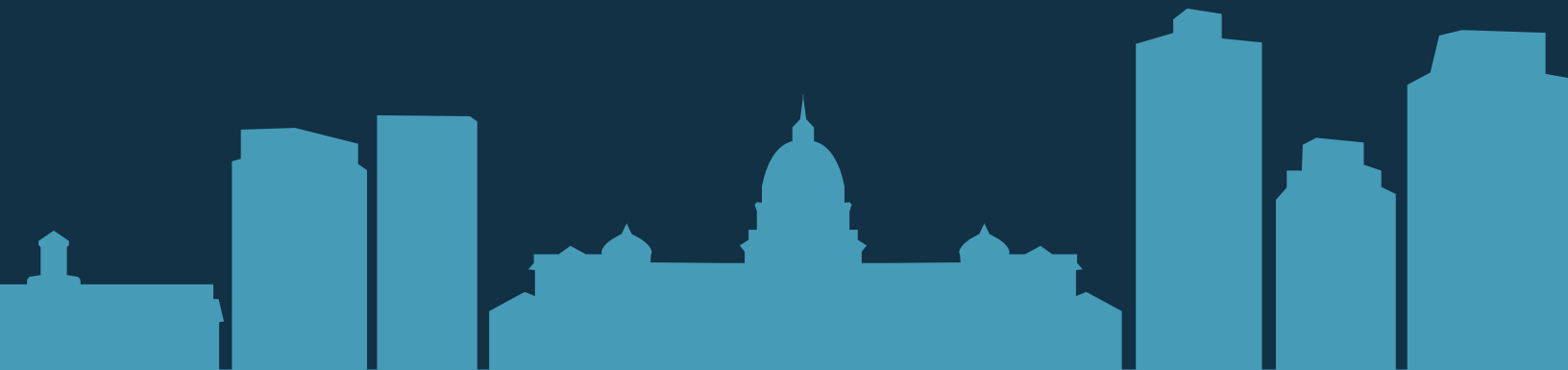


**SPOTLIGHT** PA

**2019-2024  
FIVE-YEAR**

# IMPACT

**REPORT**  
[SPOTLIGHTPA.ORG](https://spotlightpa.org)



**WE COVER PENNSYLVANIA LIKE NO ONE ELSE**  
INDEPENDENCE | TRANSPARENCY | INNOVATION | DIVERSITY | COLLABORATION



# 125+

## media partners

Largest  
distribution network  
of its kind  
in the country

Supported by  
**thousands of  
donors**

across the state  
of all political affiliations

Unique, collaborative  
model driving

## impact and access

in all corners of the state

Strengthening  
**civic education &  
engagement**

through trusted  
reporting that counteracts  
misinformation

Setting a  
**national  
standard**

for reinvigorating  
local journalism

## DEAR FRIENDS,

In March 2019, when I was offered the chance to build a news organization from scratch, I knew it was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

I had spent the past decade working in traditional, for-profit newspapers, and it was distressing. Layoffs, bankruptcies, buyouts, cost-cutting, “doing more with less” — all to save a bottom line in free fall, and without regard for the true mission of the work.

So five years ago, we launched Spotlight PA to take journalism back. With the incredible support and partnership of the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, we formed an independent, nonpartisan, and nonprofit newsroom to keep our state and local governments honest, track our tax dollars, and hold our elected leaders to account.

The impact of that moment resonates with every story we write. Together with you, we’ve saved taxpayers millions of dollars, sparked reforms of broken government programs, gotten people life-changing help, and held lawmakers and powerful institutions accountable — sometimes leading to legislative and policy changes.

In this new report, we tell the story of Spotlight PA’s first five years in a way you’ve never read before. Woven throughout the remarkable reporting, achievements, and growth is one common denominator: Our nonprofit model — meaning your support — ensures we prioritize quality journalism and impact above all else, and we answer to no one but you.

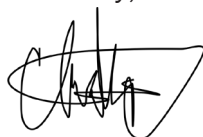
The story of Spotlight PA, however, is far larger than our one organization. We now provide state capitol and statewide reporting to more than 125 partner newsrooms at no cost, directly serving millions of Pennsylvanians every day.

We are building a legacy of accountability, transparency, and service that will make Pennsylvania stronger than ever. In the coming weeks and months, you will hear more about a bold new path for news across our Commonwealth, with plans to grow Spotlight PA in more local communities and ensure it’s financially sustainable for years to come.

I have two young children — ages 6 and 4 — and someday, they will ask me what I did to try to make Pennsylvania better. With our work and your support, we’ll have a good answer for them when that day comes.

I’m up for the challenge of the next five years. Are you with us?

Sincerely,



Christopher Baxter  
CEO & President, Spotlight PA

## AWARDS

# 34

**National Awards**  
or finalist honors

# 55

**Statewide Awards**  
or finalist honors

# 4x

Winner of the  
**Pennsylvania**  
**Public Service Award**

# 3x

Winner of the  
**Pennsylvania**  
**John V.R. Bull First**  
**Amendment Award**

## NATIONAL MENTIONS

A Spotlight PA State College investigation was featured in **The New York Times'** round-up of "Local Journalism Worth Reading from 2023."

Spotlight PA has been featured or cited in **Harvard's Nieman Reports, Poynter, Pew, the New York Times, NPR,** and the **Washington Post.**



**THE MISSION OF SPOTLIGHT PA** is to hold powerful public and private forces — especially governments, elected officials, businesses, and special interests — to account through urgent and compelling investigative and public-service journalism that drives change and strengthens our democracy, the state, and all who live here.

“**Pennsylvanians deserve better than having to rely on shrinking, vanishing, and increasingly biased media and unverified social media postings. Spotlight PA fills this critical need for trusted investigations and reporting. We are proud to support this essential organization that stays focused on its mission with unquestionable integrity, is run efficiently and effectively, and achieves results that bring positive changes for Pennsylvanians.**”

MERRILL AND NANCY BRENNER, MACUNGIE, PA

# WE ARE SPOTLIGHT PA



**1** Spotlight PA staff. Photo by Dani Fresh. **2** Spotlight PA State College reporters Marley Parish and Wyatt Massey at Quiz Bash 2024. Photo by Georgianna Sutherland. **3** Spotlight PA staff at the state Capitol. Photo by Amanda Mustard. **4** Spotlight PA Democracy Editor Elizabeth Estrada. Photo by Dani Fresh. **5** Capitol reporter Stephen Caruso talks to voters on Election Day 2022. Photo by Amanda Berg. **6** Spotlight PA staff Asha Prihar, Christina Bruno, and Stephen Kearse at the state Capitol. Photo by Dani Fresh.

