Legislation authored by Rep. Lori Mizgorski (R-Allegheny) to improve safety on the Commonwealth’s roads was signed into law as Act 131 of 2020.

The new law will improve safety by placing more stringent incident reporting requirements on holders of commercial driver licenses (CDL). It was also amended to expand driving opportunities for people with disabilities and assist homeless citizens by offering free state IDs.

“I first introduced this bill after learning of a tractor-trailer driver who caused two fatal accidents within six months. In July of 2018, the first fatal accident occurred on Interstate 81 in Lebanon County. By the time this individual was convicted in that case, he had already caused a second fatal accident in Ohio,” Mizgorski said. “We need to make sure the employers of CDL holders are promptly informed when one of their drivers is cited for breaking the law.”

Act 131 requires that a driver of a commercial motor vehicle who is cited, arrested, or charged with violating a federal or state law or local ordinance relating to motor vehicle traffic control, other than a parking violation, must notify his or her employer in writing within 30 days of receiving the citation or being arrested or officially charged.

“In addition to improving the safety of our roadways, the bill would make Pennsylvanians who have certain vision challenges eligible for a learner’s permit and driver’s license, and it would provide an opportunity to help our homeless citizens get back on their feet by providing them with a free Pennsylvania ID card,” Mizgorski said. “I am proud of the good this legislation will do for people across the Commonwealth.”

Specifically, the bill establishes a procedure for PennDOT to issue a bioptic telescope learner’s permit or driver’s license to people who meet specific visual acuity requirements and instruction in using a bioptic telescope.

Bioptic driving is a method of driving that uses both the person’s general vision in combination with intermittent spotting through a small telescopic system that improves the sharpness of the patient’s far vision. Pennsylvania would join 28 other states in offering a bioptic telescope license.

Additionally, the bill would codify mandatory CDL training requirements to comply with federal regulations, disqualify a CDL holder convicted of human trafficking, and allow PennDOT to provide free state-issued ID cards to homeless citizens. Those applying for the free ID would still have to meet all proof of identification requirements.
New Law Protects Injured Volunteer Fire, EMS Personnel

Critical members of volunteer fire companies, ambulance corps, and rescue squads who are injured in the line of duty will qualify for workers’ compensation coverage under a bill signed into law. The new law was authored by Senators Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) and Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York).

Act 108 of 2020 ensures all active volunteers and integral members of a volunteer fire, ambulance, or rescue company are covered through the State Workers Insurance Fund (SWIF). The law applies to 1,550 volunteer fire companies and 92 ambulance organizations that are insured by SWIF.

A Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee hearing in 2017 highlighted problems related to SWIF denying coverage to these critical volunteers.

“We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the brave volunteers who protect our lives and property. It is inconceivable to think that they could be left to deal with the financial consequences if they are injured in the line of duty,” Martin said. “This new law ensures their focus can remain on their life-saving work with the peace of mind to know that we have their back if anything goes wrong.”

The new law took effect immediately.

“Many men and women serve in various capacities with our volunteer fire companies, EMS and ambulance associations,” Phillips-Hill said. “This issue was brought to me by a local...”

New Law Extends Period of Time Local Governments Can Borrow Money

Legislation drafted by state Rep. Lee James (R-Venango/Butler) to bridge the tax gap caused by COVID-19 was signed into law as Act 114 of 2020. It authorizes local governments to borrow money for two years, rather than just one year, so they can maintain operations.

Tax payment deadlines have been extended for residents to alleviate some of the financial burdens caused by COVID-19, which necessitated deadline extensions for local governments.

“So many Pennsylvanians have been forced out of work and are struggling to pay their bills – let alone their taxes – after experiencing significant financial loss. Local governments, like the state and federal government, are offering a reprieve in the form of an extension to help people,” James said. “But, to avoid hurting the same people local governments are trying to help, they needed an extension of their own borrowing terms to continue serving residents without interruption.”

Local governments make budget expenditures throughout the year, but only receive revenue on a periodic basis throughout the budget year. Borrowing via tax anticipation notes provides a steady stream of funding with minimal additional costs.

The bill was amended by the Senate to also include the 2020-21 Fiscal Code, which is the legislation that dictates how the 2020-21 state budget is spent.
House, Senate Elect New Leadership for 2021-22 Legislative Session

The PA House and Senate elected new leadership teams to serve during the 2021-22 legislative session.

Senate Republicans and House Democrats both elevated women for the first time to the critical position of floor leader.

