

# NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

*County Government with a Unified Voice!*

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## STATE HOUSE NEWS

*Lame Duck Edition*

*1/16/26*

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With the 2024/25 legislative session ending on January 12<sup>th</sup>, Governor Phil Murphy has 7 days from that day to sign all passed bills into law or they are considered pocket vetoed. Additionally, the 2026/27 legislative session began on January 13<sup>th</sup> with a dozen new legislators and Governor-Elect Mikie Sherrill will take the oath of office as the Garden State's 57<sup>th</sup> Governor on Tuesday of next week. To help keep track of all the bills signed into law, vetoed, or reintroduced during a super busy lame duck session, signing along to "I'm Just a Bill" from School House Rock while reviewing the material below should do the trick with the link to the 1975 smash hit copied here [I'm Just a Bill - Schoolhouse Rock](#) and full lyrics posted later on. Good luck getting that tune out of your head for the next day or two.

### *Governor Muphy Signed into Law*

**WORKING TEST PERIOD:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, Governor Murphy signed into law **A-5146** (*Guardian R-2*)(*Polistina R-2*) as P.L. 2025, c.261, which will extend the Working Test Period (WTP) for all 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). NJAC supported this legislative initiative as one of our top priorities and submits that this modest change to the law will 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. Special thanks to CSC Chair/CEO Allison Chris Meyer for her remarkable leadership in initiating the change as Pilot Program; Atlantic County Human Resource Director Elizabeth D'Ancona for her hard work in implementing the Pilot Program; Legislative District 2 Chief of Staff Joe Berg for his patience and guidance throughout the legislative process, and NJAC Civil Service Consultant Grace Kelly for her invaluable advice and counsel.

**BUDGET OPERATIONS:** On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, Governor Murphy signed into law **A-5240** (*Egan D-17/Schnall D-30*) (*Gopal D-11*) as P.L. 2025, c.185, which makes various changes to local budget processes and related operations. Of note, the measure extends the statutory deadlines for the mayor or municipal manager 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. The measure also extends the deadline for 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 from February 10<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> for a municipality operating on a calendar fiscal year. The new law also provides 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; and, 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. NJAC supported this measure throughout the legislative process as it will implement important best practices designed to streamline budget operations.

**FIVE PERCENT DOWN:** On December 19<sup>th</sup>, Governor Murphy signed into law **S-4472** (*Lagana D-38*)(*Abdelaziz D-35/Tully D-38*) as P.L. 2025 c.164, which amends 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 measure also exempts 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 supported 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.

**FOOD WASTE:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, Governor Murphy signed into law **A-2090** (*Kennedy D-22*)(*Stanley D-18*)(*Smith D-17/McKeon D-27*), which requires each solid waste management district in the State to develop, as part of its district solid waste management plan, a strategy to reduce food waste in the district. In brief, this new law requires each solid waste management district to develop and implement a strategy for reducing, by the year 2035, the amount of food waste generated annually in the district by at least 50 percent of the amount which was generated in 2022. The measure requires the strategy to be adopted as an amendment to each district's solid waste management plan, or through administrative action subject to the approval of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The measure requires DEP to develop, and publish on its Internet website, a list of measures solid waste management districts can take in order to achieve the food waste reduction requirement established in the bill.

#### *On the Governor's Desk*

**CODE RED ALERTS:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, both houses passed **S-2346** (*Turner D-15/McKnight D-31*)(*Lopez D-19/McCoy D-14*), which would create a Code Red Alert Pilot Program to shelter at-risk individuals during certain hot weather and air quality events and appropriates \$2.5 million to five counties that voluntarily participate in the Pilot Program. Under the bill, the five counties in the State with the highest documented homelessness population as noted in the most recent Annual Point in Time Count would be eligible to participate. If one or more eligible counties decline, then one or more other counties would be eligible with priority given to each county with the next highest homeless population. Any eligible county that elects to participate in the Program would be required to establish a Code Red Alert Plan as prescribed under this bill as a condition to receiving a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The measure would also require a county emergency management coordinator in the Pilot counties to declare a Code Red Alert when the National Weather Service declares a heat advisory for that county's

region or reports an Air Quality Index of 151 or higher. As introduced, this bill would have required all 21 counties to establish a Code Red Alert Plan and did not include any funding to offset the extraordinary costs associated with implementing the bill. Special thanks to Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez, Legislative District 19 Chief of Staff Juan Carlos Nordelo, Hunterdon County OEM Coordinator and Public Safety Director Brayden Fahey, and Senate Majority Office Executive Director Jessica Cohen for their leadership in making important changes to the bill along with their commitment to helping those in need.

**NONPROFIT AGENCY PURCHASING:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, both houses passed **A-5042** (*Lopez D-19/Calabrese D-36*)(*Singleton D-7/McKnight D-31*), which would require State entities to purchase five percent of goods and services from a central non-profit agency and would further require the Division of Purchase and Property to establish training protocols for purchasing agents under certain circumstances. The bill would also allow the Central Nonprofit Agency to request that the Commodities and Services Council set aside any goods or services for approved facilities as long as the price for such goods or services provided by the approved facility is within 15 percent of fair market value provided through any cooperative contract in which the State participates. Special thanks to Monmouth County Purchasing Agent Helen Fiore and Legislative District 19 Chief of Staff Juan Carlos Nordelo for their leadership and help with amending the bill to make sure its provisions only applied to State entities and not local governing bodies.