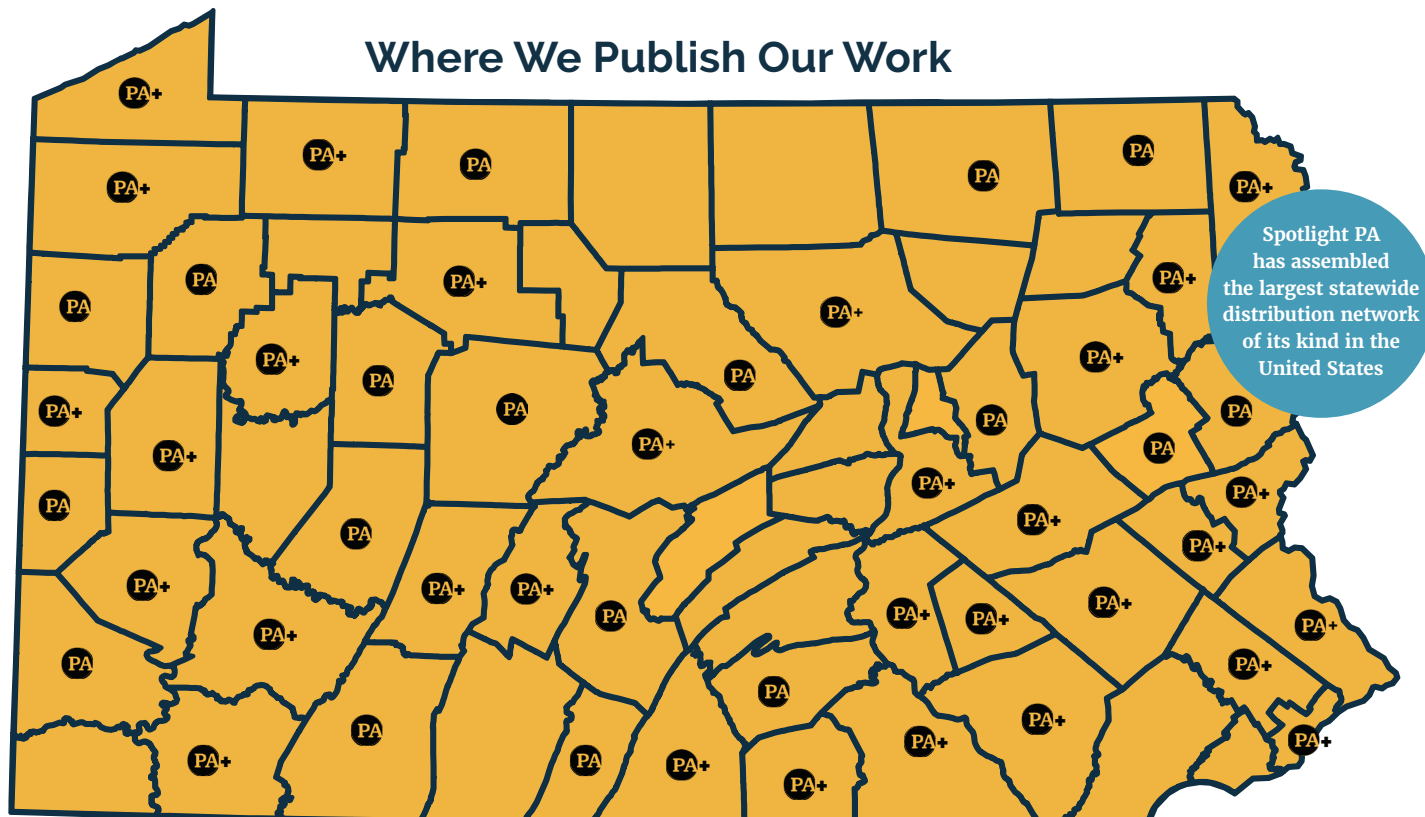
“Investigative reporting is more than ‘good content’. It’s an element essential to the functioning of our democracy, and with local media under pressure by mergers, acquisitions, and precipitous declines in audience and revenue, Spotlight PA is our best hope of keeping the Fourth Estate thriving in Pennsylvania.”

DAVID M ERDMAN, SPOTLIGHT PA COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN CHAIR, LEHIGH VALLEY

Independent, nonpartisan & nonprofit, with no opinion, endorsements, or political ads

# PARTNERS & DISTRIBUTION

## Where We Publish Our Work



“Our partnership with Spotlight PA has brought hard-hitting and impactful coverage of state issues to our readers. From breaking news out of Harrisburg to in-depth investigative projects, we have come to count on the Spotlight team to support the strong, local coverage we produce in our newsroom. Spotlight PA is the front line of accountability journalism in the Commonwealth.”

DANIELLE CAMILLI, NEWS DIRECTOR, BUCKS COUNTY COURIER TIMES | THE INTELLIGENCER | BURLINGTON COUNTY TIMES

**125+**  
media partners

Largest  
distribution network  
of its kind  
in the country

Spotlight PA has assembled the largest statewide distribution network of its kind in the United States, with more than 125 news outlets across Pennsylvania republishing its work, including newspapers, radio, network and public TV, and community media. This distribution network, which began with three initial partner outlets at launch — The Philadelphia Inquirer, PennLive/The Patriot-News in Harrisburg, and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette — has enabled Spotlight PA to grow its reach to millions of people and exponentially magnify its impact in a short period of time.

While most start-up newsrooms must labor to attract an audience starting

at zero, we creatively met audiences where they were already accessing their news while providing valuable reporting to our partner newsrooms. Then we grew new audiences via our website, [spotlightpa.org](http://spotlightpa.org), our mobile app, and through a portfolio of award-winning email newsletters. All of that work is available at no cost as a public resource and a public good — no paywalls, no subscriptions, no barriers to access. Now, our goal is to increase our footprint across the state with new investments in broadcast TV partnerships, innovative products to make the news more useful to readers, and enhanced marketing efforts around our vital journalism.

## PARTNERS BY COUNTY

### ADAMS

- Gettysburg Connection
- Gettysburg Times

### ALLEGHENY

- Allegheny Front
- Belt Magazine
- NextPittsburgh
- Pittsburgh City Paper
- Postindustrial.com
- PRESENTE: Pittsburgh Latino Magazine
- PublicSource
- TribLive/Tribune-Review
- WESA

### BEAVER

- Beaver County Times

### BERKS

- BCTV
- Berks Weekly
- WEEU

### BLAIR

- Altoona Mirror
- Morrisons Cove Herald

### BRADFORD

- The Daily & Sunday Review

### BUCKS

- Bucks County Courier Times
- Delaware Valley News
- LevittownNow.com
- NewtownPANow.com
- The Intelligencer

### BUTLER

- Butler Eagle
- Cranberry Eagle

### CAMBRIA

- The Tribune-Democrat
- WTAJ

### CARBON

- Times-News

### CENTRE

- Centre Daily Times
- StateCollege.com
- WPSU

### CLARION

- exploreclarion.com
- explore814.com

### CLEARFIELD

- GANT Media

### CLINTON

- The Record & The Record-Online.com

### COLUMBIA

- BU Now

### CRAWFORD

- The Meadville Tribune
- Titusville News Journal

### CUMBERLAND

- Carlisle Sentinel

### DAUPHIN

- Black Wall Street PA
- La Voz Latina Central
- PennLive/The Patriot-News
- WHTM
- WITF

### ELK

- Ridgway Record
- Daily Press

### ERIE

- Corry Journal
- Erie Times-News / GoErie.com
- Erie Reader
- Happi
- North East News Journal
- Union City Journal-Express
- West County News Journal
- WICU
- WJET/WFXP
- WSEE (Erie News Now)

### FAYETTE

- Daily Courier
- Herald-Standard

### FRANKLIN

- Chambersburg Public Opinion
- Franklin County Free Press
- Greencastle Echo Pilot
- Waynesboro Record Herald

### FULTON

- Fulton County News

### HUNTINGDON

- Huntingdon Daily News

### INDIANA

- Indiana Gazette

### JEFFERSON

- exploreJeffersonPA.com

### LACKAWANNA

- Scranton Times-Tribune
- WBRE/WYOU

### LANCASTER

- La Voz Latina Central
- LNP Media Group/LancasterOnline

### LAWRENCE

- Ellwood City Ledger
- New Castle News

### LEBANON

- Lebanon Daily News
- Lebtown.com
- Q Hubo

### LEHIGH

- Morning Call
- Lehigh Valley Public Media
- Saucon Source

### LUZERNE

- Citizens' Voice
- Standard-Speaker
- Times-Leader
- WVIA

### LYCOMING

- Northcentralpa.com
- Williamsport Sun-Gazette

### MCKEAN

- Kane Republican

### MERCER

- The Herald

### MONROE

- Pocono Record

### MONTGOMERY

- Burb Media
- NorthPennNow

### NORTHAMPTON

- Blue Mountain Town & Country Gazette
- Home News
- lehighvalleylive.com and the Express-Times
- WFMZ

