AIA Pennsylvania recognizes that continuing education in architecture is crucial to advancing and improving the profession and to protecting the public’s health, safety, and welfare. Architects are professionally licensed by the Commonwealth and endeavor to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the public by skillful use of planning and design concepts, building codes legislated for the various jurisdictions, and for the innovative use of new materials and technologies. Continuing education is critical.

The AIA makes continuing education a requirement for all members and believes it is in the best interest of the Commonwealth for the legislature to mandate continuing education for all architects in order for them to advance their skills.

In today’s rapidly changing landscape of building codes, standards, and new products and materials, architects must maintain an awareness and understanding of an ever-increasing amount of information. Clients and the public benefit from the expertise of architects for the development of solutions to the problems facing the built environment.

Currently, there are no mandatory continuing education requirements for architects in the Commonwealth. SB 432 and HB 223 amend the Architects Licensure Law by adding language requiring each licensee to provide certification of successful completion of a minimum of 24 hours of continuing education as a condition for renewal of the biennial license.
SAFER SCHOOLS BY DESIGN

Architects are privileged to be tasked by the Commonwealth with the responsibility to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of the public as they design the structures in which we live, work, and play. As a professional organization that represents architects, we do not have all the answers to solving the problems of violence and terrorism in our schools. One thing we can provide is our voice as designers, creative thinkers, and guardians of public health, safety, and welfare.

The recent school shooting in Florida continues an unsettling trend of assaults on students in their neighborhood schools. While the debate will continue at the national level on proposals for arming teachers and “hardening” our schools, in Pennsylvania, we need to have the conversation on what can be done to make our students safer at the schools in our communities while maintaining a nurturing learning environment.

Two ideas that can be implemented immediately are, the establishing of a statewide emergency management plan for the design and configuration of school buildings and security infrastructure, and the publishing of an assessment tool to use as a guideline for school districts to gauge priorities. We suggest a group to develop these assets that would be made up of architects, contractors, teachers, students, and law enforcement.

As school architects, our members have walked through numerous facilities that do not have even the most basic safety measures. Examples include administration offices remotely located from unmonitored school entrances, exterior doors that lead directly into classrooms, classrooms unable to be properly locked down, and lack of security cameras both on the campus and inside the building.

School safety and security can be addressed through comprehensive planning and by integrating building features that also serve to provide comfortable learning environments, address environmental design criteria required of specific geographical locations, and fire and wind resistance. Architects do all this and foster places that are intellectually and mentally uplifting, promote social wellbeing, and community pride.

The conversation about keeping our children safe is complex and spans many subjects. But there are tangible steps we can take right now to make our buildings safer. Teachers, students, school district leaders, emergency personnel, and school architects must team together to implement current security practices as well as continue to explore new methods to keep our children safe. AIA Pennsylvania intends to continue our ongoing dialogue to find workable solutions to safeguard our school children.

AIA Pennsylvania recommends updated safety assessments that focus on school facilities in the Commonwealth to gain a better understanding of the scope of work that needs to be done to secure our schools.

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School Construction

Architecture improves student success and health. Thoughtfully designed buildings and spaces enhance learning outcomes by allowing teachers and students to focus on their education.

Education funding is a welcome focus of the ongoing budget discussions, however, there is one important component of education funding that appears to be at risk of elimination: the PlanCon program for school construction reimbursement. While the current PlanCon program must be reformed, the state must also continue to provide reimbursement for school construction and renovation projects.

We understand the current PlanCon process is lengthy and burdensome and must be streamlined. We strongly believe that the state must continue to play a role in providing reimbursement for school construction and renovation. Maintaining such a program ensures that all school districts can provide appropriate school facilities and safe and secure learning environments for their students.

In an Act 1 of 2006 environment, in which school districts cannot raise property taxes above the index, it will be nearly impossible for most school districts to ever fund a needed construction or renovation project without state reimbursement. Couple that with the fact that some school districts are also facing downgraded bond ratings, due mostly to rising pension and charter school tuition costs, making borrowing an even more expensive endeavor for schools and taxpayers.

Without some program for state reimbursement, it will be educational programs on the chopping block to fund needed renovation projects—such as projects to fix leaking roofs, replace failing HVAC systems or even add space to deal with growing enrollment.

We believe that the PlanCon Advisory Committee offers the unique opportunity to craft a reformed, efficient, and streamlined process for school construction and renovation reimbursement going forward, one that we think should look very different than the current PlanCon process.

