have lived in their home for at least five years and make less than \$65,000 annually.

Realty Transfer Tax Exclusion for First Time Home Buyers

Representative Thomas Kutz has announced his intention to introduce legislation excluding the realty transfer tax for the transfer of property to first-time home buyers. □

House and Senate Session Days 2024

House

January 7, 27-29

February 3-5

March 17-19, 24-26

Senate

January 7, 27-29

February 3-5

March 24-26, 31

*reminder - session dates are subject to change



If you or anyone in your municipality/organization are having trouble receiving the *Municipal Reporter*, League Link, Legislative Locator or any other communications from The League, there is an easy fix.

Simply **whitelist the Mailerlite domain- mlsend.com** and you will be able to receive communications from us as part of your member benefits. Please share this information.





Supreme Court 2024-25 Term Preview: Important Cases for Local Governments

BY MCKAIA DYKEMA, LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH MANAGER, FEDERAL ADVOCACY TEAM, NLC AND
STEPHANIE MARTINEZ-RUCKMAN, LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, NLC

The 2024-25 United States Supreme Court Term officially kicked off on Monday, October 7. Several significant cases that could impact local governments and their interests are before the court this term. The National League of Cities (NLC), through partnership with the Local Government Legal Center (LGLC), has joined several amicus briefs supporting and advocating local government positions on key legal issues of relevance.

Cases of importance this term include questions of employment law issues related to Title VII and the Fair Labor Standards Act, environmental law and the permitting requirements under the Clean Water Act, the scope of authority for a federal regulation relating to “ghost guns,” when attorney’s fees can be assigned and The Americans with Disabilities Act. As the Supreme Court accepts additional cases to their current term docket, NLC will keep local leaders informed on important cases that impact local governments.

Ames v. Ohio Department of Youth Services

This case is related to an important employment law question under Title VII. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The specific issue is whether a plaintiff that belongs to the majority group of a class must show “background circumstances” supporting the suspicion that the defendant is an “unusual employer who discriminates against the majority.” This would be an additional element that the plaintiff must prove in addition to pleading the other elements of a Title VII discrimination claim.

This “background circumstances” test is one that the lower court found was required, given that the plaintiff was a member of the majority group in this case. The court explained that a plaintiff can meet this additional showing with evidence that a member(s) of the relevant minority group of the class made the

employment decision an issue or by showing a pattern of discrimination by the employer against members of the given majority group.

As local governments collectively continue to be one of the largest employers in the country, this is an important case that could impact the expansion of local government liability. Lawsuits under Title VII are expensive to defend and resource intensive for local governments. A ruling that applies the background circumstances test would make it harder for employees in majority groups passed over for promotions or subject to adverse employment decisions to bring Title VII lawsuits.

EMD Sales v. Carrera

This is another employment law case related to the power burden of proof level that employers must satisfy to demonstrate the applicability of a Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA) exemption to overtime pay. Generally, under FLSA, employers must pay employees overtime pay at a rate and a half for all work done above 40 hours a week. However, there are a number of exemptions from the FLSA's minimum wage and overtime requirements. The exemption relevant to this case is the "outside sales" exemption, which exempts employers from paying overtime for work done outside the office.

At issue in this case is the level of the burden of proof that must be demonstrated to show that the exemption applies. The parties disagree on whether the burden should be a "preponderance of the evidence" (the evidence shows more likely than not) or "clear and convincing evidence" (a significantly higher threshold).

This case directly impacts the burden of proof that local governments will need to show as an employer to demonstrate an exemption to overtime under FLSA. Claims under the FLSA are extremely common, and the burden of proof applies to each of the numerous exemptions. If the court finds that the higher standard of burden of proof applies, it will create significant financial implications for cities. Given the severe penalties for violating the rules under FLSA, there are significant potential liability issues at stake in this case for local governments.