### NORTHUMBERLAND

- The Daily Item
- The News-Item
- The Standard-Journal

### PHILADELPHIA

- Chalkbeat
- Chestnut Hill Local
- Kensington Voice
- KYW
- Mount Airy Local
- The Philadelphia Inquirer
- Philadelphia Gay News
- ¡Presente! Media
- Resolve Philly
- Technical.ly
- WHY?
- Wissahickon Magazine
- Wissahickon Now
- WPHL
- WURD

### SCHUYLKILL

- The Citizen Standard
- Republican Herald
- Shenandoah Sentinel

### SOMERSET

- Daily American

### SUSQUEHANNA

- WSKG Public Media

### VENANGO

- explorevenango.com

### WARREN

- Warren Radio
- Warren County Guide
- YourDailyLocal.com

### WASHINGTON

- Washington Observer-Reporter

### WAYNE

- River Reporter
- WJFF Radio

### WESTMORELAND

- Latrobe Bulletin
- Mon Valley Independent

### YORK

- The Hanover Evening Sun
- York Daily Record
- The York Dispatch

# PA ELECTIONS & BEYOND

Since launching the Democracy Initiative in 2022, Spotlight PA has become Pennsylvania's No. 1 source for statewide, nonpartisan, voter-centric election coverage. As the largest statewide news organization in the commonwealth, Spotlight PA is uniquely positioned to equip and empower voters and cut through the noise, confusion, and misinformation that surrounds elections today. We built and expanded the Democracy Initiative in response to reader demand: It was clear that Pennsylvanians were eager for more public-service journalism focused on the stakes of each race and candidates' positions, the systems that run Pennsylvania elections, and the safeguards in place to ensure they are free, fair, and without fraud.

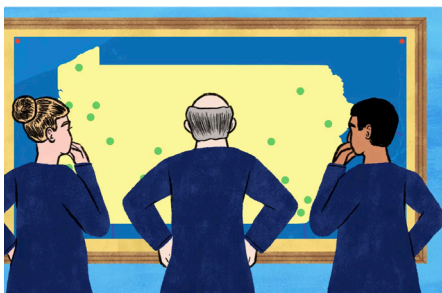
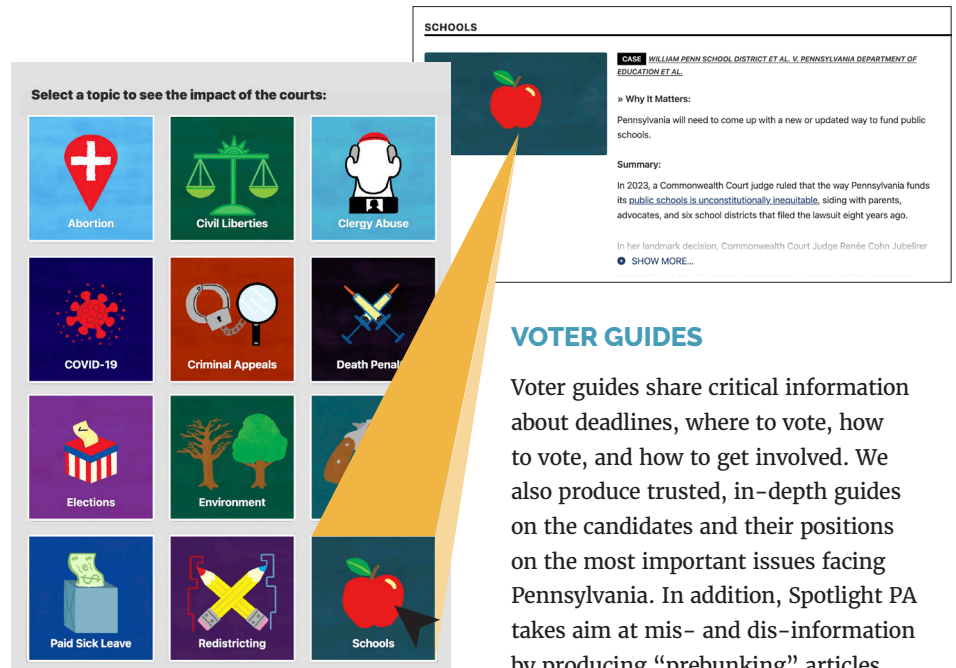


Illustration by Daniel Fishel.

“ I use your site to do research of candidates during each election. A GREAT resource.”

DEBORAH D., SPOTLIGHT PA READER AND CONTRIBUTOR

We seek to sustain and grow the Democracy Initiative by developing new tools to help voters and finding new avenues to engage them, especially those who are new to the process or traditionally underserved. The best outcomes for engagement in our democracy will be achieved not by attempting to activate voters for a few weeks every year, but by building an information infrastructure that continuously informs and engages them about the workings of government, elected officials, and the civic process.



Illustrations by Daniel Fishel.

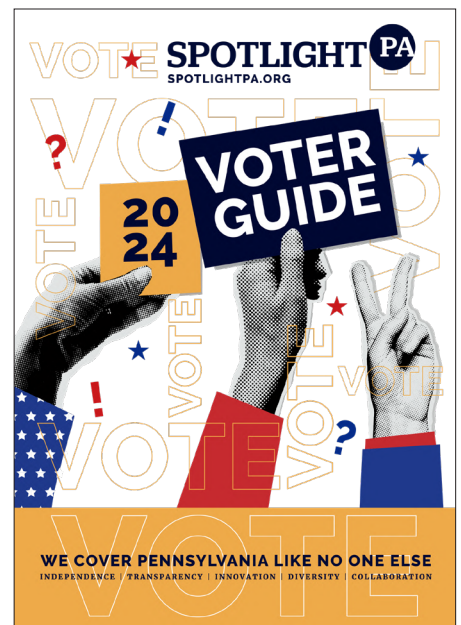
## VOTER GUIDES

Voter guides share critical information about deadlines, where to vote, how to vote, and how to get involved. We also produce trusted, in-depth guides on the candidates and their positions on the most important issues facing Pennsylvania. In addition, Spotlight PA takes aim at mis- and dis-information by producing “prebunking” articles that focus on areas that have been misconstrued in the past so voters have a trusted resource to use when issues arise.

## INTERACTIVE TOOLS

For the 2024 primary and general elections, we developed an interactive “Your Next” tool that helped voters identify the candidates for state attorney general, auditor general, and treasurer who most aligned with their values and priorities. More than 30,000 people completed the interactive quiz, with an engaged time of more than 3 minutes.

In 2023, as part of a larger “Why Judges Matter” package, we developed an interactive tool illustrating how court decisions shape policy issues from abortion to gun rights. This project won the state’s prestigious Public Service Award.



Cover of our Voter Guide that was mailed to 80,000 newly registered Pennsylvania voters.



Photo by Matt Smith.

### AI ELECTION ASSISTANT

We developed a unique AI-powered election chat tool to connect Pennsylvanians with immediate and relevant answers to their questions about the 2024 election. The tool leverages custom software and artificial intelligence (AI) to answer a variety of questions drawing on Spotlight PA’s reporting and trusted, public resources from the Pennsylvania Department of State. The tool answered thousands of questions in the lead-up to the 2024 election, and all answers were monitored in near real-time to ensure accuracy.