With school districts in mind, we ask that you continue to provide state funding for school construction both now and through future programs. Instead of eliminating the PlanCon program, we urge you to take this opportunity to craft a program for school construction reimbursement that will benefit the Commonwealth, school districts, the built environment and taxpayers into the future.
The goal of High Performance Buildings is to generate energy savings and optimize the performance of occupants, workers, students and teachers. Working in healthy, comfortable buildings provides an environment where people can do their best. Natural daylight, good ventilation, and a well-insulated building envelope all benefit the efficiency of the occupants and saves money.

AIA Pennsylvania supports policies, programs, and incentives that encourage energy conservation as it relates to the built environment as well as the development and harvesting of energy from local and renewable sources. Architects are encouraged to promote energy efficiency and waste reduction in the built environment to advance the goal of achieving carbon neutral buildings by the year 2030.

Architects are responsible for designing buildings that protect the health, safety and welfare of not only the public but also the environment. Consequently, we support governmental and private sector policy programs, including the development, evaluation, and use of building codes, standards and evidence-based rating systems, that promote the design, preservation, and construction of sustainable communities and high-performance buildings.

According to the Clean Jobs PA report, there over 70,000 clean jobs in Pennsylvania. Most of these clean jobs concern the energy efficiency of buildings. Nearly 10,000 of these jobs are in the solar and photovoltaics industry. Renewable energy creates cleaner air and adds value and resiliency to buildings and communities.

The 2015 U.S. Green Building Council Green Building Economic Impact Study, prepared by Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) quantifies the economic value of green building and LEED construction. The trajectory of the green building sector of the U.S. construction industry is slated for expansive growth. To date, green building has created millions of jobs and contributed hundreds of billions of dollars to the U.S. and Pennsylvania economies.
The American Institute of Architects

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SB 954 Wagner

BASICALLY:
AIA Pennsylvania would like to reduce the Statue of Repose for PA to 6 years.

STATUTE OF REPOSE

Architects, engineers, and contractors practicing in the Commonwealth face a substantial degree of liability exposure for property damages and other construction claims.

We agree that some amount of liability is needed. However, there is a need to define a period of time after which the architect can be held liable for personal injury or injury to property.

We believe that this time period should end when the architect no longer has influence of the property. After this time period, deficiencies in the design have been or should have already been discovered, and/or any injury to persons or property is most likely to have been caused as the result of something outside the architect’s design work.

Furthermore, we are looking to stay current with the statutes of repose with other States and commensurate with where the industry is trending.

Currently, the statute of repose for some other states are as follows:
Arkansas: 4 years Massachusetts: 6 years
Colorado: 6 years Mississippi: 6 years
Delaware: 6 years Vermont: 6 years
Kentucky: 7 years Virginia: 5 years
Louisiana: 5 years

The Statute of repose in Pennsylvania is 12 years for construction projects.

For better or worse, the estimated shelf-life for a building has been trending downward over the years. For some building types, renovations to newer buildings are occurring closer to when the building was originally constructed.

Oftentimes, after 6 years; issues that arise from completed projects are due more to owner’s and tenant’s failure to maintain the property rather than faulty design. Without legislation to protect design professionals from unlimited liability, it might be possible for an architect to be sued for an injury suffered in or around a building that was designed many years prior, even when the injury is a result of improper maintenance, accomplished renovations since the building was put into commission, or other causes beyond the architect’s control.

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Student debt is one of the most critical issues facing the next generation of design professionals. The average architecture student with a five year Bachelors’ degree graduates with over $42,000 in student loan debt. Students graduating with a Masters in Architecture face over $72,000 in loan debt, ranking architecture as one of the disciplines with the highest loan balances in the country.

Due to a spiraling economy several years ago, many architecture firms were forced to lay off staff or even close. Many architecture students were unable to find jobs in their field and were obligated to find another occupation. The design and construction industry faces a severe shortage of talent, at exactly the moment the Commonwealth needs to start rebuilding and revitalizing our underserved areas and blighted communities.

For the aforementioned reasons we are supporting legislation that eases the burden by providing loan assistance to architecture students and recent graduates who contribute their design services to underserved areas.

The Neighborhood Restoration Act would create a program allowing architecture students to work in underserved areas of the Commonwealth in exchange for assistance with their student loans. As a result, communities will receive a broad range of architecture services that may not have otherwise been available, and architecture graduates will be able to get valuable experience while lessening their debt.

SB 459 will help promote sustainable economic development and jobs by ensuring aspiring architects are able to gain valuable experience while giving back to their communities designing public projects such as schools, health clinics, housing facilities and libraries. In return, the bill will alleviate some of the barriers new graduates face as they pursue their dreams in architecture. Architecture is the key to neighborhood revitalization and downtown restoration.

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