

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

County Government with a Unified Voice!

SHANEL Y. ROBINSON
NJAC President
Somerset County Commissioner

JOHN G. DONNADIO, ESQ.
Executive Director

STATE HOUSE NEWS

5/23/2025

FUNDING TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS

NJAC is optimistic that the Legislature's proposed fiscal year 2026 state budget will include budget resolutions in funding for emergency shelters and homeless prevention based on the recommendations of NJAC's Working Group on Transitional Housing. At the request of Mercer County Executive Dan Benson, NJAC formed the Working Group to share resources and ideas, and make recommendations on how counties may provide vital housing services, temporary shelters, and permanent placement for those in need.

After several months of meetings with human and social service county leaders from across the State, the Working Group recommended, in part, that the State provide additional Social Services for the Homeless Prevention (SSH) dollars and funding for emergency shelters. The Working Group reported that 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, the Group recommended increasing the State's annual appropriation and expanding the use of SSH dollars to better capture this underserved population and provide enhanced transitional housing opportunities. The Working Group's recommendation is for the Department of Human Services (DHS) to allocate an additional \$5,250,000.00 in SSH funding for counties in fiscal year 2026 contingent on matching county funds of up to \$250,000.00 per county.

The Working Group further reported that 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. As such, the Working Group recommended increasing the State's annual appropriation for emergency shelters in direct grants that a county may use to contract with selected agencies to manage temporary shelters accordingly. The Working Group's recommendation is for the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to allocate \$5,250,000.00 in emergency shelter funding for counties in fiscal year 2026 contingent on matching county funds of up to \$250,000.00 per county. NJAC is mindful of the well-documented challenges the fiscal year 2026 state budget will present and intends to be part of the solution that provides critical services to those in need with the opportunity for county governments to match any new additional investments made by the State in SSH and emergency shelter funding. In addition to contacting DHS and DCA concerning our request for additional SSH dollars and funding for emergency shelters, NJAC testified before the budget committees in both houses and recently

met with Senator Troy Singleton (D-7), Chairman of Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee. Stay tuned for additional details; and, importantly note that there's no guarantee the fiscal year 2026 state budget will ultimately include these monies as budget negotiations are ongoing until the end of June.

LEGAL NOTICES

On May 12th, NJAC testified before the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee in support of **S-3905** (*Corrado R-40/Beach D-6*), which would require the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to establish an online, statewide database of local government unit legal notices.

In general, this legislation would require DCA to establish and maintain a database for the purpose of providing the general public with a single, statewide, access point for locating and viewing local government unit legal notices. The measure would require that whenever a local government unit is required by law to publish a legal notice in one or more newspapers, the governing body may satisfy that requirement by transmitting the legal notice to DCA for inclusion, without charge or fee, on DCA's centralized database of local government unit legal notices. The bill would provide DCA with the discretion to determine the manner in which it may require a local government unit to submit legal notices to the department for inclusion in the database.

Although NJAC supports **S-3905** and commends the sponsors for their leadership in developing a fair and reasonable compromise that would save counties, municipalities, and school districts money, NJAC submits that authorizing local governments to post public notices in a clear and transparent manner on a local government's official website as the best viable option. Local government officials serve as the stewards of property taxpayer dollars and should no longer be required to subsidize the newspaper industry with revenues collected from publishing legal notices in the press. In fact, long before NJ Advanced Media's announcement that it was terminating daily print publications in January of 2025, local government officials found it increasingly difficult to comply with the notice requirements under the law as the media has become almost exclusively digitized and struggled to retain staff, resources, and publications. As such legislation that will authorize local governments to publish legal notices on a local government's official website would streamline an antiquated and overly burdensome process and save valuable time, resources, and property taxpayer dollars. The Committee favorably reported **S-3905** to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee; and, the companion version **A-4231** (*Sauickie R-12*) is in the Assembly State and Local Government Committee.

Please note that Senator Andrew Zwicker (*D-16*) recently introduced **S-4484**, which would authorize public bodies to provide required notices to newspapers distributed online and would establish related publication requirements along with the rates that newspapers and online news publications may charge for each notice posted online. NJAC is in the process of reviewing the measure and plans to contact Senator Zwicker to discuss the matter in detail, but our initial concerns are that this legislation would prove more costly and establish a more complicated process than either the above noted long overdue solutions.