### EVENTS

Spotlight PA holds virtual and in-person events across the state, some in collaboration with partners, that provide Pennsylvania voters with trusted election information. For example, Spotlight PA partnered with other media in 2022 to hold primary debates at Dickinson College and Gettysburg College. In 2024, Spotlight PA partnered with The Philadelphia Citizen and other outlets to host live interviews of the candidates for state attorney general — before the primary and then before the general election — in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

### ALL-IN-ONE ELECTION CENTER

We created an online one-stop shop for all of Spotlight PA’s nonpartisan election resources at [spotlightpa.org/elections](http://spotlightpa.org/elections). The Election Center houses all of Spotlight PA’s voting materials under one roof, such as original Spotlight PA election articles, voter guides, and information about key dates.



Illustration by Daniel Fishel.

### VOTEBEAT PARTNERSHIP



We have also partnered with Votebeat, a national nonprofit newsroom focused on voting and election coverage, since 2020 to enhance our coverage. Votebeat has a full-time reporter in Pennsylvania who coordinates with our team on articles and coverage.

“ One good way to tell if your election coverage is mission-driven or if it’s ‘horse race’ is to implement a sniff test. Take Spotlight PA as an example, who ask ‘How does this help a voter make an informed choice?’ before they write an election story.”

AMERICA AMPLIFIED

### AWARDS

**LION Local Journalism Awards** *Product of the Year Award (Finalist)*

**Nonprofit News Awards** *INNovator Award (Finalist, 2023 and 2024)*

**Pa. NewsMedia Association, Keystone Media Awards** *Public Service Award (Winner, 2023 and 2024)*

**Press Club of Western Pennsylvania, Golden Quill Awards** *Excellence in Journalistic Craft Achievement, Digital Presentation (with Votebeat, Finalist)*

# REGIONAL EXPANSION

As Spotlight PA's work has garnered more local and national recognition, the call has grown for the newsroom to help bring investigative journalists back to local communities in Pennsylvania. To address this, Spotlight PA developed a regional hub-and-spoke model that leverages the centralized efficiency, organizational structure, and distribution network of its statewide news operation to create and support regional bureaus. We launched our first regional bureau in 2022, based in State College and covering north-central Pennsylvania, and a second regional bureau, based in Reading and covering Berks County, is launching in 2025. Discussions are underway for additional expansions in other parts of the state. With each bureau, we are unlocking new support and philanthropy to enhance vital local journalism.

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Setting a  
**national  
standard**  
for reinvigorating  
local journalism

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Spotlight PA State College's 2024 Quiz Bash fundraiser at Axemann Brewery in Bellefonte. Photo by Georgianna Sutherland.

## STATE COLLEGE

Spotlight PA launched its first regional bureau in July 2022. The bureau is based in State College and covers 14 counties in north-central Pennsylvania. With a team of four journalists, Spotlight PA State College produces investigative and public-service journalism about Penn State University, challenges facing rural communities, and local government accountability. The bureau has consistently delivered unique, relevant, and impactful reporting for the region as well as for Spotlight PA's statewide audience and newsroom partners. In 2024, the State College bureau was one of six newsrooms nationwide chosen as part of the Knight Growth Challenge Fund's inaugural cohort and awarded \$600,000 over two years. Spotlight PA State College has served as a model for how to address the crisis in local news in communities across the state. Thanks to the success of the bureau, Spotlight PA is expanding its regional network.

## BERKS COUNTY

In Berks County, the severe decline in local reporting in recent years has stifled transparency and accountability at all levels. In 2023-24, with the support of Berks County Community Foundation, Spotlight PA undertook a yearlong community research project in Reading and Berks County to assess the possibility of launching a second bureau. The study engaged more than 1,000 Berks residents in a series of local discussions and an expansive survey to identify information gaps, coverage needs, and news preferences in the local market. It found that Berks County residents are extremely frustrated with the diminished capacity of the local newspaper and they are concerned about a lack of access to trustworthy information in their community. Nearly three-quarters of the residents who participated in the research identified access to local news

as “extremely important” to them. They said the most pressing need was more reporting to keep local governments honest and accountable. Spotlight PA also contracted a firm to conduct a philanthropic feasibility study in the region, which tested the case for support from foundations, corporations, and individuals. As a result of the findings of both the community study and the feasibility study, Spotlight PA is

launching a new regional reporting bureau in Berks County in 2025, to be supported primarily by people living and working in the region. The journalism produced by the new bureau will be freely available as a public resource to all in the community, and other local organizations can republish it at no cost. Spotlight PA has already partnered with Berks Community Television, Berks Weekly, WEEU, and WFMZ.

“ When I went home to visit my family in rural Graham Township, Clearfield County, everyone was talking about your DuBois story. The work you are doing is vital to rebuilding trust in the media in communities like rural Pennsylvania. Thank you!”

NICHOLE D., SPOTLIGHT PA READER AND CONTRIBUTOR



**1** A street in St. Marys, Pa., which is in Spotlight PA State College's north-central coverage area. Photo by Nate Smallwood. **2** Troy Geiter was one of the patients affected by the closure of the abdominal transplant programs at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. Photo by Susan L. Angstadt. **3** A listening session as part of Spotlight PA's yearlong community study in Berks County. Photo by Susan L. Angstadt. **4** Old Main on Penn State's University Park campus. Photo by Georgianna Sutherland.



Illustration by Daniel Fishel.

## AWARDS

**Nonprofit News Awards**  
*Community Champion Award*

**Nonprofit News Awards**  
*Nonprofit Newcomer of the Year (Finalist)*

**LION Local Journalism Awards**  
*Collaboration of the Year*

**National Headliner Awards**  
*Education Writing (Finalist)*

**ONA Online Journalism Awards** *Feature Story (Finalist, 2023 and 2024)*

**Pa. NewsMedia Association, Keystone Media Awards**  
*Personality Profile*

**Pa. NewsMedia Association, Keystone Media Awards**  
*John V.R. Bull First Amendment Award*

**Press Club of Western Pennsylvania, Golden Quill Awards**  
*Excellence in Written Journalism, Education, News Feature, Public Affairs/Politics/Government*

**Society of Professional Journalists' Keystone Pro Chapter**  
*Education Writing*

# IMPACT

Spotlight PA's unmatched investigative journalism holds powerful public and private forces — especially governments, elected officials, businesses, and special interests — to account for the benefit of all in Pennsylvania. Our reporters are uncovering stories that would otherwise go untold and producing work that drives the conversation in Pennsylvania and leads to meaningful change in the state Capitol and beyond.