**FIRST RESPONDERS:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, both houses passed **S-2373** (*Beach D-6/Greenstein D-14*)(*Moen D-5/Stanley D-18*), which would establish employment protections for paid first responders who are diagnosed with work-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) under certain circumstances. Under the bill, an employer would be prohibited from discharging, harassing, or otherwise discriminating or retaliating against an employee, or threatening to do so, with respect to the compensation, terms, conditions, duties, or privileges of employment on the basis that the employee took or requested any leave related to a qualifying diagnosis of PTSD. Under the bill, a PTSD diagnosis would qualify if it was memorialized in an order of a judge of the Division of Workers' Compensation; and, the diagnosis is admitted by the employer after the employee is examined by a mental health professional who reports the diagnosis and determines that it arose.

**PLASTIC FORKS:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, both houses passed **S-3195** (*Smith D-17/Mukherji D-32*) (*Collazos-Gill D-27/Donlon D-11*), would prohibit food service businesses from providing single-use utensils and condiments to customers under certain circumstances. The measure would also require the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to establish an education campaign on the benefits of reducing single-use utensils and condiments. Special thanks to Dan Sperrazza with the New Jersey Department of Corrections (DOC) for his great work in making sure that all correctional facilities would be exempt from the requirements imposed by bill. NJAC and the New Jersey County Jail Wardens Association (NJCJWA) were concerned with the legislation as introduced since the use of disposable utensils are much more cost effective, provide safety for correctional police officers and inmates, and promote operational and logistical efficiencies.

**DEFERRED COMPENSATION PLANS:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, both houses passed **A-4562** (*Barolie D-27/Freiman D-16*)(*McKeon D-27*), which would allow the State and local governments to implement automatic enrollment of their employees in deferred compensation plans. In summary, this bill would permit the State, counties, and municipalities to adopt an automatic enrollment arrangement where a deferred compensation plan provision would authorize the employer to defer and deduct a specified percentage from an employee's salary unless the employee affirmatively elects not to defer or to defer a different percentage. The measure would provide that the automatic enrollment for counties and municipalities would be optional at a local governing body's discretion, but that enrollment is mandatory for State employees hired after the effective date unless the employee makes an affirmative election not to defer or to defer at a different percentage.

**MAIL-IN BALLOT CURES:** On January 12<sup>th</sup> both houses passed **S-4835** (*Sarlo D-36*)(*Calabrese*), which would allow voters to cure mail-in ballots due to certain envelope deficiencies or missing certificates. The measure would allow a voter to cure the voter's mail-in ballot if the voter failed to insert the voted mail-in ballot in the inner envelope; if the voter failed to complete the certificate on the inner envelope; if the inner or outer envelope is missing or unsealed; if the seal appears to be tampered with; and for other certain defects. The bill would give the voter the opportunity to submit a new mail-in ballot if the voter failed to enclose the ballot in the inner envelope; if the voter failed to provide or properly seal the inner or outer envelope; if the seal appears to be tampered with; or, due to any deficiency other than a missing or discrepant signature subject to the curing procedures specified in current law.

**HOMELESSNESS TRUST FUNDS AND HOUSING PLANS:** On December 11<sup>th</sup>, the Assembly housing Committee favorably reported **S-4832** (*Scutari D-22*) (*Carter D-22/Quijano D-22*), which would permit municipal governments to create municipal homelessness trust funds and homeless housing plans. In summary, this bill would permit municipalities to establish municipal homelessness trust funds by ordinance and municipal homeless housing plans by resolution. The measure would permit municipalities to impose additional fees on fines and penalties to deposit into a municipal homelessness trust fund. The legislation would further require that grants awarded by the municipalities must be used to support projects that: measurably reduce homelessness; demonstrate government cost savings over time; employ evidence-based models; can be replicated in other municipalities; include an outcome measurement component; are consistent with the municipal homeless housing plan; or, fund the acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of certain projects.

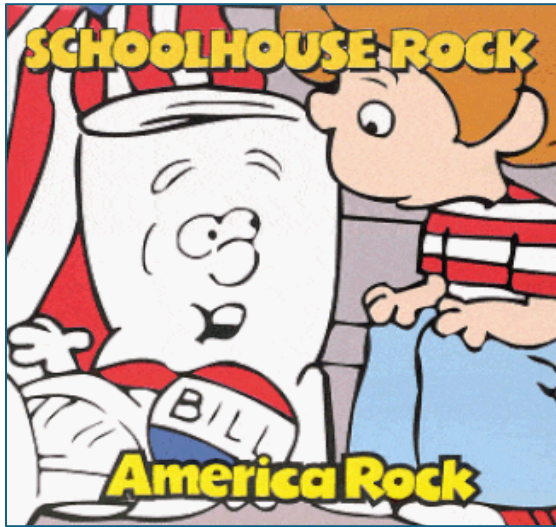
**CONSTRUCTION CODE PAYMENTS:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, both houses passed **S-3323** (*Henry D-12*) (*Karabinchak D-18*), which concerns the payment of construction code fees. In general, this legislation would require a local government to establish a card payment system and an electronic funds transfer system for collecting agency fees under the "State Uniform Construction Code" for construction contracts entered into under the "Local Public Contracts Law." The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) concluded that the measure could result in an annual cost increase for certain municipalities, but added that towns could collect indeterminate annual revenues from service charges levied when the electronic payment systems are utilized.