City and County of San Francisco v. EPA

The issue in this case is whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can impose generic prohibitions in their National Pollutant Discharge

Elimination System (NPDES) permits without identifying specific limits to which pollutant discharges must conform.

Under the Clean Water Act (CWA), the EPA has the authority to issue National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits that contain pollutant levels to provide manageable and precise benchmarks for enforcement. Contrary to the requirements of the CWA and EPA guidance, the permits EPA regularly issue impose generic prohibitions against pollutant discharging in a manner that contributes to exceeding applicable water quality standards. The generic prohibitions that are used in the NPDES permits issued to localities around the country create uncertainty and increase the risk that local governments will be subjected to significant penalties. The generic water quality terms in the permits expose permit holders nationwide to enforcement actions while failing to tell them how much they need to limit or treat their discharges to comply with the CWA. A decision in this case would provide clarity to local governments on CWA requirements.

Garland v. VanderStok

The issue in this case is whether a weapon parts kit that has been designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive is considered a "firearm" regulated under the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA). The GCA is the federal law that imposes licensing, background checks, recordkeeping and serialization requirements on persons engaged in the business of importing, manufacturing or dealing in firearms. In 2022, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) issued a regulation that clarified the definition of "firearm" under the GCA includes products and kits that can "readily be converted" into an operational firearm or a functional frame or receiver. These types of products are commonly referred to as "ghost guns."

Ghost guns create significant public safety concerns for local law enforcement as they allow minors and felons who are otherwise prohibited from owning guns under the GCA to obtain them without any background checks or serialization requirements. This lack of serial numbers has created significant roadblocks for law enforcement in investigating violent crimes, as they cannot typically be traced. The Court will determine whether these "ghost gun" products are subjected to the requirements of the GCA or if these types of products do not meet the definition of a "firearm."

Lackey v. Stinnie

The issue in this case involves the important question of deciding when attorney's fees apply for plaintiffs in civil rights cases. Section 1988 of the U.S. Code provides that a prevailing party may collect attorney's fees in certain civil suits (including Section 1983 actions). The Court will determine in this case what "prevailing" really means. The specific question is whether a plaintiff who obtains a preliminary injunction can obtain attorney's fees under Section 1988 if there is never a permanent injunction or full ruling on the claim's merits since the defendant voluntarily changed their conduct.

As local governments are party to civil suits (including under Section 1983 actions), a limitation in the award of attorney's fees would result in a significant financial victory for local governments involved in these types of cases. Attorney's fees can be as high or higher than the underlying liability or damages of a civil suit, and they regularly cost governments hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. If the Court rules that attorney's fees are appropriately awarded only when there is a conclusive ruling, this would significantly reduce future potential civil litigation costs for local governments.

Stanley v. City of Stanford

This case presents a question of whether a former employee can sue their employer under The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for discrimination in post-employment distribution of fringe benefits if they no longer hold their job. Title I of the ADA prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities regarding compensation and other terms of employment. Lower courts found that a former employee doesn't qualify as an "individual with a disability" and therefore cannot bring suit for discrimination in post-employment distribution of fringe benefits.

Local governments are sometimes faced with difficult decisions when balancing the public fisc with other local government operations or initiatives. As local leaders continue to look for cost-saving mechanisms to balance their budgets, some may look to post-employment benefit liabilities as a place to potentially cut costs and fulfill their duties of fiscal responsibility. This case is important to ensure local governments have the flexibility and authority they need to make these difficult decisions without the threat of litigation.

□





Public Finance

PROTECTING AGAINST CHECK FRAUD

NEW SOLUTIONS TO A PERSISTENT PROBLEM

BY KATIA FROCK, DIRECTOR, PFM ASSET MANAGEMENT LLC, PLGIT'S INVESTMENT ADVISER

It might seem like a dull topic compared to other types of crime, but fraud surrounding the use of checks is still a dominant — and costly — issue in the financial markets.

