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**CONTACT:**

Chris Kazlauskas

Email: [chrisk@pa-news.org](mailto:chrisk@pa-news.org)

Phone: (717) 703-3025

## **Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association honors legislator, attorney as 2024 Advocates of the Year**

*Recognition for state Rep. Ryan Bizzarro and Michael Berry cites successful efforts to protect First Amendment freedoms in the commonwealth*

HARRISBURG – For the first time, the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is honoring two individuals with its prestigious Advocate of the Year award. State Rep. Ryan A. Bizzarro, an Erie County Democrat, and Michael Berry, a partner in the Philadelphia office of Ballard Spahr, were recognized today for their pivotal roles in the enactment of the new Pennsylvania anti-SLAPP law, [Act 72 of 2024](#).

The awards lauding work that culminated last year were presented at the Sunshine Week forum, “Getting to Know Pennsylvania’s Transparency Laws,” held at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

“We are so appreciative of Rep. Bizzarro and Mike Berry’s tireless efforts and support of Pennsylvania’s anti-SLAPP law, seeing it across the finish line after more than 10 years of work,” PNA President and CEO William Cotter said. “The new law will have an incredibly positive impact on local journalism statewide and protect freedom of expression for all Pennsylvanians.”

The anti-SLAPP (strategic lawsuit against public participation) law championed by both men protects against frivolous lawsuits targeting individuals or organizations that speak out on issues of public interest or concern. The measure expands existing free speech safeguards to all First Amendment expression, allows defendants to file anti-SLAPP motions early in the litigation process, and mandates the award of attorney fees, court costs, and other fees associated with meritless litigation to the target of SLAPP suits.

As prime sponsor of the legislation, Rep. Bizarro introduced House Bill 1466 in June 2023. The bill represented the work and negotiations of legislators and stakeholders spanning more than a decade of Pennsylvania legislative sessions. The bill passed both the House and Senate with unanimous support and was signed into law by Gov. Josh Shapiro on July 17, 2024.

"I'm a strong advocate for the First Amendment, and in these uncertain times it is important to preserve our rights to protest and speak up against injustice," Rep. Bizarro said. "I'm glad I could make sure 2024 was the year we finally got this done."

"This is an honor to be recognized with Mike Berry," the lawmaker continued. "He has been the constant in this effort, translating advocacy into action in the Legislature. Mike was there to catch the smallest details and made sure we had an effective bill that both parties and both chambers could agree to. The unanimous votes are proof of that."

For more than 20 years, Berry, who was instrumental in drafting the new law, has represented news, entertainment and other media clients in defamation and privacy suits. He has fought for the rights of the press and public to access government and court records, defended reporters who are subpoenaed, and advised clients on newsgathering and other First Amendment matters.

"The new anti-SLAPP law gives the people and press of Pennsylvania greater protection when they exercise their First Amendment freedoms," Berry said. "It ensures that lawsuits are not used as weapons to stifle speech and will allow Pennsylvanians across the political spectrum to speak more freely."

Every year, PNA recognizes dedicated leadership and outstanding advocacy for the Pennsylvania news media industry with the Advocate of the Year award. Previous honorees are: former Democratic U.S. Sen. Robert P. Casey Jr.; state Rep. Kerry A. Benninghoff, a Republican representing Centre and Mifflin counties; state Sen. Patrick J. Stefano, a Republican serving Bedford, Fayette, Somerset and Westmoreland counties; and Northampton County state Rep. Robert L. Freeman, a Democrat.

### **About PNA:**

Founded in 1925, PNA is the nonprofit trade association for print and online news media in Pennsylvania. Its mission is to advance the business interests of Pennsylvania news media organizations and to promote the importance of a free and independent press.

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