## \$20+ Million

Taxpayer dollars saved or returned

## 35

Policies Changed

## 14

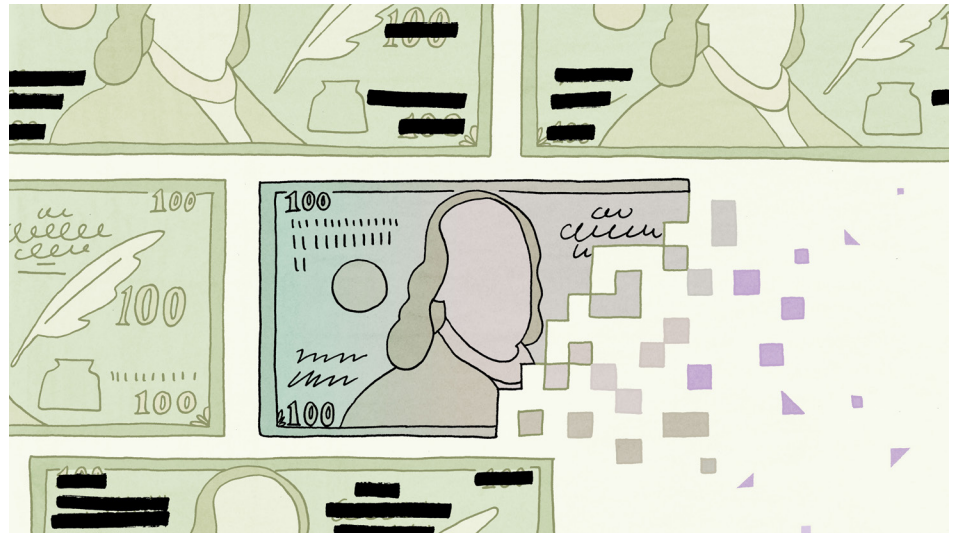
Bills Introduced

## 8

Legal Victories

“We’ve saved taxpayers millions of dollars, uncovered broken government programs and gotten people life-changing help, and held lawmakers and powerful institutions accountable for their actions.”

CHRISTOPHER BAXTER, CEO & PRESIDENT OF SPOTLIGHT PA



Spotlight PA's "Hidden Tab" investigation delved into how taxpayers foot a huge bill to run Pa's full-time legislature, but are blocked from many details. Illustration by Leise Hook.

### GOVERNOR'S OFFICE & LEGISLATURE

A yearlong investigation by Spotlight PA and The Caucus found Pennsylvania lawmakers, operating under some of the weakest campaign finance laws in the country, obscured nearly \$3.5 million in campaign spending from 2016 through 2018.

Another series with The Caucus into how lawmakers spend tax dollars on themselves and hide it from the public resulted in new legislation and the Senate posting expenses online for the first time — an unprecedented move towards transparency in Harrisburg.

Spotlight PA has also reported extensively on Gov. Josh Shapiro, including gifts he has accepted from special interests and a settlement related

to a sexual harassment complaint against one of Shapiro's most trusted advisors. A report detailing the governor's extensive use of the state plane — far more than his predecessor — led a lawmaker to introduce a bill to restrict use only to state business.

Spotlight PA's exclusive reporting on Shapiro found he quietly revised his administration's code of conduct to bar state employees from engaging in "scandalous or disgraceful" behavior, actions that could lead to discipline or termination. Shapiro did so amid protests over the war in Gaza, setting off First Amendment concerns. FIRE, a Philadelphia-based free speech advocacy organization, sent a letter to Shapiro about the policy and sought plaintiffs for a potential First Amendment lawsuit against the administration.

## MORTGAGE RELIEF

A Spotlight PA investigation into Pennsylvania's pandemic mortgage relief program found long delays and poor communication were leaving thousands in limbo, with their homes and utilities at risk. Immediately after the story was published, the state fired the third-party contractor running the program. Later reporting revealed the state only learned of the extent of the problems while fulfilling public records requests filed by Spotlight PA.

## UNEMPLOYMENT ERROR

A Spotlight PA investigation revealed how the state Labor Department overcharged unemployed residents for years and never made the problem public, directly prompting state officials to admit the error and say they would return \$19 million to Pennsylvanians.

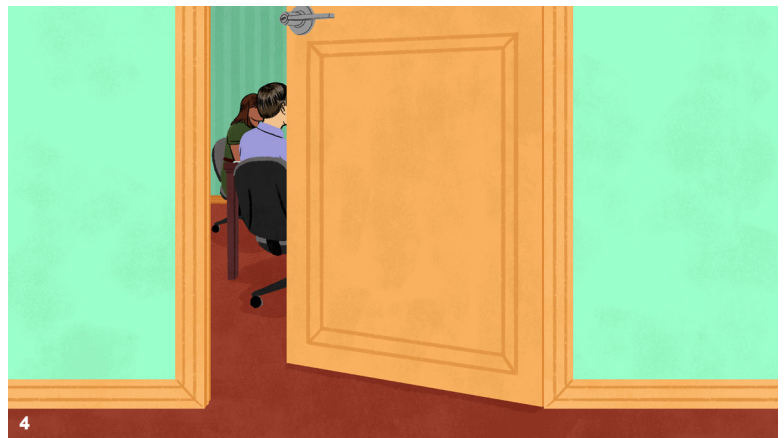
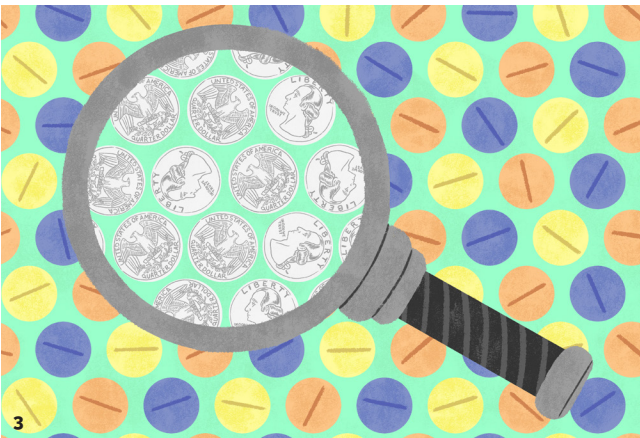
## STATE COLLEGES

A Spotlight PA investigation into how Pennsylvania's higher education system failed students of color prompted an advocacy effort for reform in the state college system (PASSHE). State senators have urged the universities to take action and Spotlight PA's reporting was cited by Pennsylvania's civil rights agency in the release of a report about the issue.



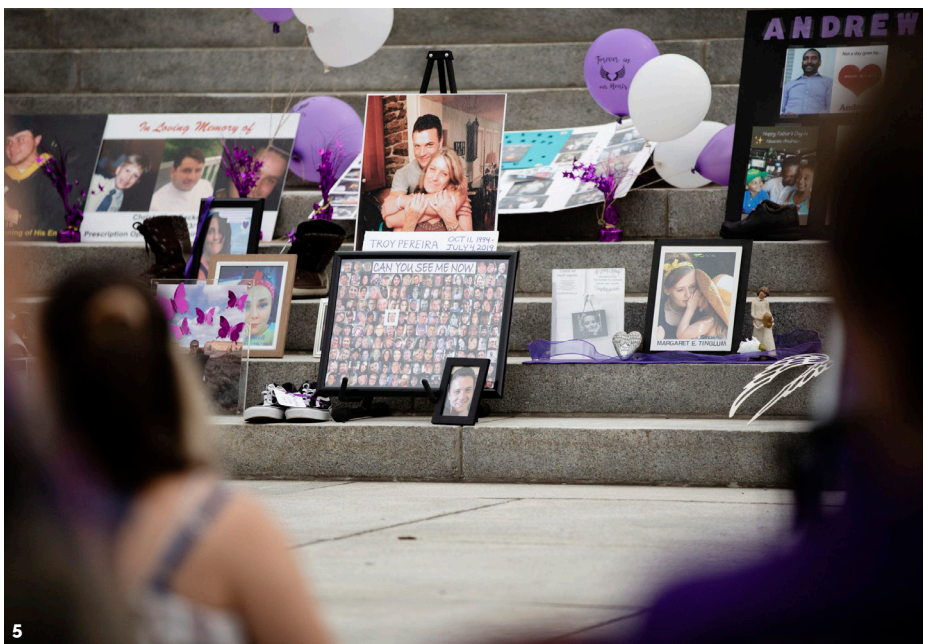
**1** Advocates urged the state to speed up its backlogged mortgage relief program. Photo by Jelani Splawn. **2** Lynn Darby transferred from Bloomsburg University to Temple in Philadelphia after feeling like an outsider on campus. Photo by Dan Gleiter / PennLive. **3** Mike Ramsey was among the many unable to get mortgage or utility relief from a state program. Photo by Nate Smallwood. **4** The Department of Labor building in Harrisburg. Photo by Jelani Splawn. **5** Gov. Josh Shapiro in Philadelphia in November 2024. Photo by Commonwealth Media Services.

