

# NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

*County Government with a Unified Voice!*

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## STATE HOUSE NEWS

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### HEALTH BENEFITS

In 2025, county governments spent approximately \$1.2 billion in taxpayer dollars on providing health benefits for an estimated 30,000 employees with employee contributions totaling \$150.0 million or 12.5% of the total amount. Although the staggering increases in health benefit premiums for local governments participating in the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP) have been well documented, local governments across the State are also struggling to control unsustainable increases in healthcare costs. With this in mind, NJAC is urging all twenty-one counties to adopt the following resolution.

A RESOLUTION urging state leaders to implement fair and equitable reforms to mitigate the unsustainable increases in health benefit premiums for public sector employees.

WHEREAS, county governments across the State spent an estimated \$1.2 billion in taxpayer dollars in 2025 to provide health benefits for approximately 30,000 employees with employee contributions totaling \$150.0 million or 12.5%; and,

WHEREAS, despite innovative cost containment measures taken by county officials to make available affordable and quality healthcare for valued employees and their families, public sector health benefit plans are far too costly; and,

WHEREAS, time is of the essence for State leaders to enact long-term structural reforms that should include eliminating costly plan designs; modifying co-pays for specialists and urgent care, restricting the use of out-of-network healthcare coverage and GLP-1 drugs; implementing a Reference Based Pricing system; streamlining the use of Health Savings Accounts and Flexible Spending Accounts; and, enhancing medical transparency and the collection of data; and,

WHEREAS, failure to make these long-term structural reforms will leave county officials no choice but to impose hiring freezes, eliminate budgeted vacancies, and increase taxes on residents already burdened with the highest property tax bill in the nation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED NJAC does hereby in fact urge state leaders to implement fair and equitable reforms to mitigate the unsustainable increases in health benefit premiums for public sector employees.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution shall be sent to Governor Mikie Sherrill, 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.

## CODE BLUE ALERTS

NJAC, the New Jersey Emergency Management Coordinators Association, the New Jersey Association of County Human Service Directors, and the New Jersey Association of County Welfare Directors are looking forward to the opportunity to meet with legislative leadership to discuss the challenges county governments across the State face when activating Code Blue Alerts along with key recommendations to strengthen the system and deliver vital services to those in need.

Current law requires a county emergency management coordinator to declare a Code Blue Alert when the National Weather Service predicts temperatures below freezing or when the wind-chill temperature will be zero degrees or less for a period of two hours or more. The law also requires counties, municipalities, social service agencies, and non-profit organizations to establish a plan for issuing a Code Blue Alert and to provide emergency warming centers during activation of the plan. Although certainly well intended, county officials have long struggled with implementing the law as highlighted in “Strengthening New Jersey’s Code Blue System,” which summarizes the findings from two recent surveys prepared by the New Jersey Emergency Management Coordinators Association in collaboration with the New Jersey Association of County Human Service Directors.

In addition to a lack of clarity in the law concerning which agency is responsible for maintaining and operating warming centers and providing essential services, key findings in the report found inadequate funding, staffing limitations, reporting and terminology gaps, and the lack of a formal surge framework as the primary structural issues that place at-risk individuals in jeopardy. Moreover, capacity shortages at warming centers and emergency shelters while the State’s homeless population has increased by a staggering 50% in the past two years have forced those in need of shelter to endure increased exposure to prolonged hazardous weather as was especially the case this past winter. As such, NJAC looks forward to meeting with legislative leadership to discuss how stakeholders may strengthen the current Code Blue Alert system with the following: defined roles for counties, municipalities, social service agencies, non-profit organizations, and other volunteers; the appropriate use of facilities, staffing levels, fire codes, permits, and other resources; and, a permanent and steady source of funding to offset the costs associated with issuing Code Blue Alerts. *Special thanks Morris County OEM Director Jeffrey Paul, Hunterdon County Public Safety Director/OEM Coordinator Brayden Fahey, Middlesex County Human Services Director Melyssa Lewis, and Ocean County Board of Social Services Director Meredith Sheehan, for their leadership and commitment to addressing this matter.*

## JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITIES

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, NJAC testified before the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee in support of **S-1279 (Greenstein D-14)**, which would establish a “Youth Detention Task Force” to assess the current condition of youth detention in the State of New Jersey and recommend a system that best serves this population.

