

# Government Union Political Spending in Pennsylvania's 2023–24 Election Cycle

Andrew Holman, Policy Analyst

## KEY POINTS

- Government unions enjoy a host of special legal privileges in Pennsylvania, which allow their executives to exert undue influence over Pennsylvania's public policy process. Government union bosses use this influence to advocate for policies that further entrench their power and oppose any attempts to disrupt the status quo.
- Membership dues and political action committee (PAC) dollars fund government union political activities. During the 2023–24 election cycle, Pennsylvania's largest government unions spent \$33.5 million on politics.
- Government union PACs spending hit \$18 million during the 2023–24 election cycle, with \$14.2 million contributed directly to candidates and partisan political organizations. Of this, 94.8 percent went to Democrats, helping them keep control of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.
  - Notably, by spending over \$750,000 directly or indirectly on a single seat, government unions determined the 102-101 Democrat majority in the current 2025–26 legislative session.
- Government unions directed \$15.4 million in membership dues to politics, with most expenditures supporting left-wing organizations.<sup>1</sup>
- Government unions use taxpayer resources to collect their political money. This practice should end to ensure that taxpayers are not funding unions' partisan political operations.

## OVERVIEW

Government unions rank among the most powerful and well-funded interest groups in Harrisburg. State law grants many special legal privileges to government union executives, including monopoly representation over public sector workplaces, the ability to collect membership dues and other deductions through the public payroll system, and other legal tools that allow them to escape accountability from their membership.

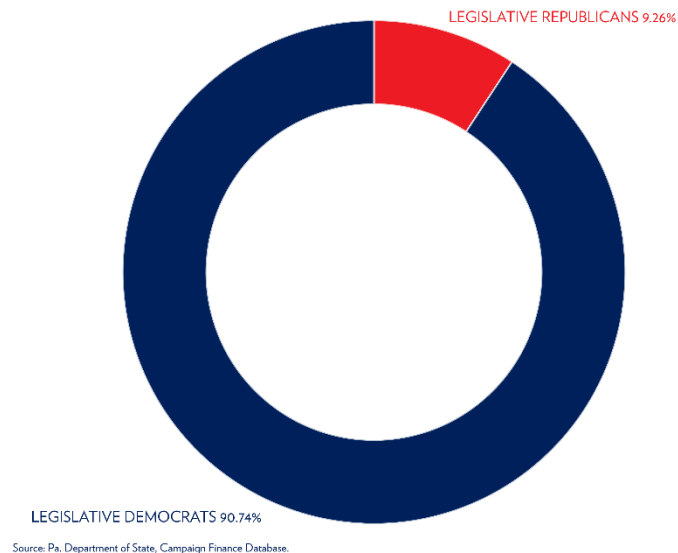
Armed with these legal privileges, government unions advocate for policies that entrench their power and increase the size of government. At the same time, these unions oppose any policy they perceive as a threat to their power, including school choice, tax and expenditure limits, and welfare reform.

Government unions fund their political operations with members' dollars, provided through membership dues and PAC deductions. During the 2023–24 election cycle, government union PACs spent just over \$18 million, with \$14.2 million going directly to candidates and partisan political organizations.<sup>2</sup> Of the money contributed to candidates, 94.8 percent went to Democrats, and 5.2 percent went to Republicans.<sup>3</sup> In

addition to PAC contributions, government unions directed \$15.4 million in membership dues to politics.<sup>4</sup> Since 2007, government unions have used dues and PAC contributions to spend \$227.7 million on politics.

## Pennsylvania Government Union Legislative Contributions, by party

During the 2023–24 election cycle, government unions contributed \$6.47 million to legislative Democrats and \$660,615 to legislative Republicans



### PAC CONTRIBUTIONS: LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES

Pennsylvania's 2023–24 election cycle featured several highly competitive state legislative races. Government union executives invested heavily to ensure control over the legislative process. The result: the Pennsylvania Senate and House of Representatives remain split between parties, with Democrat control of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives determined by a one-seat margin.

Half of all government PAC contributions during the 2023–24 election cycle, totaling \$7.1 million, went to state legislative candidates. Of this, Democrats received \$6.47 million, and just \$660,615 went to Republicans.