**JUVENILE DEFENDANTS:** On January 12<sup>th</sup>, both houses passed **A-5018** (*Park D-37/Karabinchak D-18*)(*Diegnan D-18/Polistina R-2*), which would require that juvenile defendants who voluntarily elect to be tried as adults have the same procedural rights as juvenile defendants who are involuntarily waived by the prosecutor from the Family Part to the Criminal Part of the Superior Court. This bill would also require the court to determine that an election by a juvenile to be tried as an adult is made knowingly, willingly, and voluntarily, given the differential treatment under the law between juveniles adjudicated delinquent and adults convicted of crimes. As part of making that determination, the court would be required to conduct a hearing during which the juvenile would be informed of the differences in sentencing or disposition between adults and juveniles for the offenses charged.

**UPCOMING NJAC EVENTS:**

- *Reorganization Meeting:* We look forward to seeing you at the swearing-in of NJAC's 2026 board of directors, executive officers, and Warren County Commissioner James Kern as the Association's 85<sup>th</sup> President at 11:00 a.m. on January 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Senate Chambers of the State House in Trenton. You're also welcome to join us for a terrific lunch at the historic Masonic Temple immediately following the reorganization meeting at Noon.
- *Conference Kick-Off Meeting:* Don't miss the opportunity to serve on NJAC's Conference Committee as we begin planning for the Association's 75<sup>th</sup> annual celebration of county government set for May 6<sup>th</sup> through May 8<sup>th</sup> at Caesars in Atlantic City. Since breakfast is the most important meal of the day, the Committee is hosting an in-person meeting at 11:00 a.m. on *January 30<sup>th</sup>* at NJAC's office located at 150 West with plenty of crispy bacon, fluffy eggs, greasy hashbrowns, and buttery pancakes to power you through the day. Please let us know if you're interested in helping prepare for county governments' showcase event.

**I'M JUST A BILL**  
*School House Rock 1975*



Verse

*Boy: Woof! You sure gotta climb a lot of steps to get to this Capitol Building here in Washington. But I wonder who that sad little scrap of paper is?*

Chorus

I'm just a bill.  
Yes, I'm only a bill.  
And I'm sitting here on Capitol Hill.  
Well, it's a long, long journey  
To the capital city.  
It's a long, long wait  
While I'm sitting in committee,  
But I know I'll be a law someday

At least I hope and pray that I will,  
But today I am still just a bill.

Verse

*Boy: Gee, Bill, you certainly have a lot of patience and courage.*

*Bill: Well I got this far. When I started, I wasn't even a bill, I was just an idea. Some folks back home decided they wanted a law passed, so they called their local Congressman and he said, "You're right, there oughta be a law." Then he sat down and wrote me out and introduced me to Congress. And I became a bill, and I'll remain a bill until they decide to make me a law.*

Chorus

I'm just a bill  
Yes I'm only a bill,  
And I got as far as Capitol Hill.  
Well, now I'm stuck in committee  
And I'll sit here and wait  
While a few key Congressmen discuss and debate  
Whether they should let me be a law.  
How I hope and pray that they will,  
But today I am still just a bill.

Verse

*Boy: Listen to those congressmen arguing! Is all that discussion and debate about you?*

*Bill: Yeah, I'm one of the lucky ones. Most bills never even get this far. I hope they decide to report on me favourably, otherwise I may die.*

*Boy: Die?*

*Bill: Yeah, die in committee. Oooh, but it looks like I'm gonna live! Now I go to the House of Representatives, and they vote on me.*

*Boy: If they vote yes, what happens?*

*Bill: Then I go to the Senate and the whole thing starts all over again.*

*Boy: Oh no!*

*Bill: Oh yes!*

### Chorus

I'm just a bill

Yes, I'm only a bill

And if they vote for me on Capitol Hill

Well, then I'm off to the White House

Where I'll wait in a line

With a lot of other bills

For the president to sign

And if he signs me, then I'll be a law.

How I hope and pray that he will,

But today I am still just a bill.

### Verse

*Boy: You mean even if the whole Congress says you should be a law, the president can still say no?*

*Bill: Yes, that's called a veto. If the President vetoes me, I have to go back to Congress and they vote on me again, and by that time you're so old...*

*Boy: By that time it's very unlikely that you'll become a law. It's not easy to become a law, is it?*

*Bill: No!*

### Chorus

But how I hope and I pray that I will,

But today I am still just a bill.

### Verse

*Congressman: He signed you, Bill! Now you're a law!*

*Bill: Oh yes!!!*