

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

County Government with a Unified Voice!

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STATE HOUSE NEWS

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COUNTY LEGISLATIVE GOALS

During the 2024/25 legislative session, NJAC found success in proactively advocating for initiatives recommended by county officials such as modernizing the Open Public Records Act (OPRA), authorizing local governments to post legal notices online, permitting county commissioner boards to hold annual reorganization meetings at alternative locations, making various changes to Civil Service rules and regulations, and more. Although a substantial degree of our advocacy and research is reactive in nature, pursuing well thought out legislative goals is critical for county governments' ability to deliver essential services in an effective and efficient manner.

In the furtherance of NJAC's core mission to advocate for county government with a unified and proactive voice, NJAC's Board of Directors formerly adopted the legislative goals below based on the following parameters: (1) Recommendations should benefit county governments as a whole and enjoy bipartisan support. (2) Recommendations should focus on streamlining county government operations. (3) Recommendations should be specific and tangible, so that we may quantify potential costs savings and other benefits. (4) Recommendations should be realistic and achievable. (4) Recommendations may include current initiatives such opposing the State's diversion of 911 fees and prohibiting the imposition of unfunded State mandates.

1. **LAME-DUCK GOALS:** Goals should be realistic and achievable before the new Governor and Legislature take office in January of 2026.
 - A. Establish a legislative task force to review the current juvenile detention facility structure in the State of New Jersey and make recommendations on whether the Youth Justice Commission (YJC), existing county facilities, or an entirely new system would best serve the youth and individuals that oversee them.
 - B. Extend the Working Test Period (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).
 - C. Provide immediate relief from the staggering 37.5% increase in health benefit premiums for county governments and their agencies participating in the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP) along with long-term structural reforms.

2. **SHORT-TERM GOALS:** Goals should be realistic and achievable within the two-year legislative cycle; and, should be specific and tangible, so that we may accurately quantify any potential cost savings or other benefits.
 - A. Prevent the State from diverting 911 fees to fund general operating expenses and monies available for county 911 centers to regionalize, upgrade, or maintain a precise, accurate, and reliable communications network.
 - B. Mitigate the \$78.0 million federal cost shift to counties for the administration of SNAP along with the development of best practices by the State to reduce payment error rates and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to alleviate worker caseload.
 - C. Increase the State's annual appropriation for emergency shelters to include matching grant funding for each county to either operate or contract with select agencies to provide vital services for those in need.
 - D. Reinstate full funding for county reentry services coordinators to help inmates navigate the broad spectrum of services available upon release from a county jail after being incarcerated for 90 days or longer.
 - E. Streamline Civil Service laws, rules, and regulations, which include an opt-out provision for local governing bodies, authorization to hire grant-funded employees on an "at-will basis," and the establishment of a pilot program where local governments may administer promotional examinations.
3. **LONG-TERM GOALS:** Goals should be realistic and achievable within the first term of the newly elected Governor; and, should offer viable solutions for long-standing issues that have had a negative impact on county government.
 - A. Prohibit the imposition of unfunded mandates by legislation, regulation, and directives.
 - B. Reduce the costs associated with operating and maintaining county court facilities.
 - C. Offer incentives for the regionalization of services with county jails, EMS, fire, and more.
 - D. Authorize Class 2 special Law Enforcement Officers to provide court security.
 - E. Protect the long-term viability of the State's pension systems.
 - F. Study and recommend best practices for issuing and managing Code Blue alerts.
 - G. Require site plan approval of projects affecting county roads.
 - H. Adopt uniform standards in AI, digital, and cybersecurity for counties.
 - I. Permit the cremation of unclaimed bodies by counties under certain circumstances.
 - J. Preserve county governments negotiating power under Chapter 78.

SNAP FUNDING CHANGES

NJAC is alarmed with the fast-approaching changes in the amount the federal government will reimburse for the administrative costs associated with providing vital services to residents in need under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These changes will impact county governments in New Jersey particularly hard as the Garden State is one of only ten states nationwide where county welfare agencies and boards of social services process SNAP

applications and have historically been reimbursed by the federal government for administrative expenses at 50%. Under the “Budget Reconciliation Bill” signed into law earlier this year, the federal government will now reimburse SNAP administrative expenses at a rate of 25% leaving county governments responsible for the 75% balance as outlined in the table below prepared by the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJDHS) and based on the fact that the federal government reimbursed counties \$156.0 million to process SNAP applications in 2024. Importantly note that county governments must begin preparing for this additional financial burden in their calendar year 2026 budgets as the SNAP administrative fee shift will take effect in Federal Fiscal Year 2027, which begins on October 1, 2026.