PRIVATIZATION CONTRACTS

NJAC is encouraging all twenty-one counties to adopt the following resolution in opposition to **A-919** (*Reynolds-Jackson D-15*), which would effectively prohibit the use of privatization contracts by requiring county governments to pay new employees' wages and benefits at a rate not less than the wages and benefits paid to displaced employees. **A-919** is currently in the Assembly Appropriations Committee and the companion version **S-1518** (*Turner D-15*) is in the Senate Labor Committee awaiting consideration.

A RESOLUTION, opposing **A-919/S-1518**, which would establish certain procedures and standards concerning public services privatization contracts.

WHEREAS, this legislation would effectively prohibit the use of privatization contracts by requiring county governments to pay new employees' wages and benefits at a rate not less than the wages and benefits paid to displaced employees; and,

WHEREAS, counties enter into privatization contracts to recognize important cost savings in salary, wage, pension, and health benefit costs that make up approximately 65% of overall operating budgets; and,

WHEREAS, counties, municipalities, and school districts across the State are struggling to provide essential services in the wake of double-digit health benefit increases, pension payments, utility expenses, property and casualty insurance coverage, and the cost of goods and services; and,

WHEREAS, this legislation would effectively eliminate one of the only mechanisms available for local governments to control the ever-increasing property tax burden; and,

WHEREAS, this legislation would create an overly burdensome, adversarial, and unnecessary level of bureaucracy by requiring the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) to review and approve privatization contracts as local governments should retain autonomy to enter into such agreements that they believe serve in the best interest of constituents; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the New Jersey Association of Counties does in fact oppose **A-919/S-1518** (*Reynolds-Jackson D-15/Wimberly D-35*)(*Turner D-15/Greenstein D-14*). which would establish certain procedures and standards concerning public services privatization contracts.

BE IT FURTHER, RESOLVED, that certified copies of this Resolution shall be sent to Governor Phil Murphy, Senate President Nicholas Scutari, Speaker of the General Assembly Craig Coughlin, and the clerks of the boards of county commissioners in all twenty-one counties.

VOTING RIGHTS

NJAC respectfully opposes **A-4083** (*Reynolds-Jackson D-15/Sumter D-35*), which would establish the “John Lewis Voter Empowerment Act” for the reason set forth below.

Specifically, NJAC is concerned that the language contained in section 4.d. below would impose a significant policy change with substantial financial ramifications for county governments. As you know, under current law, the State’s Attorney General is responsible for providing legal representation to county boards of elections in all election matters. NJAC submits that this legislation would eliminate that responsibility and effectively force county governments to provide legal representation accordingly. *“4.d. Henceforth, the Attorney General shall not act as the legal adviser, attorney or counsel for any ¹[officers, departments, boards, bodies, commissions or instrumentalities of the state government] political subdivision, governing body of a political subdivision, or local election office¹ in matters of voting or elections ¹[;]¹ and may not represent them in any proceedings or actions of any kind related to voting or elections which may be brought for or against them in any court.”* With this in mind, NJAC respectfully opposes **A-4083** at this time and looks forward to meeting with the sponsors to discuss these concerns and potential solutions to address the legislation’s intent.

In general, this legislation would provide certain protections regarding the right to vote in New Jersey as it would safeguard the voting rights for members of a protected class by establishing a series of tests to determine when those rights have been infringed and by creating a standardized mechanism for redressing violations. Under the bill, aggrieved parties may notify local governments, including school districts, of perceived violations and demand reimbursement for the cost of substantiating such claims if the local government implements a remedy in response to the notification or the Office of the Attorney General approves such a remedy. The bill would further establish a preclearance process through which local governments previously found to have violated the voting rights of a protected class are to have changes to their voting policies and practices approved by the Office of the Attorney General or the court.