Americans write some sixty billion checks each year, and the physical handing of paper checks, plus the ready availability of information and technology, opens the window for widespread fraud through the use and sale of checking information.

While organizations have increased their allocation of resources to combat cybercrime, check fraud remains the highest level of fraud activity of any type of financial transaction. In a 2023 New York Times article, analysis of a Treasury Department report projected that banks and credit unions would file nearly 540,000 suspicious-activity reports tied to check fraud, more than double the levels in 2021.¹

What has made a bad problem even worse is the added element of the “darknet,” a part of the internet which is accessible only to specific browsers or

network configurations, as well as other encrypted platforms. Criminals now have the option of altering checks from individuals, businesses, and organizations, and then selling the account information to others, which adds the risk of identity theft to the list of threats.

How did this problem get so severe?

A number of elements have come together to make check fraud such a persistently big problem:

The nature of checks: Unlike debit card transactions or electronic fund transfers (EFT), checks are paper based, which requires both a slow clearing process and a degree of human involvement. This check-clearing process creates a comfortable margin between when fraud is committed and when it is discovered.

Banking legislation: In 1988, Congress passed legislation requiring banks to process checks within a 72-hour period. While this regulation may have succeeded in making depositors' funds more accessible, it also made passing fraudulent checks

easier by giving banks less time to confirm the legitimacy of transactions.

Technology: Today's computer technology makes check fraud relatively simple. A counterfeiter requires only a laser scanner, a personal computer, and a quality laser printer, all of which can be obtained for a few thousand dollars.

Technology...Part II: According to the American Bankers Association, **mobile banking** increased by 200 percent during the last 24 months. This innovation has given criminals just as much convenience as it has customers: perpetrators no longer have to show their faces at physical branches or ATMs to deposit fake checks.

Access to information: The use of the Internet to access and steal personal and financial information has become an epidemic.

Types of Check Fraud

With all these openings for potential fraud, it is no wonder that a range of check fraud schemes exist across the

¹The New York Times. “We Can’t Stop Writing Paper Checks. Thieves Love That.” December 9, 2023; upd. June 3, 2024

banking landscape. Although it is impossible to summarize all check fraud schemes here, a handful of the most prominent:

Altered checks are a common fraud that occurs after a legitimate check is issued to pay a debt. A criminal takes the good check and uses chemicals or other means to erase the amount or the name of the payee, so that new information can be entered. The new information can be added by typewriter, in handwriting, or with a laser printer or check imprinter.

Counterfeit checks are presented based on fraudulent identification or are false checks drawn on valid accounts. A person may open checking accounts, cash counterfeit checks, and file false tax returns, using fraudulent drivers' licenses and other identification produced using computer software.

Identity theft in check fraud occurs when criminals learn information about a financial institution customer, such as name, address, financial institution account number, social security number, telephone numbers, or employer, and use the information to misrepresent themselves as the valid financial institution customer.

Payroll check fraud involves using an individual who works within a payroll check-processing company. The 'insider' prints duplicate payroll checks for various corporate clients, takes the checks from the premises and duplicates them for later use. The criminal also obtains full background identifying data on the client's regular employees, which can be used in future crimes.

Fraud prevention

Because fraud has become easier to commit, financial institutions have developed a variety of high and low-tech methods to ensure each check that enters their systems is authentic.

Positive Pay, the most widely used check verification system, enables a company and its financial institution to work together to detect check fraud by identifying items presented for payment that the company did not issue. In the usual case, the company electronically transmits a list of all checks it issued on a particular day to the financial institution. The financial institution verifies checks received for payment against that list and examines rejected checks to find out if any items are fraudulent.

Fingerprinting programs require any non-account holder presenting checks for payment to provide a fingerprint or thumbprint. The check presenter is asked to ink his or her thumb on a small pad and place the imprint in the space between the memo line and the signature line of the check being presented. If the financial institution later discovers that the check was fraudulent or altered, it can provide the fingerprinted check to law enforcement officials.