NJAC strongly supports this legislation and is urging the Committee to consider the measure at one of its upcoming meetings. In general, this important and timely initiative would require the Task Force to recommend whether existing county youth detention facilities, facilities managed by the Youth Justice Commission, or an alternative system of detention would best serve the youth of this State. The bill would also permit the Task force to examine factors including, but not limited to, available resources, logistical considerations, safety protocols, staff training, rehabilitation opportunities, and security requirements.

Although NJAC greatly appreciates last year's public hearing on the matter, county governments across the State continue to struggle with maintaining adequate housing along with providing vital support services for juveniles taken into custody. With only one-third of the State's twenty-one counties currently operating juvenile detention facilities, county governments across the State have been struggling to secure and maintain adequate housing and provide vital support services for juveniles taken into custody. County law enforcement officials, juvenile detention officers, social service professionals, and management attributes these struggles to a variety of factors that include an increase in serious crimes committed by juveniles, the housing of certain adults in juvenile detention facilities, inadequate staffing and training opportunities, lengthy case processing times, and a fragmented system for housing juveniles between counties that operate juvenile detention facilities and those that do not. *Special thanks to Bergen County Assistant County Counsel David Mateen and Cumberland County Deputy County Administrator Luz Vazquez for making the trip to Trenton and testifying before the Committee.* The companion version **A-4680 (Walker D-31)** is currently in the Assembly Public Safety and Preparedness Committee waiting consideration.

#### **CIVIL SERVICE REFORM**

Next week, NJAC is meeting with the new Chair/CEO of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), Mary Cruz, to discuss the recommendations below provided by our county personnel directors, administrators, counsels, and commissioners. Over the past several years, NJAC has worked closely with the CSC to implement meaningful changes that streamlined the antiquated hiring, evaluation, and promotional process. Under the leadership of former Chair/CEO, Allison Meyers, the CSC made important changes to the Working Test Period, special reemployment lists, seasonal employees, title reclassifications, and more. NJAC commends the CSC for having the foresight to make these critical changes and looks forward to making further progress by conducting regional and localized testing; improving the open competitive and promotional process; modifying disciplinary review appeals; eliminating reconciliation plans and bumping rights; and, addressing grant funded employees.

*Delegated Testing:* The CSC hiring process significantly restricts the ability of local governments to fill critical job vacancies due to the lack of timely testing and publication of lists, which often takes months to receive and may only include a limited number of qualified candidates who frequently reside in areas of the State located far removed from the hiring jurisdiction. As a direct consequence of this process, the county correctional facilities alone continue to face double digit

job vacancy rates placing county correctional police officers in harms-way and forcing the jails into paying substantial overtime costs. With this in mind, NJAC recommends allowing each county and municipality to conduct testing on an as needed and vacancy related basis, so the county or municipality may draw from a pool of qualified candidates within their region and fill vacancies in a more timely and orderly manner.