Of the \$7.1 million government union PACs spent on state legislative candidates, \$4.6 million went to Pennsylvania House of Representatives candidates:

- House Democrats received \$4.2 million, or 91.5 percent of PAC contributions directed to state House candidates.
- House Democrats receiving significant support from government unions include Reps. Joanna McClinton (\$463,000), Matt Bradford (\$338,500), and Jordan Harris (\$287,000).
- Moreover, government union executives invested heavily in Democratic candidates running competitive state House districts.

- Rep. Frank Burns, whose House race ultimately **determined** the one-seat control of the chamber, received \$60,000 in direct contributions.<sup>5</sup> In addition, government unions gave a combined \$706,000 to the House Democratic Campaign Committee (HDCC). The HDCC put major funds toward competitive House races, including over \$3.4 million for Burns.
- Other candidates in **competitive** state House races who received significant support from government unions include Elizabeth Moro (\$97,440), Anna Thomas (\$91,828), Jim Haddock (\$89,858), and Rob Matzie (\$85,944).<sup>6</sup>
- Republican Rep. Tom Mehaffie was the top Republican recipient of government union PAC contributions. Mehaffie received \$110,500 from government unions, more than twice the amount of any other Republican and nearly seven times the amount of any other House Republican. Government unions gave a combined \$12,000 to the House Republican Campaign Committee (HRCC).

Government unions made a total of \$2.5 million in PAC contributions to candidates for the Pennsylvania State Senate:

- Senate Democrats received \$2.2 million, or 89 percent of all PAC contributions directed to state Senate candidates.
- Candidates receiving contributions from government unions included Jay Costa (\$371,500), Nicole Ruscitto (\$250,479), Nick Pisciotto (\$241,668), and Patty Kim (\$134,500). In addition to supporting candidates, government unions contributed a combined \$332,500 to the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee.
- No Republican Senate candidate received more than \$40,000 from government unions. These unions contributed a mere \$5,000 to the Senate Republican Campaign Committee.

## **PAC CONTRIBUTIONS: OTHER PACS AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Government union PACs made a total of \$4.9 million in contributions to other PACs, Super PACs, and other political organizations. These contributions accounted for 35 percent of all government union PAC contributions during the 2023–24 election cycle. Most of these contributions went to large, influential liberal Super PACs. Notably, their PACs contributed to:

- Pennsylvania Fund for Change (\$1,235,000), a progressive state-based Super PAC that spent **heavily** in competitive Pennsylvania House races.<sup>7</sup> In addition to contributions from government unions, Pennsylvania Fund for Change received significant funding from Pennsylvania Alliance Action, a left-wing nonprofit group that doesn't disclose donors but is tied to Philadelphia trial lawyers.
- Fighting Together for Philadelphia (\$750,000), a Super PAC that supported progressive Philadelphia Mayoral candidate Helen Gym. Gym finished third in the 2023 Philadelphia Democratic Mayoral primary.
- Pennsylvanians for Judicial Fairness (\$730,000), an independent expenditure committee that sought to elect Democratic judicial candidates during the 2023 election. The organization has ties to Adam Bonin, an election lawyer who routinely serves as counsel for Democratic presidential campaigns.

- Pennsylvania Alliance Action (\$425,000), a left-wing political nonprofit. Pennsylvania Alliance Action receives significant funding from other left-wing organizations funded by billionaires George Soros and Tom Steyer. During the 2023–24 election cycle, the organization directed over \$4.4 million to Pennsylvania Fund for Change and over \$1.2 million to Pennsylvanians for Judicial Fairness.

Other notable left-wing political organizations receiving support from government union PACs include CASA in Action, Pennsylvania United, and the Conservation Voters of PA Victory Fund. Of the \$4.9 million contributed to PACs and other organizations, only \$37,500 went to Republican or conservative-leaning PACs and organizations.

## Top Recipients of Pa. Government Union PAC Money, 2023–24 Cycle

Ranking	Candidate	Party	Race	Amount
1	Vincent Hughes	D	Senate District 7	\$493,000
2	Joanna McClinton	D	House District 191	\$463,000
3	Eugene DePasquale	D	Attorney General	\$488,094
4	Jay Costa	D	Senate District 43	\$371,500
5	Matt Bradford	D	House District 70	\$338,500
6	Sara Innamorato	D	Allegheny County Executive	\$335,800
7	Jordan Harris	D	House District 186	\$287,000
8	Nicole Ruscitto	D	Senate District 37	\$250,479
9	Nick Pisciotano	D	Senate District 45	\$241,668
10	Daniel McCaffery	D	Pennsylvania Supreme Court	\$196,000

Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, "Campaign Finance Online Reporting," accessed February 20, 2025

### PAC CONTRIBUTIONS: STATEWIDE AND LOCAL CANDIDATES

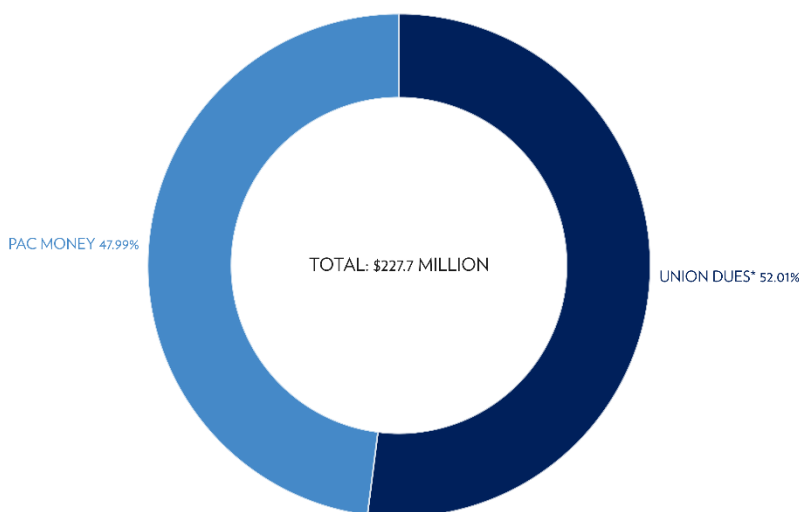
During the 2023–24 election cycle, Pennsylvanians elected three statewide row officers, three statewide judges, and one state Supreme Court Justice. There were also two significant local elections: the Philadelphia Mayoral election and the Allegheny County Executive election. Government unions spent a total of \$1.01 million on direct contributions to statewide candidates and \$1.08 million on direct contributions to local candidates.

- Democratic statewide judicial candidates Daniel McCaffery, Jill Beck, Timika Lane, and Matthew Wolf received a total of \$309,600 in direct contributions. Unions also supported this slate of candidates with contributions to Pennsylvanians for Judicial Fairness, as covered in the PAC section.
- Democratic Attorney General candidate Eugene DePasquale received \$448,094, the most of any statewide candidate. Auditor General candidate Malcolm Kenyatta received \$172,250, while Treasurer candidate Erin McClelland received \$34,500.
- State Rep. Ryan Bizzarro, who lost in the Democratic primary for Treasurer, received \$86,000 from government unions.

- In total, Democratic candidates for statewide offices received \$1,004,169, while Republican candidates for statewide offices received \$12,400, a 99 percent to 1 percent split.
- Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato received \$335,800 from government unions, while Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker received \$69,650.
- In addition to the \$750,000 contributed to a Super PAC supporting Helen Gym's mayoral candidacy, government unions gave \$50,400 directly to Gym's campaign.
- In total, \$1,063,320 went to Democratic candidates for local office compared to \$19,743 for Republicans.

## Union Dues as a Percentage of Political Spending

Union dues accounted for 52 percent of \$227 million in government union political spending since 2007



Sources: The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards, Form LM-2 Reports, Pa. Department of State, Campaign Finance Database.  
Note: Does not include AFSCME Council 13's 2024 dues spending on politics. The union is delinquent on its LM-2 reporting as of March 31, 2025.

### MEMBERSHIP DUES SPENDING ON POLITICS

Though government union executives often [claim](#) that membership dues dollars cannot be used to support political candidates, they direct millions in membership dues to politics in other ways, including lobbying efforts, get-out-the-vote campaigns, political mailers, and by contributing to PACs, Super PACs, and other political organizations.

During the 2023–24 election cycle, Pennsylvania government union executives combined to use \$15.4 million in membership dues on politics.

- Compensation paid to union officers and employees for time recorded as political and lobbying activities was \$7.2 million.
- Vendors, suppliers, postage, and printers for mailers and other communications related to union political objectives received \$2.22 million.