The PA House Republican leadership team consists of:
- Speaker Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster).
- Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff (R-Centre/Mifflin).
- Majority Whip Donna Oberlander (R-Clarion/Armstrong/Forest).
- Majority Appropriations Committee Chairman Stan Saylor (R-York).
- Majority Policy Committee Chairman Marty Causer (R-Cameron/McKean/Potter).
- Majority Caucus Chairman Mike Reese (R-Westmoreland/Somerset).*
- Majority Caucus Secretary Martina White (R-Phila.).
- Majority Caucus Administrator Kurt Masser (R-Northumberland/Columbia/Montour).

The PA House Democratic leadership team consists of:
- Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton (D-Phila./Delaware).
- Democratic Whip Jordan Harris (D-Phila.).
- Democratic Appropriations Committee Chairman Matt Bradford (D-Montgomery).
- Democratic Policy Committee Chairman Ryan Bizzarro (D-Erie).
- Democratic Caucus Chairman Dan Miller (D-Allegheny).
- Democratic Caucus Secretary Tina Davis (D-Bucks).
- Democratic Caucus Administrator Mike Schlossberg (D-Lehigh).

The PA Senate Republican leadership team consists of:
- President Pro Tempore Jake Corman (R-Centre).
- Majority Leader Kim Ward (R-Westmoreland).
- Majority Appropriations Committee Chairman Pat Browne (R-Lehigh).
- Majority Whip John Gordner (R-Columbia/Montour/Luzerne).

The PA Senate Democratic leadership team consists of:
- Democratic Leader Jay Costa (D-Allegheny).
- Democratic Appropriations Committee Chairman Vincent Hughes (D-Phila./Montgomery).
- Democratic Whip Anthony Williams (D-Phila./Delaware).
- Democratic Caucus Chairman Wayne Fontana (D-Allegheny).
- Democratic Caucus Secretary Maria Collett (D-Bucks/Montgomery).
- Democratic Policy Committee Chairwoman Katie Muth (D-Berks/Chester/Montgomery).

*Rep. Mike Reese passed away unexpectedly at 42 on Jan. 2. PSAB offers condolences to his family.
Effort to Boost Broadband Funding Now Law

State Rep. Martin Causer’s (R-Cameron/McKean/Potter) proposal to boost broadband access in the state’s most rural communities was signed into law as Act 132 of 2020. Causer’s HB 2348 was amended into SB 835.

“The pandemic has shown us time and again that broadband access is a necessity, not a luxury,” Causer said. “Our students and teachers need it to improve educational opportunities. Businesses need it to stay competitive and better serve their customers. And our doctors and patients need it to improve access to health care.”

Act 132 creates the Unserved High-Speed Broadband Funding Program to provide grants in support of broadband expansion in areas most in need of these services. Initial funding comes from a repeal of the $5 million Mobile Telecommunications Broadband Investment Tax Credit, though the law calls for supplementing the $5 million with additional state or federal funds.

The grant program will be administered by the Commonwealth Financing Authority. Eligible applicants for this program include nongovernmental entities with the ability to operate broadband services through wireline or fixed wireless technology, which can include rural electric cooperatives and local development districts.

At least 25% of funding for a project must come from the nongovernmental entity, not counting state or local grants, loans, or subsidies. Projects to be managed or operated by a government entity are ineligible to receive grant funds and projects resulting in an overbuild would not be eligible. Buildout in areas with high-speed broadband service already will constitute an overbuild.

Preference will be given to projects in the most unserved areas of the Commonwealth as defined by the Federal Communications Commission’s minimum speed requirements and to projects that already have federal funding allocated to them.

This is the second major pro-broadband measure to become law. Act 98 of 2020 clears the way for rural electric cooperatives, cable companies, or any entity that wanted to run broadband cable to provide the service using the existing infrastructure and easements held by rural electric cooperatives. The law cuts through some of the red tape that was slowing down the pace and driving up the cost of broadband expansion. 

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constituent who was denied workers’ compensation after being injured during a fire company carnival. This bill will provide peace of mind to all volunteers across the Commonwealth to ensure that no matter the capacity in which you volunteer, that the law protects you.”

The legislation is part of a broader focus by lawmakers on the challenges facing fire and EMS companies throughout the state. The Senate also approved a comprehensive package of bipartisan reforms to improve the delivery of fire services throughout the state, including improvements to grant and loan programs dedicated to fire companies.

How Did Your Legislator Vote?

Get to know your state representatives and state senators and find out how they voted on key issues. Find their contact information and check their voting records at www.legis.state.pa.us.