# IMPACT



**1** The parents of Christian Hall. Spotlight PA and NBC News reported that the teenager had his hands up when Pennsylvania State Police killed him. Photo by Fred Adams.  
**2-5** Spotlight PA has reported extensively on how the state is spending opioid settlement funds. There has been controversy over spending it on syringe services. Photo by Nate Smallwood (2). Illustrations by Daniel Fishel (3-4). Photo by Amanda Berg (5).

Uncovering and enhancing  
**stories of  
statewide  
importance**  
that otherwise would go  
unnoticed or untold



“ We can’t afford to leave those with power and influence — especially government — to their own devices and without sustained scrutiny.”

CHRISTOPHER BAXTER, CEO & PRESIDENT OF SPOTLIGHT PA



Mary Buffaloe holds a picture of her brother Raymond Caliman. Inspired by Spotlight PA’s reporting, an attorney secured her brother’s release from prison using the state’s compassionate release law. Photo by Joe Lamberti.

### STATE POLICE

After Spotlight PA revealed that the Pennsylvania State Police had quietly stopped tracking the race of drivers who get pulled over—making it harder to detect bias—the State Police resumed tracking race data from traffic stops and resumed a data analysis partnership with the University of Cincinnati.

A Spotlight PA and NBC News investigation into the State Police shooting of Christian Hall in the Poconos revealed for the first time that the teenager had his hands in the air when he was shot and killed, prompting a new national wave of attention on the case. The story contributed to calls to remove State Police from investigating incidents involving fellow troopers, and to a federal excessive force lawsuit against the agency. The case became a central issue in the local district attorney’s election.

### JUSTICE SYSTEM

A Spotlight PA investigation into the state’s broken system for protecting

incarcerated people with mental health needs included the creation of a first-of-its-kind database of cases involving competency hearings. The data has since been requested by researchers as valuable to understanding the extent of the problem.

And a Spotlight PA investigation into the state’s broken compassionate release program for the state’s oldest and most frail prisoners led an attorney to take up the case of the man featured in the story, and his application for relief was granted. Lawmakers drew on Spotlight PA’s ongoing coverage of compassionate release in drafting legislation introduced during the 2025–26 session to fix the broken process and expand medical release for incarcerated individuals.

### OPIOID SETTLEMENT MONEY

Spotlight PA’s investigative reporting into how Pennsylvania is spending its opioid settlement money found a push to use funds on police and prosecutors, barriers to a widely supported public health intervention, confusion about the

process, and decisions made in secret. As a direct result of reporting as part of this series, Allegheny County received \$479,000 it had been slated to lose.

### ADDICTION TREATMENT

A Spotlight PA investigation found that a state agency’s long-running failure to clarify federal rules around funding for addiction treatment and medical marijuana use had deadly consequences. In response, state officials updated policies and the federal government eliminated policy language that had caused the confusion.

A separate Spotlight PA and Kaiser Health News investigation into how Pennsylvania’s Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs allowed treatment providers to continue operating despite repeated violations and harm to clients contributed to a new effort to give the state the authority to fine providers.

## SELECTED AWARDS

**Gerald Loeb Award** *Local (with the Philadelphia Inquirer)*

**Investigative Reporters and Editors** *FOI Award (Winner with The Caucus, 2022, Finalist, 2024)*

**Nonprofit News Awards** *Game-Changer Award*

**Nonprofit News Awards** *Best Investigative Journalism Award (2021, 2022)*

**ONA Online Journalism Awards** *Al Neuharth Innovation in Investigative Journalism Award*

**Toner Prize** *Excellence in Local Political Reporting (Finalist with The Caucus)*

**LION Local Journalism Awards** *Outstanding Coverage Award (Finalist)*

**National Headliner Awards** *Education Writing*



Spotlight PA produced high-impact reporting on nursing homes during the pandemic. Illustration by Dan Nott.

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## Uncovering **waste, fraud & abuse** in Pennsylvania

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### NURSING HOMES

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Spotlight PA reported that state and federal officials had not released patient and death data for individual nursing homes, making it nearly impossible to examine if facilities were properly responding to the crisis. Following our reporting and pressure from lawmakers and other advocacy groups, the state released the list of nursing homes with COVID-19 cases and deaths.

A separate Spotlight PA investigation found the pandemic had exploited Pennsylvania's failure to correct outdated nursing home regulations, dangerously low staffing requirements for nurses, and overarching issues with weak and inconsistent inspections. A state lawmaker introduced a bill to address the longstanding problems highlighted by the story.

### LOCAL CORRUPTION

Spotlight PA spent months delving into how the manager of a small Pennsylvania city landed at the center of one of the most sweeping political corruption cases in the state in recent years. The investigation was highlighted by the New York Times as among "some of the best work from news outlets across the U.S." and residents praised the work as groundbreaking and vital, especially given the local newspaper provided no similar coverage.

### PANDEMIC FRAUD

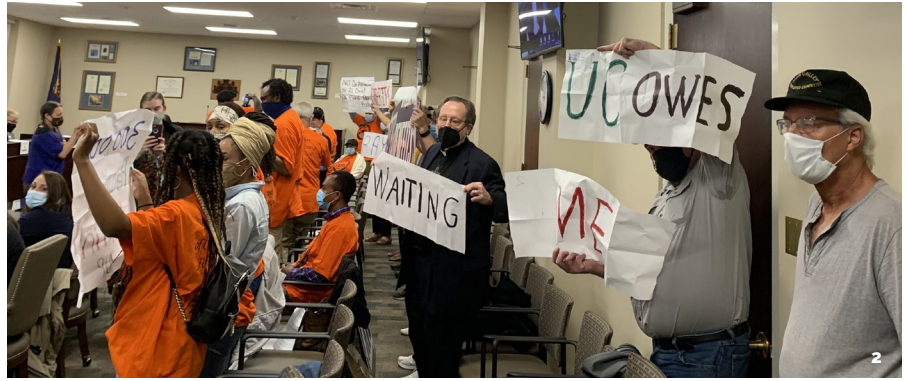
A pandemic-era unemployment program was hard hit by fraudsters, leaving thousands of apparent victims frustrated and confused after receiving unexpected tax documents. Spotlight PA's investigation into the issue helped one woman access her benefits, while the Office of Attorney General stepped in to help another person highlighted.

### HELP FOR OLDER ADULTS

Spotlight PA found the number of older Pennsylvanians getting help from a property tax rebate program was shrinking as lawmakers in Harrisburg dragged their heels on a long-term fix. Shortly after the story ran, a state senator introduced a bill to expand the program, and a similar proposal was signed into law by Gov. Josh Shapiro the following year.

“ The impact Spotlight PA has had on Pennsylvania in five short years is remarkable. As a longtime journalist, I’m hugely impressed. And as the chair of the Spotlight PA board, I’m hugely proud.”

