

# NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

*County Government with a Unified Voice!*

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## STATE HOUSE NEWS

*June 6, 2025*

### FUNDING TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS

To help combat the alarming 45% increase in the State's homeless population over the past two years, the New Jersey Association of Counties (NJAC) strongly supports the following Temporary Budget Resolutions (TBR) for the fiscal year 2026 State budget as introduced by Senator Troy Singleton, Chairman of the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee.

- **TBR No. 377:** \$5.25 million to the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) in emergency shelter funding for counties in FY 26 contingent on matching county funds of up to \$250,000 per county.
- **TBR No. 381:** \$5.25 million increase to the Department of Human Services (DHS) in Social Services for the Homeless (SSH) monies for counties in FY 26 contingent on matching county funds of up to \$250,000 per county.

As nonprofit organizations, civic centers, and churches are struggling to provide temporary shelter for those in need and have become more reliant on assistance from county governments, **TBR No. 377** would provide vital resources for counties to either operate or contract with selected agencies to manage temporary shelters in a safe and reliable manner. And although services and resources may be readily available for individuals with no income, those with limited income are often ineligible for the same level of assistance and are in grave jeopardy of becoming homeless. With this in mind, **TBR No. 381** would increase critical funding to better capture this underserved population with much needed rental assistance, utility assistance, transitional housing, and more. NJAC commends Senator Singleton for his vision and leadership in sponsoring these budget resolutions as they would provide county governments with the unique opportunity to serve those in need by matching any new or additional investments made by the State. For these reasons, NJAC urges the State Legislature to include **TBR Nos. 377 & 381** in the final appropriations bill.

### PAYMENTS IN LIEU OF TAXES

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, both houses unanimously passed **S-3787/A-5613** (*Scutari D-22/Ruiz D-29*)(*Pintor Marin D-29/Morales D-34*), which would change certain provisions of the Long-Term Tax Exemption Law concerning Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT).

Under current law, a municipality receiving an “annual service charge” under a PILOT must remit five percent of the annual service charge to the county in which the municipality is located. The bill as amended would change the current practice to require that with each installment as required under current law, the chief financial officer in each municipality must provide the following information for each PILOT agreement entered into by the municipality to the county: the project name and address; the date on which the municipality entered into the agreement; the expiration date of the agreement; the amount of the annual service charge to be paid to the municipality; the annual amount due to the county; the portion of the quarterly service charge installment due to the county; the quarterly installment amount collected by the municipality; and, the amount attributable to the agreement that’s included in the installment of county tax.

The bill would also provide that if the five percent remittance due to the county is not paid when due, the unpaid balance thereof and interest, at the rate of one percent per month accrued thereon, together with attorneys' fees and court costs, may be recovered by the county from the municipality in an action filed in a court of competent jurisdiction; and that the municipal finance officer may be subject to revocation or suspension for willful or intentional failure, neglect, or refusal to comply. The bill would further require that notice of the time, date, and place of the public hearing required to be held prior to the approval of the ordinance on the financial agreement be provided to the chief financial officer of the county and the clerk to the board of county commissioner of the county within which the municipality is located. Governor Murphy is expected to sign the measure into law.

## **CREMATION SERVICES**

NJAC supports recently introduced legislation in **S-4461** (*Moriarty D-30*), which would authorize the cremation of unclaimed bodies by counties under certain circumstances.

Under current law, county governments are responsible for the burial of unidentified, unclaimed bodies. As such, NJAC supports this legislation as it would provide counties with the option to cremate the remains of unidentified, unclaimed bodies in dignified and respectful manner while saving valuable time, money, and resources. In 2023 alone, county governments spent approximately \$2.5 million on the burial of unclaimed, unidentified bodies. This legislation could reduce that number by approximately 75% as the cost to cremate is substantially less expensive. And in light of the fact that cremation is growing increasingly more popular than traditional burial services with U.S. cremation rates at an estimated 62%, this legislation would allow New Jersey to join forty other states that authorize the use of cremation certificates for the remains of unidentified, unclaimed bodies. Moreover, precedent for this legislative change exists in New Jersey with respect to juveniles under N.J.A.C. 13:95-17.12 where the Youth Justice Commission “*shall arrange for the burial or cremation of unclaimed bodies of juveniles.*” And that “*an unclaimed body shall be cremated where it is reasonably believed that it would not violate the religious tenets of the deceased juvenile.*”

Additionally, the bill would stipulate that a medical examiner's office must retain cremains for at least one year from the date of the cremation before interment. Additionally, the legislation would permit the storage of an unclaimed body by a hospital or medical examiner, where the body may be, at the expense of the county, buried by a morgue keeper or cremated if, after 30 days, remains unclaimed. The measure would further provide that if an individual makes a valid claim to a body or cremains already buried, the individual would be responsible for the cost of disinterment. However, if a medical examiner must investigate a body or cremains already buried, the medical examiner would be responsible for the cost of disinterment. **S-4461** is currently in the Senate Commerce Committee awaiting consideration with no companion version in the General Assembly at this time.

## **BUDGET OPERATIONS**

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee considered **S-3941** (*Gopal D-11*), which would make various changes to local unit budget processes and related operations. NJAC generally supports the measure as it would implement important best practices designed to streamline budget operations.