COUNTY	ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN
Atlantic	\$2,166,000
Bergen	\$2,790,000
Burlington	\$3,206,000
Camden	\$8,215,000
Cape May	\$1,102,000
Cumberland	\$2,230,000
Essex	\$10,199,000
Gloucester	\$1,478,000
Hudson	\$6,295,000
Hunterdon	\$425,000
Mercer	\$6,458,000
Middlesex	\$4,835,000
Monmouth	\$3,031,000
Morris	\$1,871,000
Ocean	\$4,565,000
Passaic	\$6,610,000
Salem	\$799,000
Somerset	\$1,870,000
Sussex	\$551,000
Union	\$8,680,000
Warren	\$670,000
TOTAL	\$78,045,000

With this in mind, NJAC recently formed a Working Group of county leaders to address these changes and made the following recommendations with additional details to follow: (1) Advocate for the Department of Human Services to provide grant funding to counties to address the \$78.0 million administrative cost shift contingent on using the monies to fund necessary staff, software, information technology, and more as recommended by this working group. (2) Advocate for the Department of Human Services to develop an inventory, best practices, or guidelines to mitigate payment error rates along with having the Department provide monthly error rate reports to all twenty-one counties. (3) Advocate for guidance on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help alleviate worker caseload and streamline services. (4) Advocate for the Department of Humans Services to enhance its case processing software, systems, and applications. NJAC plans to meet with legislative leadership on both sides of the aisle along with the new Administration to discuss implementing these much-needed recommendations.

JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITIES

Although NJAC certainly appreciates the progress that has been made in terms of enhanced communication between the Youth Justice Commission (YJC) and county juvenile detention facilities across the State, NJAC will continue advocating for fair and equitable solutions that address housing adults in juvenile detention facilities, streamlining case processing times, and examining a fragmented system for housing juveniles between counties that operate juvenile detention facilities and those that do not.

NJAC is grateful to Senator Linda Greenstein (*D-15*) as Chairwoman of the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee for her leadership in introducing legislation to address these challenges in **S-4625**, which would establish a “Youth Detention Task Force” to review the current juvenile detention facility structure in the State of New Jersey and make recommendations on whether the Youth Justice Commission (YJC), existing county facilities, or an entirely new system would best serve the youth and individuals that oversee them. Senator Greenstein also introduced **S-4662**, which would make various revisions to the statutes governing juvenile justice. The intent of this legislation is to limit juvenile detention facilities from housing individuals over the age of 18 by implementing an in the “Interest of Justice Hearing” process to determine if it’s in the interest of justice to detain an individual in a county detention facility or at the YJC’s New Jersey Training Schools in Monroe Township, when an individual reaches the age of 18; when an individual violates the conditions of probation after reaching the age of 18; and when an individual over the age of 18 incurs a legal charge while in custody in a juvenile detention facility.

In general, upon turning the age of 18, or when an individual is found to have violated any of the conditions as set forth above, the Court would determine that it’s in the interest of justice to remove an individual from placement in a juvenile detention facility to detention in a county detention facility or at the YJC’s New Jersey Training Schools in Monroe Township by considering the following criteria: the physical and mental danger the individual presents to juveniles; known gang affiliations of the individual; the nature of the alleged crimes committed by the individual; the history of prior delinquent acts committed by the individual; the physical and mental maturity of the individual; the imminent risk of harm the individual presents to the individual’s person along with their aggravating and mitigating factors. Both bills are in the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee (SLP) awaiting consideration and NJAC is advocating for the Committee to hold the bills for consideration a hearing following November’s General Election.

Separate, but related, NJAC is urging the Legislature to streamline the intake, remand, and placement process as the average statewide length of stay for youth in a secure detention facility is nearly 6 months and well over 1-2 years in many cases. The process should model the adult Criminal Justice Reform timelines with the final disposition or trial to take place within 2 years following the initial intake and screening of a juvenile. Please note case processing delays occur, in part, when a prosecutor files a waiver motion to have a juvenile’s case transferred from family court to criminal court because the juvenile typically committed a crime in the 1st or 2nd degree. If a family court judge finds that the prosecutor did not abuse discretion in filing the waiver, the

juvenile's case is transferred to criminal court accordingly. However, the time in which the juvenile spent detained in family court, and detained in a juvenile detention facility, does not count toward the juvenile's speedy trial time in criminal court and it should. P.L. 2015, c.89 governs the juvenile waiver process where the prosecutor has 60 days to file a waiver motion after a complaint is filed against a juvenile. Although including these 60 days and more pending the waiver hearing is not the only solution to streamlining case processing times, detained juveniles should be afforded this protection under the law, and it would also serve to alleviate the housing burden placed on juvenile detention facilities.

PRIVATIZATION CONTRACTS

NJAC is encouraging all twenty-one counties to adopt resolutions 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.

NJAC strongly opposes this measure as it 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. As noted below, 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. At a time in which counties, municipalities, and school districts across the State are struggling with double digit health benefit increases, pension payments, utility expenses, property and casualty insurance coverage, and the cost of goods and services, this legislation eliminates one of the only limited resources available for local governments to control the ever-increasing property tax burden. NJAC is also alarmed that 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. Moreover, local governments should retain autonomy to enter into such agreements that they believe serve the best interest of constituents.

