



## Opinion Column

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**For more information, contact  
Tricia Harris, communications manager  
717 720-5447 or 717 645-2073**

### **Legislature Looks at Labor, Workforce Issues**

While much attention has been paid to the state's budgetary issues over the past several weeks, the state legislature has also been looking at ways to improve Pennsylvania's business climate. Last month, both chambers of the General Assembly passed separate pieces of legislation that would help to bring uniformity and fairness in the Commonwealth's labor laws.

Local governments nationwide have been imposing across-the-board paid leave policies on businesses. The most recent example is in Philadelphia, where a new law places a paid leave mandate on employers with 10 or more workers. These types of blanket mandates hurt Pennsylvania's business climate by ignoring the characteristics that make each business unique – i.e, their size, industry and financial stability. They also negate HR policies that allow business owners to tailor leave policies to what works best for them and the people they hire. That's why the PA Chamber has been advocating for passage of [S.B. 333](#), which the Senate recently passed by a vote of 37-12 and would prohibit local municipalities from implementing their own mandatory leave policies. We're now telling the House to pass this legislation. Doing so will put Pennsylvania in line with other states that have recently enacted similar laws. It will also bring consistency and predictability to Pennsylvania's business climate, improving the Commonwealth's ability to compete with other states and putting leave decisions in the hands of the person who knows the business best – the owner.

We're also applauding the House for their passage of an important bill that would eliminate a loophole in the Crimes Code. Under current law, law enforcement is prevented from intervening in situations involving stalking, harassment and even bomb threats if the perpetrator is a party to a labor dispute. While we understand that most unions do not engage in these intimidating behaviors, there is a dark side to the organized labor movement that has allowed egregious activity to go unpunished. [House Bill 874](#), which passed by a vote of 109 to 84, would remove this exemption, ensuring that all parties – including unions, workers and employers – are fairly protected during labor disputes.

In other workforce news, there have been renewed calls by legislators in both the House and Senate to raise the state's minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour. What special interests who favor an increase fail to take into account are the many unintended consequences a mandated wage hike will have on Pennsylvania's small business community and low wage workers. Numerous studies have shown that an increase to \$10.10 will lead to job loss. In a [February 2014 report](#), the Congressional Budget Office estimated that it could lead to the loss of at least 500,000 jobs nationwide. A Pennsylvania specific [study](#) by the Employment Policies Institute showed that such an increase would result in the loss of 30,000 jobs statewide. Another [study](#) showed that a minimum wage increase can create additional burdens on those living in poverty, due to the higher prices on goods and services that result from higher labor costs. There are simply more effective, targeted approaches that can better help low-wage earners, including strengthening workforce development programs and Earned Income Tax Credits – which don't trigger the negative unintended consequences of a mandated wage hike.

Throughout this legislative session, the PA Chamber will continue to monitor these issues and promote pro-business policies that will help the private sector to flourish and our economy to grow.

*Gene Barr*

President and CEO

PA Chamber of Business and Industry

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