DAVID BOARDMAN, SPOTLIGHT PA BOARD CHAIR AND DEAN AND PROFESSOR, KLEIN COLLEGE OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY



Driving meaningful  
**change  
 & policy  
 reforms**  
 in the state capital  
 and beyond

**1** A Spotlight PA State College investigation dug into how one man remade the city of DuBois, while allegedly ripping off his neighbors. Photo by Nate Smallwood. **2** A labor hearing at the state Capitol in Harrisburg in 2021. Photo by Rebecca Moss. **3** Then-Attorney General Josh Shapiro and his office helped a woman affected by unemployment fraud whose case was highlighted by Spotlight PA. Photo from Commonwealth Media Services. **4** Sandy Kolenda was a victim of identity fraud through Pennsylvania's unemployment system. Photo by Nate Smallwood / Tribune-Review. **5** Spotlight PA reported on a shrinking property tax rebate program for older people. A major expansion was later signed into law. Illustration by Daniel Fishel.

# FIGHTING FOR TRANSPARENCY

Spotlight PA's reporters frequently rely on public records requests to uncover information that is valuable to Pennsylvanians and would otherwise go untold. However, government agencies sometimes try to keep important information secret, and Spotlight PA has to use another tool: the courts. Spotlight PA is represented pro bono by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, a national nonprofit that employs First Amendment Lawyers to help ensure our powerful institutions abide by the state's public records and meeting laws. The newsroom also received pro bono legal review from Ballard Spahr in Philadelphia.

Keeping  
**government honest**  
and combating secrecy in  
state and local government

Promoting  
**transparency  
and openness**  
for the health of our state

Fighting to ensure  
**powerful  
institutions abide**  
by the state's public records  
and meeting laws

“We’re proud to have helped Spotlight PA successfully push for greater government transparency and accountability in Pennsylvania. Access to information about how public officials are carrying out their duties is essential to supporting strong, engaged, and informed communities across the state.”

PAULA KNUDSEN BURKE, LOCAL LEGAL INITIATIVE ATTORNEY FOR PENNSYLVANIA,  
REPORTERS COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS



Illustration by Leise Hook.

## PENN STATE UNIVERSITY

Spotlight PA is involved in two ongoing court cases involving Penn State. In the first case, the university and the Pennsylvania Department of Education have asked the Commonwealth Court to block the release of university records that were deemed public by the Office of Open Records. In the second case, Spotlight PA has sued the university's Board of Trustees over alleged violations of the open meetings law.

## MEDICAL MARIJUANA

A Spotlight PA court victory led to new academic research into Pennsylvania's medical marijuana program. Geisinger

researchers described their study, based on data that Spotlight PA won access to after a 15-month battle, as “the first study in the USA of the association between dispensary locations and qualifying conditions.” The records consisted of anonymized medical marijuana certifications, which showed the reasons why hundreds of thousands of patients qualify for the state's medical marijuana program. Spotlight PA's investigation based on the records found that anxiety disorders are the No. 1 reason why patients get approved for a medical marijuana card, and there was weak oversight and companies courting patients without a previous diagnosis. Drexel University's Medical Cannabis

Research Center cited Spotlight PA’s analysis in a review of the research around cannabis and anxiety. The Pennsylvania Department of Health has since promised greater transparency and it now posts online the certification data it previously fought to keep secret. A pharmacist who serves on the state Medical Marijuana Advisory Board publicly praised the increased transparency at a 2023 meeting, saying it would bring Pennsylvania in line with some other states.

### PRIVATE LAWYERS

A court ruled in favor of Spotlight PA and partner The Caucus, part of LNP Media Group in Lancaster, that the legislature cannot categorically redact the reasons for hiring private lawyers based on attorney-client privilege, but must instead meet the burden of withholding records on a case-by-case basis.

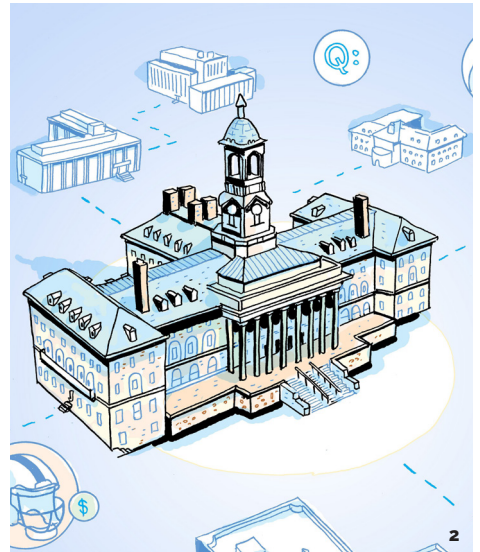
A court also ordered the governor’s office to reveal more details about why it hired private law firms.

### SMALL TOWN CORRUPTION

Spotlight PA joined with four partner newsrooms in filing suit seeking to unseal records in a widely publicized corruption case against former DuBois City Manager Herm Suplizio. The documents, which are normally made public in the usual course of business, were later released.

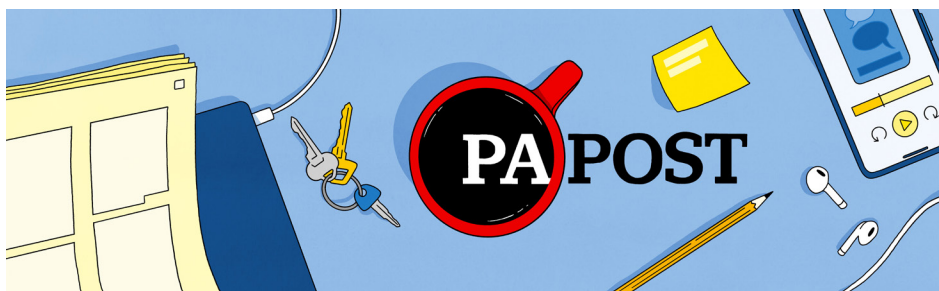


1 Supporters of marijuana legalization gather at the Capitol. Photo by Ed Mahon. 2 An illustration of the main Penn State campus. Illustration by Dan Nott. 3 A street in DuBois. Photo by Georgianna Sutherland. 4 An illustration of a courtroom. Illustration by Daniel Fishel.



# INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Spotlight PA presents its news, investigations, and civic information in innovative digital formats to make its work as relevant and easy-to-access as possible. Spotlight PA's products include daily and weekly email newsletters, a weekly news quiz, a mobile app, and reader tools like interactive maps, databases, sample ballots, and more. Spotlight PA also hosts regular virtual events, including expert panels and live interviews with newsmakers.



## EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Spotlight PA has a popular daily (Monday–Friday) newsletter and a growing lineup of weekly newsletters reaching an audience of 50,000 people. We cover the day's most important statewide news, behind-the-scenes looks at our latest investigations, and uplifting stories and events happening across the commonwealth. Our newsletters inform, equip, and inspire readers to stay connected with their communities, all at no cost, directly to their inbox. Our “good news” newsletter, PA Local, won the Excellence in Newsletters Portfolio award from the Online News Association in 2024, beating the Boston Globe and Wall Street Journal.



The Investigator is one of Spotlight PA's free weekly newsletters.

