

PA HOUSE MEMBERS PLAY CATCH-UP WITH RAPID DATA CENTER DEVELOPMENT



**By Christina Lengyel,
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The era of the data center has arrived, and with it comes a hefty assortment of House bills aimed at regulating the new tech infrastructure.

While many previous bills have focused on the role of artificial intelligence itself, like limiting its use in health care or education, October saw the circulation of five separate memos concerning legislation around data centers.

One bill from Rep. Kyle Mullins, D-Peckville, and Rep. Kyle Donahue, D-Scranton, whose Lackawanna County is a proposed location for several new data center projects, calls for accountability and transparency.

"Without clear reporting, it is difficult for policymakers to fully understand and mitigate impacts on ratepayers, the electric grid, local water supplies, and our environment," write the sponsors, noting that the proliferation of development proposals have left local communities with "more questions than answers."

The legislation would require data center developers and end users to report details about their operations including water and energy consumption to the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, which would then be responsible for creating an impact report with policy recommendations for the legislature.

"Appropriate guardrails can only be applied to this growing industry if residents and policymakers alike have an unrestricted view into data center development and operation," say the sponsors.

Along those lines, Rep. Joe Webster, D-Collegeville, has proposed reporting requirements for water usage ahead of data center development. As it stands, major developers like Amazon have enacted proactive water policies and even entered a compact with UPenn at the Water-AI Nexus Center of Excellence. Still, water use and availability is a highly localized question.

"This step will ensure that state agencies, in collaboration with local governments and river basin commissions, can assess potential impacts and ensure adequate considerations are in place to protect our water supplies," reads the memo.

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DATA CENTER DEVELOPMENT

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Another bill calls for data centers developers to pay prevailing wages for construction in order to be eligible to receive sales and use tax exemptions offered by the state. The legislation is headed up by Rep. Elizabeth Fiedler, D-Philadelphia, Rep. Melissa Cerrato, D-Horsham, and Donahue.

"This reform strikes a balance: developers would still have access to incentives to grow in our state, while workers would be protected with fair wages that reflect the going rate in their trades and regions," reads the memo.

The use of prevailing wages is a thorny issue in the state, with many conservatives saying that the policy drives away business or forces state and local governments to pay more than they should to complete projects. Still others say that by requiring entities to pay prevailing wages, workers are protected from being underbid and exploited.

Rep. Mandy Steele, D-Cheswick, is introducing a bill to help reduce the intense energy demand expected from data centers by incentivizing operators to be efficient. The legislation would be another requiring developers to comply in order to receive the massive tax incentives already offered by the state.

In this case, data centers would need to "obtain recognized energy efficiency certifications, such as LEED, Energy

Star, Green Globes, or International Organization for Standardization (ISO)."

"With this proposal, we can incentivize data centers to operate sustainably, reduce electricity demands, and help meet Pennsylvania's future energy needs," writes Steele. "At the end of the day, the cleanest and cheapest energy is the energy we don't use."

A final bill asks what we do when the data goes out and examines the human toll to potential emergencies. Rep. Christina Sappey, D-Kennett Square, has proposed legislation that addresses emergency preparedness for data centers faced with overheating or electrical failures.

"The high-density layout of computing and storage equipment could lead to fast-spreading fires," writes Sappey. "The consequences of a data center fire extend beyond service interruptions, loss of data, and threats to facilities; fires of this type pose special hazards to firefighters and other first responders."

Sappey's legislation would require data centers, fire departments, and local governments to work together on planning and training for rare but dangerous fires occurring within the large and labyrinthine buildings. It would also require centers to meet the National Fire Protection Association's standards for energy storage facilities.



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Compression pads serve as the interface between the crew module and service module of the Orion MPCV and carry the structural loads generated during launch, space operation, pyroshock separation of the two modules. The compression pads also serve as ablative TPS withstanding the high heating of earth reentry. 3DMAT

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