

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Deborah Musselman, Director of Government Affairs

E-mail: [deborahm@pa-news.org](mailto:deborahm@pa-news.org)

Phone: (717) 703-3077



**PNA recognizes Pa. Legislature on Senate Bill 1**

HARRISBURG, Pa., Feb. 13, 2008 — The Pennsylvania Newspaper Association (PNA) recognizes the significant achievement of the State Legislature this week in passing Senate Bill 1, which overhauls the state's open records law, and expects swift enactment into law.

According to PNA President Tim Williams, "In 2006 we rolled out an ambitious legislative initiative, titled 'Brighter Pennsylvania.' Our goal was to improve Pennsylvania's open records law, which is widely regarded as one of the worst in the country, and expand citizens' access to government. Senate Bill 1 accomplishes a number of our goals."

As part of the initiative, the PNA identified the following items as "must-haves" for open records reform: 1) An acknowledgment that records belong to the public; 2) An improved definition of "public record" and a presumption of access; 3) The burden of proof on an agency denying access; 4) A broader definition of "agency;" 5) An Office of Access to make it easier for citizens to appeal denials; and 6) Meaningful penalties.

Senate Bill 1 contains all of these.

As explained by Williams, "The bill fundamentally changes the structure of Pennsylvania's Right to Know Law. It begins with the presumption that state and local agency records are open for public inspection and places the burden on an agency denying access. For the first time since the Right to Know Law was passed in 1957, it will include the General Assembly and will give citizens the ability to appeal open records disputes to an administrative agency, the Office of Open Records, without the need to file a court action."

"It took a tremendous amount of hard work, negotiation, and compromise to get this bill to the Governor," said Deborah Musselman, PNA's director of government affairs. "Senate Bill 1 was originally introduced by Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi (R-Del) on March 29, 2007 and has gone through multiple, significant amendments since that time."

Musselman emphasized that the legislation has the potential to impact all Pennsylvanians. "I can't imagine an issue with a broader scope, since government can and often does try to address virtually any kind of problem or challenge that individuals or groups may face."

"We were afforded a significant opportunity to work with key legislators and staff experts to craft this legislation," continued Musselman. "While the bill is not perfect it increases transparency in government finances, in particular, and establishes a process we believe will improve citizens' access to their government. We will continue to monitor several concerns that we have regarding exemptions, but certainly recognize the hard work and effort by so many on this legislation."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“PNA specifically recognizes the leadership of Sen. Pileggi on Senate Bill 1 and praises his commitment to fairness and government accountability,” said Williams.

PNA Chairman John A. Kirkpatrick, publisher of *The Patriot-News* in Harrisburg, said he is pleased that the new Right to Know bill represents the first major reform measure passed by the General Assembly. “We are proud that Pennsylvania legislators, in making this the first piece of reform legislation to become law, recognize the importance of a meaningful right of access to government for all citizens. We commend the lawmakers for having placed the public’s right to know at the top of their list of priorities this session.”

The PNA, founded in 1925, is a nonprofit trade association. Its mission is to advance the interests of Pennsylvania newspapers, promote the importance of a free and independent press and provide a forum for critical and innovative thinking about the future of journalism and the newspaper industry.

###