## WEEKLY NEWS QUIZ

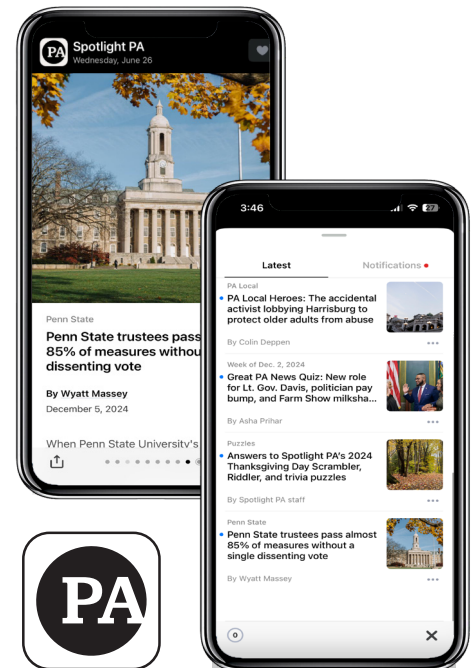
Spotlight PA publishes a weekly news quiz about statehouse and statewide news. Quizzes have been shown to help people learn and digest content, and they also enable us to see (on the back end) aggregate data on our audience's information gaps.

## READER TOOLS

Digital tools enable readers to access our work in more interactive, user-friendly formats. For example, we produced a redistricting map comparison tool, where Pennsylvanians could type in their addresses and see how their district would change. We also produced quizzes before elections to help voters identify statewide candidates that most aligned with their values and priorities. Alongside an investigation into one of the most controversial infrastructure projects in Pennsylvania's history, we produced an interactive map of vulnerable buildings along the length of the Mariner East pipeline system. During the pandemic, we produced weekly COVID-19 email alerts with the latest county-by-county data.

“After reading your great reporting nice to actually meet you on zoom. Keep up the excellent reporting. Glad to be a member.”

LILLIAN H.



## SPOTLIGHT PA APP

Based on reader feedback, we launched a new Spotlight PA mobile app. Available for free on the Apple App Store and Google Play, the app offers readers a convenient way to keep up with Spotlight PA's reporting. The app streamlines the reader experience by sharing our latest stories in a visual, easy-to-read format, and allows us to use push alerts to get breaking news out fast.



Spotlight PA strives to inform, equip, and inspire Pennsylvanians on critical topics, including elections and voting.



**CIVIC EVENTS**

Spotlight PA offers regular virtual panels, live interviews, and reader Q&As on important statehouse and statewide topics, featuring our reporters, newsmakers, and experts from around Pennsylvania. Thousands of people have tuned in to our events over the years.



**1** Spotlight PA partnered with Capital B in 2024 on the Philadelphia stop of its Black Political Power Tour. **2** Spotlight PA hosted a Zoom event on the history of Pa.'s queer media. Photo by Commonwealth Media Services. **3** As part of Spotlight PA State College's "How Local Government Works" series, reporter Min Xian hosted a discussion on why local governments struggle to attract and keep talent. Illustration by Dan Nott. **4** Spotlight PA reporting presented at Philly Story Fest in 2023. Photo courtesy of Colibri Workshop / Back Pocket Media. **5** A live interview in fall 2024 with attorney general candidates. Photo by Evan Levine.



**MERCHANDISE STORE**

Spotlight PA launched a merchandise store in late 2023 featuring custom Pennsylvania art we commissioned from a local artist. Our oversized tote bags quickly became a hit, and since then we've added a "Now Serving the Truth" apron, an "All Sun, No Shade" beach towel, mugs, hats, sunglasses, T-shirts, and a "Headline Brews" coffee in collaboration with Rothrock Coffee in State College. The store strengthens our connection with readers and allows us all to have fun.



**“ I love your Zoom updates and try to attend them all.”**

CATHY Y.

# SUSTAINING THE WORK

Spotlight PA's success over the past five years would not have been possible without our generous, committed donors, who believe deeply in the power of high-impact investigative and public-service journalism for Pennsylvania.

**\$17+ Million**  
Total Raised

**50**  
Foundations, Nonprofits,  
or Media Partners  
Giving Support

**9,000+**  
Individual Donors

**50,000**  
Newsletter Subscribers



Former Washington Post editor Marty Baron in conversation with Spotlight PA CEO Christopher Baxter at a donor event in 2024. Photo by Alan Sylvestre.

## FOUNDING DONORS

A special thanks to The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, which both founded Spotlight PA and has provided more financial support than any other entity or individual in the past five years. Poor Richard's Charitable Trust provided generous three-year support at a time when Spotlight PA was still an idea on a piece of paper, and has continued to support Spotlight PA at a high level ever since. Wyncote Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, the Henry L. Hillman Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Good Words Foundation, The Pittsburgh Foundation and The Philadelphia Foundation also provided early, generous support and have continued to be critical to Spotlight PA's financial sustainability since.

## HIGH-IMPACT SUPPORT

The American Journalism Project generously supported us at a critical time, transforming our business and operations teams so that Spotlight PA could grow sustainably. Richard Williams also provided catalytic support, enabling Spotlight PA to produce much more high-impact journalism over several years. Posner Foundation of Pittsburgh joined in a critical moment for Spotlight PA, providing generous support that has underpinned our growing newsroom.

## LOCAL EXPANSION

### State College

Knight Foundation, Centre Foundation, and myriad individual donors, led by Katie O'Toole and R Thomas Berner, made our State College regional bureau possible.

### Berks

Berks County Community Foundation generously funded Spotlight PA's community and philanthropic feasibility study in Berks County, which equipped us with the information, resources, and confidence to launch a bureau in 2025. Berks County Community Foundation,



A Spotlight PA State College Quiz Bash fundraiser. Photos by Georgianna Sutherland.



“**Spotlight PA is viewed widely as a national model for revitalizing local news, engaging audiences across the political spectrum, and partnering productively with over 100 fellow news organizations within its home state.**”

JIM FRIEDLICH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & CEO, THE LENFEST INSTITUTE FOR JOURNALISM

Wyomissing Foundation, and Breidegam Family Foundation have all provided three-year funding commitments for the new bureau. Special thanks to the Henry Janssen Foundation, the Berks Alliance, the United Way of Berks County, Marlin Miller, and the Kurr Foundation for providing generous support for the bureau as well.

### LEADERS IN ACTION

We launched a leadership giving program to honor individuals giving gifts of \$1,000 or more, and we'll be adding more levels in 2025. Leaders in Action has grown from 12 people in 2020 to more than 100 in 2024. Our regional volunteer community campaign chairs have helped make this possible: special thanks to David Erdman, Lehigh Valley Community Campaign Chair; Katie O'Toole, State College Community Campaign Chair; and Jennifer Bertetto, Pittsburgh Community Campaign Chair.

### MEMBERS

Members are individual donors who contribute anywhere from \$1 to \$999 to Spotlight PA. Our membership has grown from about 1,500 individuals in 2020 to about 5,700 in 2024. Membership is an essential

revenue source for Spotlight PA, and, since our members come from all all corners of Pennsylvania, illustrates to larger donors and foundations that Pennsylvanians truly value Spotlight PA's work.

### EVENTS & SPONSORSHIP

Spotlight PA is diversifying its revenue through events, newsletter sponsorships, and more. Special thanks to Ballard Spahr for sponsoring our “PA Local Heroes” series in our PA Local newsletter. Thank you to the sponsors of our Path to Equity event in 2023 and to our State College Bureau Quiz Bash sponsors in 2023 and 2024, which included a wide range of generous foundations, nonprofits, businesses, and individuals.

### RAISING AWARENESS

Spotlight PA's readers and donors serve a crucial role in raising awareness about our mission and nonprofit business model, by hosting us at their homes, local rotary events, and inviting us to speak to other local civic groups. Get in touch anytime about speaking opportunities or hosting an event for Spotlight PA.



A panel during a “Path to Equity” event in Harrisburg in 2023, hosted by Spotlight PA and Color & Culture. Photo by John Bivins.

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