- Contributions to the Fund for Student Success, the Pennsylvania State Education Association's own Super PAC, hit \$1.45 million. Notably, the Fund for Student Success can raise and spend unlimited funds to influence elections and policy.
- Government union executives paid \$1.17 million to various consultants for their assistance with union politics and lobbying.
- Affiliated state and local unions got \$946,431 in support of their political and lobbying activities.
- Contributions to Spirit of 1776, UFCW Local 1776's Independent Expenditure Committee, summed \$387,200.
- Project Keystone, a left-wing 501(c)4 organization that researches legislative preferences and voting trends in Pennsylvania, received \$340,000.
- PA Alliance Action received \$250,000.
- Government union executives contributed \$150,500 to the Keystone Research Center, a progressive advocacy group and front group for unions.

Of the \$15.4 million in dues spent on politics, \$600,463 was misclassified under "contributions, gifts, and grants," a category usually reserved for charitable giving. Political spending, misclassified as charitable giving, included:

- Sixty percent (\$233,000) of the \$387,200 contributed to Spirit of 1776.
- Seventy percent (\$175,000) of the \$250,000 contributed to PA Alliance Action.
- A \$10,000 contribution to the Shapiro-Davis Inaugural Committee, supporting Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro's inaugural festivities.
- A \$5,000 contribution to the Allegheny for All Inaugural Committee, supporting Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato's inaugural festivities.

## POLICY SOLUTION: PAYCHECK PROTECTION

Pennsylvania law allows government unions to use the public payroll system to collect payroll deductions. Under this system, taxpayers, rather than unions, are responsible for collecting an employee's union dues and PAC contributions. [Pennsylvania's Ethics Act](#) dictates that lawmakers cannot use taxpayer resources to collect political contributions. Yet public payroll systems remain in use to collect overtly political funds for some of the state's largest public interest groups.<sup>8</sup>

Pennsylvania [House Bill \(HB\) 466](#) would prevent unions from collecting their PAC deductions through the public payroll system.<sup>9</sup> Under HB 466, unions would be responsible for collecting their respective PAC deductions, rather than relying on taxpayers. A January 2025 [poll](#) shows 88 percent of Pennsylvania voters support this reform.<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Armed with millions of dollars in resources and given special legal privileges, government union executives exert undue influence on Pennsylvania's political process. During the 2023–24 election cycle, government unions used taxpayer resources to collect and spend a combined \$33.5 million on politics, almost all of

which went to Democratic candidates and left-wing causes. Lawmakers should act to make unions responsible for collecting their own political money and end the taxpayer funding of partisan union politics.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, “Office Of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) – LM Reports and Constitutions and Bylaws,” accessed March 31, 2025, [https://olmsapps.dol.gov/olpdr/?\\_ga=2.155219453.795852441.1676478675-638021529.1674498453](https://olmsapps.dol.gov/olpdr/?_ga=2.155219453.795852441.1676478675-638021529.1674498453).

<sup>2</sup> To the reader, the remaining money was spent on consulting, apparel, vendors, and other items that are not inherently political.

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania Department of State, “Campaign Finance Online Reporting,” accessed February 25, 2025, <https://www.campaignfinanceonline.pa.gov/Pages/CFReportSearch.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> Note: This figure does not include political spending from AFSCME Council 13’s 2024 LM-2. The union is delinquent on its LM-2 reporting as of April 11, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Scolforo, “Democrats Retain 1-Seat Majority Control of the Pennsylvania House,” Associated Press, November 8, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/pennsylvania-house-2024-election-frank-burns-johnstown-1fb3477611874bb4e4409c6452681e5f>.

<sup>6</sup> Ballotpedia, “Pennsylvania House of Representatives Elections, 2024,” [https://ballotpedia.org/Pennsylvania\\_House\\_of\\_Representatives\\_elections\\_2024](https://ballotpedia.org/Pennsylvania_House_of_Representatives_elections_2024).

<sup>7</sup> Pennsylvania Fund for Change, “Target Races,” accessed March 31, 2025, <http://pafundforchange.com/races/>.

<sup>8</sup> 65 Pa. C.S. § 1101–1113, <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/consCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&ttl=65&div=0&chpt=11#:~:text=%2D%2DNo%20person%20shall%20offer,future%20employment%20based%20on%20the>.

<sup>9</sup> Rep. Milou Mackenzie, House Bill 466,” Pennsylvania General Assembly, Regular Session 2025–26, <https://www.palegis.us/legislation/bills/2025/hb0466>.

<sup>10</sup> Public Opinion Strategies, “Commonwealth Foundation Statewide Survey,” January 9, 2025, <https://commonwealthfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/250009-Pennsylvania-Statewide-Interview-Schedule-Public.pdf>.