The bill would require local governments to provide physical and online voting materials in languages other than English when the local electorate meets certain criteria regarding limited English language proficiency. As referenced above, the legislation would also grant the Office of the Attorney General authority for voting and elections-related matters including mediating claims of perceived violations of the act and meeting various reporting and administrative requirements regarding voter education campaigns, public presentations, and the creation and maintenance of accessible online resources regarding covered entities and preclearance submissions. The bill would also establish the “New Jersey Voting and Elections Institute,” at a public university in New Jersey, to maintain and administer a database and central repository of elections and voting data available to the public. **A-4083** is currently in the Assembly Oversight, Reform, and Federal Relations Committee awaiting consideration. The companion version, **S-3009** (*Turner D-15/Cyran D-20*) is in the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee.

PAYMENTS IN LIEU OF TAXES

On May 15th, the Assembly State and Local Government Committee amended and favorably reported **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). The General Assembly then passed the measure on May 22nd and sent it back to the Senate, which recently passed the bill as well, to consider the changes.

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

WORKING TEST PERIOD

NJAC is urging legislative leadership to consider **S-3892/A-5146** (*Polistina R-2/Guardian R-20*), which would remove the exception to the Civil Service Working Test Period (WTP) concerning political subdivision employees. In summary, this legislation would extend the WTP for local governments from three months to four months along with the ability to extend the WTP to six months at the discretion of the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

For the past two years, NJAC has been working with the Chair/CEO of CSC, Allison Meyers, who has made several positive changes to streamline the antiquated hiring, evaluation, and promotional procedures long imposed by the CSC. As an integral component of these initiatives, the Chair/CEO and Commission implemented a Pilot Program in Atlantic County to extend the

WTP from three months to four months. In general, the CSC defines the WTP as the period of time following a regular appointment from a certified list or appointment to a non-competitive title. CSC considers WTP as a continuation of the examination process and as an opportunity for local governments to properly evaluate prospective employees. County officials contend that this relatively brief timeframe hampers human resource professionals from properly evaluating potential employees and making accurate recommendations accordingly. Moreover, current law provides the State of New Jersey as an employer with a four-month WTP, so any permanent changes to the law would create uniformity among all levels of government.

Please also note that prior to the commencement of the Pilot Program, Atlantic County notified all career service employees subject to the three-month WTP of the change and that the County has reported no issues, challenges, or grievances with any of its collective bargaining units. NJAC submits that this modest change to the law would provide personnel and human resource departments in local governments across the State with additional time to adequately evaluate and recommend qualified employees for full-time employment. **S-3892** is currently in the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism, and Historic Preservation Committee awaiting consideration and A-4146 is in the Assembly State and Local Government Committee.

UPCOMING NJAC EVENTS: Don't miss 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 with a topic to be determined any minute now. Visit www.njac.org for additional information and upcoming events.

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

74th Annual Celebration of County Government

County Service Award & Vo-Tech Cook-Off Challenge Winners 2025

MAURICE FITZGIBBONS COUNTY COMMISSIONER OF THE YEAR AWARD

- **SHAUN C. VAN DOREN, HUNTERDON COUNTY COMMISSIONER**
For his steadfast, measured, and non-partisan leadership during a year as President of NJAC that presented several unique legislative challenges.

COUNTY SERVICE AWARDS

- **CLARIBEL CORTES, MIDDLESEX COUNTY SURROGATE**
For her positivity, commitment, and enthusiasm as an active member of NJAC's Board of Directors and the NJAC Foundation.
- **STACY PENNINGTON, SALEM COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EVERYTHING**
For being one of the hardest working professionals in county government and an incredible resource for NJAC.

- HELEN FIORE, MONMOUTH COUNTY DIRECTOR OF PURCHASING
For her innovative and outstanding leadership among purchasing officials and commitment to shaping procurement legislation and regulations.

