

Executive director defends PIAA over proposed legislation; state Rep. requests meeting

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Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) Executive Director Robert Lombardi on Wednesday defended the non-profit organization from a new bill introduced by state Rep. Scott Conklin.

The legislator, in response, invited Lombardi to Harrisburg.

The new legislation, introduced by Conklin, D-77, of Centre County in Harrisburg on Tuesday, is intended to hold the PIAA more accountable to the General Assembly. Conklin said he became especially curious of the PIAA after he read PIAA officials were not responding to The Daily Item's request for receipts from the association's District IV, which is overseen by PIAA board president and Shamokin Area School District Transition Administrator Jim Zack.

Conklin said reading published stories in the media about Shamokin Area school administrators, including Zack, conducting PIAA work on school time was further proof the state needs to be involved with the PIAA.

Lombardi, who did not address District IV financial records, responded Wednesday by saying the PIAA does not receive public money.

"Rep. Scott Conklin has distributed a co-sponsorship memo that criticizes the PIAA and members of the Pennsylvania Athletic Oversight Committee and in so doing regrettably misstates facts and the role of the PIAA," Lombardi wrote in an email. "PIAA receives no federal or state funding, PIAA does receive membership dues from schools. This is the case with almost any organization that a school joins and the mere fact that a school pays to be part of an organization does not change the nonprofit entity into a governmental one. Moreover where that money comes from is up to individual schools."

Conklin responded to Lombardi late Wednesday night by inviting him to Harrisburg to meet.

"I want to thank Dr. Lombardi for sharing information pertaining to the operation of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, its status as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) corporation and the role it plays as the overseer of school athletics in the commonwealth," he said. "Please know, I do respect the work of the Athletic Oversight Committee and the mission of the PIAA. As a "state-affiliated entity" under the Right-To-Know Law and in the interest of transparency, would Dr. Lombardi care to share the sources of the other 90-percent of PIAA revenues? What about a list of PIAA donors? Is proper notice of district committee meetings given? Was the same done for the meeting in question for the District IV committee? When a district committee does not comply with PIAA rules what actions are taken? Who is held accountable? I appreciate civil discourse and I want to invite Dr. Lombardi to meet at my Harrisburg office next week to have an in-person discussion on this matter."

Lombardi said more than half of the 12 Districts in the PIAA use ticket

money from games to pay their fees.

"Rep. Conklin's co-sponsorship memo is a criticism of those House and Senate members who have worked so diligently and cooperatively to address issues from the General Assembly and the public at large," Lombardi wrote.