As a means to deliver often mandated services in a more cost effective and creative manner, and without impacting the level of service provided, counties throughout the State have carefully chosen to privatize various services and functions that may include: medical, dietary, and laundry services at county jails and juvenile detention facilities; maintenance services at county administrative, judicial, and prosecutorial facilities; home health services; risk management services; and, much more. Importantly note that several counties have considered privatizing welfare services and transportation services for the aged and disabled, but decided against it after conducting comprehensive feasibility studies. Despite opposition from NJAC, the New Jersey State League of Municipalities (NJLM), the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce (NJCC), the New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA), and more. **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.

WORKING TEST PERIOD

NJAC is advocating for the Senate State Government, Wagering, Toursim, and Historic Preservation Committee to consider **S-3892** (*Polistina R-2*) after the General Assembly unanimously passed companion version **A-5146** (*Guardian R-20*) back in June. In summary, this legislation would extend the Working Test Period (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 three years, NJAC has been working with the Chair/CEO of CSC, Allison Meyers, who has made many 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 brief period of time 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. 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.

NJ PACT/REAL RULES

Before the September 19th deadline, NJAC provided formal comments to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) concerning the implementation of the revised New Jersey Protection Against Climate Threat (PACT)/Resilient Environment and Landscape (REAL) rules set to take effect in 2026.

Although NJAC's Board of Directors certainly recognizes that climate change and sea level rise impose a documented risk to local governments across the State, NJAC is concerned with the long-term economic and social consequences the rule proposal will inflict on new development, redevelopment, and the renovation of existing development. As currently drafted, the revised proposal fails to take into consideration how the new standards will affect a county's ratable base of which is critical for delivering essential services to those in need. With this in mind, and based on the comprehensive analysis of the Notice of Substantial Change prepared for the Cape May County Board of Commissioners on August 15, 2025 and submitted for public comment accordingly, NJAC respectfully requests that NJDEP consider taking the following actions:

1. Delay implementation of the NJ PACT/REAL rules to provide stakeholders with additional opportunities to consider how the regulations will affect them and their communities and to determine whether the rules comply with corresponding federal regulations.
2. Conduct a comprehensive and independent fiscal analysis on the potential economic and social impact of the proposed regulations.
3. Engage the New Jersey State Legislature to enact PACT/REAL rules through the legislative process, which includes public hearings and committee meetings.
4. Dedicate funding in the State budget to assist local governments with implementation of the regulations along with grant monies for resiliency efforts to comply with the new standards.

Importantly note that county and municipal governments across the State, and on both sides of the aisle, have made similar recommendations as they offer a measured and reasonable approach that effectively balance the risks imposed by climate change and sea level rise with the long-term economic and social needs of the Garden State. Moreover, NJAC urges the NJDEP to consider a more moderate regulatory and legislative approach that actively engages stakeholders at the local and federal levels along with the business community and residents.

PFAS SETTLEMENT WITH 3M

Also on September 19th, NJAC provided formal comments in opposition to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) proposed settlement agreement between NJDEP and the 3M Company (3M) concerning the contamination of the State's natural resources by per- or poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

NJAC objects to the proposed settlement agreement because it would release 3M from liability stemming from the company's sale, marketing, distribution, use, or manufacture of PFAS in the Garden State. Additionally, NJAC is concerned that NJDEP would receive the vast majority of the proposed \$450 million settlement with only a fraction of the monies allocated for the remediation of contaminated PFAS sites at county and municipal facilities across the State. Particularly alarming is the fact that the proposed agreement would prohibit county operated airports, fire academies, landfills, sewage authorities, utility authorities, and other publicly operated assets from seeking relief in future litigation that could hold 3M accountable for its contamination of the State's drinking water and other natural resources.

With this in mind, NJAC urges NJDEP to reject the proposed settlement agreement and provide local government stakeholders with the opportunity to partake in settlement negotiations with 3M moving forward. Moreover, NJDEP should conduct a comprehensive and independent fiscal analysis to determine whether the proposed \$450 million settlement is an inadequate representation of the true harm caused by PFAS and the ultimate cost of remediation. For these reasons, NJAC again opposes the proposed settlement agreement and urges NJDEP to consider the long-term ramifications of prematurely settling its lawsuit against 3M.

Upcoming NJAC Events: Stay tuned for details about NJAC's next virtual workshop set for 10/29 and our Year-End Summit concerning health benefits on 12/19.

The top 5 almost top-secret best places to have a fantastic steak dinner that won't break the bank.

5. Steve's Sizzling Steaks *in Carlstadt*
4. Arthurs Tavern *in Morris Plains*
3. Tavern 519 *in Frenchtown*
2. Red Wolfe Inn *in Belvidere*
1. Sarah Janes *in Somerville*

"Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it, the seed of an equal or greater benefit." Napolean Hill.