In general, this legislation would extend the statutory deadlines for: (1) the mayor or municipal manager, as applicable, to submit a recommended budget to the council of a municipality from January 15<sup>th</sup> to February 28<sup>th</sup> of the calendar fiscal year; (2) the governing body of a local unit to introduce and approve the annual budget from January 26<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> for a county and February 10<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> for a municipality operating on a calendar fiscal year. The bill would also provide that a governing body of any municipality or county may introduce and approve the annual budget at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the governing body after the dates specified in the statute; (3) to adopt the annual budget from February 25<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup> for a county and from March 20<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup> for a municipality operating on a calendar fiscal year. The bill would also require that a governing body of any municipality or county may introduce and approve the annual budget at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the governing body after the dates specified; (4) the annual audit of a municipality or county from six months to eight months after the close of the fiscal year; and, (5) the annual statement on the financial condition of the local unit from February 10<sup>th</sup> to March 10<sup>th</sup> for municipalities operating on a calendar fiscal year.

The measure would further establish a 90-day deadline and clarifies procedures to fill vacancies in the following roles with budget-related responsibilities: municipal chief financial officer, county chief financial officer, municipal tax collector, municipal clerk, and principal public works manager. In certain circumstances, the Director of the Division of Local Government Services (DLGS) would be permitted to extend the 90-day deadline. Additionally, under current law, members of a local unit governing body are subject to a personal penalty of \$25 for failure or refusal to comply with certain statutory responsibilities related to local unit budget processes and operation of a local unit. This bill would increase the personal

penalty to \$100 for these violations and establish a personal penalty of \$100 for failure or refusal to comply with additional existing requirements.

For counties and municipalities operating on a calendar fiscal year, the bill would increase the permissible amount of a temporary budget, which is adopted in the first month of the fiscal year and in effect for approximately three months, from 26.25 percent to 35 percent of the previous year's total appropriations. Under current law, the governing body or chief executive officer of any municipality may request a review by the DLGS Director of the behavior or practices of certain individuals serving the local unit in a professional capacity. The bill would authorize the DLGS Director to initiate a review of the behavior or practices of the following: registered municipal clerk, certified tax collector, certified public works manager, and qualified purchasing agent. Finally, the bill would allow the Director to authorize an extension of the statutory deadlines for municipalities to mail estimated property tax bills upon good cause shown. The companion version in the General Assembly **A-5240** (*Egan D-17*) is currently in the Assembly State and Local Government Committee awaiting consideration.

#### **BOND ORDINANCES**

Also on June 6<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee favorably reported **S-4472** (*Lagana -D-38*) to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee for consideration. In summary, this legislation would amend the Local Bond Law to exempt local governments from appropriating an amount equal to five percent of the total amount of obligations for local bond ordinances involving hazard mitigation and resilience projects. The bill would also exempt local governments from applying to the Local Finance Board concerning the maturity and amount of annual installment payments related to the financing of local bond ordinances involving hazard mitigation and resilience projects. At a time in which county governments are struggling to provide essential services in a cost-effective manner, NJAC supports this legislation as it frees up limited resources that local governing bodies may utilize to manage their affairs in a more flexible and efficient manner.

#### **ELECTIONEERING**

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, both houses passed and sent to the Governor **S-3850** (*Smith D-17/Scutari D-22*)(*Karabinchak D-18/Reynolds-Jackson D-15*), which would permit county boards of elections to extend the distance within which electioneering is prohibited. Under current law, electioneering is prohibited inside any polling place or room, within 100 feet outside the entrance to a polling place or room, and within 100 feet of a ballot drop box in use during an election. This bill would grant county boards of elections the discretion to extend the distance from 100 feet to 200 feet. The bill would further require county boards of elections to place notice of these prohibitions and penalties for any violations in a clear and conspicuous manner outside the polling place, polling room, or ballot drop box. Governor Murphy is expected to sign the measure into law.

## REHABILITATION AND REENTRY CENTERS

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Community and Urban favorably reported **S-3615/A-4877** (*Beach D-6*)(*Greenwald D-6*), which would amend a recently enacted law that authorizes the establishment of a regional authority to develop and operate rehabilitation and reentry center. In general, this legislation would rename the "management committee" as the "board of authority commissioners" and require two or more counties to enter into an agreement establishing the regional authority. The bill would also make certain changes to: (1) time considerations concerning applications to the Local Finance Board; (2) provisions related to withdrawal from and dissolution of authorities under the bill; and (3) provide for certain allotments with financial debt service. The bill would further allow for a registered municipal accountant to conduct an audit of the authority and make specific reference to the employment of correctional police officers. The Senate is expected to consider the measure at one of its upcoming voting sessions in June and the General Assembly previously passed the bill in April.

**UPCOMING NJAC EVENTS:** Don't miss NJAC's next Board of Directors meeting by video conference set for 10:00 a.m. on Friday 6/27 and make sure to mark your calendars for NJAC's free virtual workshop set for 10:00 a.m. on 7/9 with a topic to be determined any minute now. Check out [www.njac.org](http://www.njac.org) for additional information and upcoming events.

*The top 11 government and corporate phrases, sayings, or words that often need translation and make your ears bleed a little.*

11. Per My Last Email
10. Breakdown Silos
9. Take Offline
8. Thought Leader
7. Work-Life Balance
6. On Boarding
5. Paradigm Shift
4. Growth Vector
3. Vertical Integration
2. New Normal
1. Circle Back

*"Every adversity, every failure, every heartbreak, carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit." Napoleon Hill*