COUNTY SERVICE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

- DOMINIC J. VESPER, JR., CAMDEN COUNTY DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR
For his remarkable career in public service that greatly benefitted the lives of those struggling with opioid addiction, homelessness, food insecurity, and more.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

- EVE CULLINAN, BURLINGTON COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
For her exceptional leadership and service to NJAC's Board of Directors, the NJAC Foundation, and as NJAC's PFRS Board of Trustees Representative.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER HALL OF FAME

- BETTE JANE KOWALSKI, UNION COUNTY COMMISSIONER
For her extraordinary commitment to shared services, human services, open space preservation, and especially transportation.
- PAT LEPORE, PASSAIC COUNTY COMMISSIONER
For his distinguished career and visionary leadership that resulted in a dozen credit rating upgrades during his time as Director and Budget Chair.
- TERRY DUFFY, PASSAIC COUNTY COMMISSIONER
For his lifelong commitment to volunteerism and active supporter of the law enforcement and public safety communities.

PETER PALMER BUSINESS ASSOCIATE OF THE YEAR

- NEW JERSEY WIRELESS ASSOCIATION (NJWA)
For the unwavering advocacy of Rob Ivanoff and Dominick Villecco that helped NJAC secure funding for county 911 centers for the first time in two decades.

COUNTY VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL COOK-OFF CHALLENGE - PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARDS

As voted on by all participating conference attendees and tabulated by ES&S.

- GOLD MEDAL (\$1,250.00 SCHOLARSHIP): CAPE MAY COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Shrimp & Crabcake Sandwich with Lemon Caper Aioli

- SILVER MEDAL (\$750.00 SCHOLARSHIP): PASSAIC COUNTY TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS
Chicken & Cheese Empanadas with Chicharron Tostones
- BRONZE MEDAL (\$500.00 SCHOLARSHIP): UNION COUNTY VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Braised Pork Tacos with Plantain Tortillas

COUNTY VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL COOK-OFF CHALLENGE - NJAC JUDGES AWARDS

As voted on by selected conference attendees from the business community.

- GOLD MEDAL TASTE: ATLANTIC COUNTY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Tandoori Chikcen Skewers with Coconut Sauce & Garlic Naan
- SILVER MEDAL TASTE: SOMERSET COUNTY VOCATIONAL & TECHNICAL SCHOOS
Pancetta Brushetta
- BRONZE MEDAL TASTE: CAPE MAY COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Shrimp & Crabcake Sandwich with Lemon Caper Aioli
- GOLD MEDAL STATION DISPLAY: PASSAIC COUNTY TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS
Chicken & Cheese Empanadas with Chicharron Tostones
- SILVER MEDAL STATION DISPLAY: CAPE MAY COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Shrimp & Crabcake Sandwich with Lemon Caper Aioli
- BRONZE MEDAL STATION DISPLAY: UNION COUNTY VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Braised Pork Tacos with Plantain Tortillas

COUNTY VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL COOK-OFF CHALLENGE - PROFESSIONAL CHEFS AWARDS

As voted on by professional chefs in Atlantic City & featuring Chef David Burke & Man Verses Food Star Casey Webb.

- GOLD MEDAL TASTE: OCEAN COUNTY VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Sea Scallops wrapped in local Black Sea Bass
- SILVER MEDAL TASTE: CAPE MAY COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Shrimp & Crabcake Sandwich with Lemon Caper Aioli
- BRONZE MEDAL TASTE: UNION COUNTY VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Braised Pork Tacos with Plantain Tortillas
- GOLD MEDAL FOOD PRESENTATION: CAPE MAY COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Shrimp & Crabcake Sandwich with Lemon Caper Aioli

- SILVER MEDAL FOOD PRESENTATION: PASSAIC COUNTY TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS
Chicken & Cheese Empanadas with Chicharron Tostones
- BRONZE MEDAL FOOD PRESENTATION: UNION COUNTY VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS
Braised Pork Tacos with Plantain Tortillas

Additional fantastic dishes included: Highland Harvest Pierogi by the Bergen County Technical Schools, Paramus Campus; Spring Lamb with Asparagus, Mint Yogurt, Gremolata, & Bordelaise by the Burlington County Institute of Technology; Kauai Hawaiian Street Tacos by Hunterdon County Polytech; Surf & Turf Paella by the Middlesex County Magnet Schools; and, Pate de Campagne with Pickled Turnups by the Morris County School of Technology.

‘Our life is what our thoughts make it.’ Marcus Aurelius