Electronic check presentment (ECP) is an electronic/paper method of expediting check collection. A depositing financial institution captures payment information from incoming checks and transmits the information electronically to the paying financial institution, and then sends the actual check according to its normal procedure. During check posting, the paying

financial institution identifies checks that should be returned and immediately notifies the depositing institution.

How PLGIT Can Help Local Governments

Here are a few basic recommendations that PLGIT advisors offer when it comes to check fraud prevention:

- Consider reducing your volume of outgoing checks by using electronic transfers (ACH and wires) for payments.
- Use PLGIT's Reverse Positive Pay (see below), and Positive Pay if offered through other institutions.
- Secure your municipality's check stock before use. When mailing, place checks in secure mail receptacles.
- Establish internal controls by keeping check signers and verifiers current, and monitoring account activity each day.
- Be alert for bad actors or processes that may open your municipality to check fraud perpetrated either internally or externally.
Vigilance is one of the very best lines of defense against fraud.

In addition to these suggestions, PLGIT has its own programs to help combat this challenge:

Reverse Positive Pay is a security feature that allows Investors to review checks and reverse a payment that should not be paid. Where this differs from Positive Pay verification is that local governments designate internal check verifiers to receive email notifications each day as checks are presented on an account.



Those verifiers then notify PLGIT's Client Services Group by the next business day to ensure checks in question are reversed.

PLGIT's On-Site Electronic Deposit Service allows Investors to make deposits into their PLGIT-Class account using either dedicated scanning equipment or the camera on a mobile device.

In addition to reducing the risk of mail theft or loss, the benefits of this service include the rapid availability of scanned funds, lower processing costs at financial institutions, and enhanced organization and recordkeeping.

Beginning in 2024, PLGIT included scanned images of the front and back of all municipality-issued checks in its account reporting to enhance check verification even further.

A dedicated scanner is ideal for frequent deposits – especially if your local government frequently deposits five or more checks daily. There are multiple scanners to choose from based upon a local government's volume and needs.

Even if a municipality doesn't deposit a high volume of checks, it can still take advantage of the security of these services.

As criminals become more sophisticated, organizations and law enforcement must continue to develop and implement new fraud detection techniques. To meet this challenge, the battle against check fraud is best fought through cooperation--among agencies, bankers, bank regulators, and the public.

For more information about check fraud, contact your PLGIT representative

Katia Frock is a Director at PFM Asset Management LLC, working primarily with investors in the central part of the Commonwealth. She can be reached at frockk@pfmam.com.
□



pfm asset
management

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- We have recovered tens of millions of dollars for Pennsylvania taxing districts
- Identified \$4,500,000 of unreported taxes for the City of Chester
- There are no upfront costs to the taxing district
- Performance based compensation –We only get paid if we collect
- We work closely with the taxing district
- Our Audit Discovery services coexist with your current or in-house tax collector
- We increase current collections by returning unidentified taxpayers to the tax rolls
- Pursue recovery of delinquent and unreported tax funds through legal enforcement

Our Municipal Collection and Audit Services

We collect both current and delinquent municipal taxes and fees including:

- Business Gross Receipts Taxes
- Real Estate Taxes
- Sewer, Refuse and Parking Fees
- EIT and Local Services Tax
- Proprietary software provided to taxing district
- Electronic reporting and remittance

We provide audit services for current and delinquent:

- Business Gross Receipts Tax
- Payroll Tax
- EIT Tax



"eCollect+ delivered on what they promised. They recovered business gross receipts tax revenue from out-of-state businesses that were not on our books! We have had zero complaints from the business community while yielding desperately needed revenue from the business gross receipts tax."

— **John Sipper**
Township Manager, Hanover Township

Our Experience

We have over 25 years experience with municipal audit and business gross receipts tax collection.

Our general counsel has over 30 years experience in taxation, and served as a Chief Deputy Attorney General in charge of taxation with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office.

Contact Us Today

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