*Open Competitive Process:* The CSC should revamp the broken “Open Competitive Process” as title certifications cannot be generated to find candidates, since it takes far too long to fill positions. In most cases, a local government fills a position with a provisional employee hired through regular human resources practice and screening. Only after this hire has been made and months have passed does the Commission post a vacancy announcement. The announcement is misleading to job seekers, who believe that a vacancy exists when in fact it does not. After the announcement closes and several months have passed, a certification is generated; and in most cases, the names provided to the local appointing authority as eligible are not screened by the CSC beyond a paper application. The CSC does not interview the job seeker, verify information, check references, or even test candidates in most cases. However, the local authority is informed that they must use this list for hiring purposes, and that prior interviews, reference checks, or skills examination carry little or no weight. Revisions to the open competitive process should authorize local governments, which subscribe to the CSC’s job specifications, to recruit and screen candidates by using best practices methodology and residency preference guidelines to select the most qualified candidate. The CSC may still regulate the procedures to assure the proper posting of vacancies and review appropriate veterans’ preferences. Upon employment, local governments should then submit to the Commission for approval, the new hire’s application, resume, other relevant credentials, and of course an application fee. The Commission may also issue a certificate to the appointing authority that the employee is the most qualified and best candidate for the position.

*Open Competitive Process – Human Resource Titles:* As an example of the challenges noted above with the open competitive process, county human resource professionals find it extremely difficult to hire candidates with experience and/or a degree to fill vacancies with titles such as personnel tech or personnel aide. With this in mind, NJAC recommends adding the following current titles to model those in the private sector as follows: A) Entry-Level / Early Career to include HR Assistant, HR Generalist, HR Coordinator. B) Mid-Level Roles to include HR Specialist (e.g., Benefits, Payroll, Compliance), Employee Relations Specialist, Senior HR Generalist, HR Manager, Assistant Director of Human Resources. C) Leadership Roles to include HR Compliance Officer, Labor Relations Manager, and Chief Human Resources Officer. Please note that Mercer County hosted a conference of county human resource professionals and CSC management in 2025 to discuss this initiative and brainstorm solutions. NJAC supports the recommended changes and urges the CSC to continue this important work.

*Promotions:* The CSC does not consider an employee’s overall job performance, job knowledge, or job efficiency as eligible criteria for job promotion. Instead, CSC primarily relies on test scores and rewards longevity where it may not always be warranted. In general, when selecting

promotional candidates, CSC rules only permit local governments to consider the top three candidates on its list; and in some cases, only the “best of the worst candidates” when the top three scoring candidates may not be qualified for the job. As such, NJAC recommends that the CSC consider overall job performance, attendance, and other work-related competencies. Moreover, the CSC should further expand testing to include oral, written, computer, organizational, management, and leadership skills as eligible criteria for promotional purposes so the most deserving employees advance. CSC ~~may~~ should delegate this function to local governments as part of the challenge may be that the CSC does not have the staff or the local experience to conduct the necessary due diligence when considering promotions and instead relies on a testing scheme that misses the mark.

*Reconciliation Plans:* The Uniform Shared Services and Consolidation Act sets forth the rules necessary to effectuate agreements between local units for any service or circumstance intended to reduce property taxes through the reduction of local expenses. This law currently includes a requirement to compensate employees who are separated from employment due to a consolidation or shared services agreement with terminal leave payments. NJAC recommends eliminating these statutorily imposed severance payments as a substantial financial disincentive for local governments working to consolidate costs and save valuable taxpayer dollars.

*Bumping Rights:* Current CSC laws make it difficult for local governments to lay off staff for reasons of economy and efficiency. Once a layoff plan has been approved and proper notice has been given, subject employees have the right to “Bump” other employees from their titles and potentially their jobs. Although an appointing authority may have planned for a certain financial and service outcome from said layoff, that plan is typically inaccurate because of bumping and title entitlements. To make matters worse, the Commission will not share bumping and title rights with the appointing authority; and such rights are granted based on title and qualifications and not on job performance. With this in mind, NJAC recommends either eliminating bumping rights or requiring the Commission to fully disclose such rights upon request, so that local governments may properly execute a layoff as originally planned.

*Grant Funded Employees:* Current CSC laws require local governments to implement a layoff plan for certain employees hired for positions funded with federal or state monies when the federal or state government eliminates the grant or a local government discontinues its participation in a grant program. Although layoff plans afford permanent CSC employees with important protections under the law, local governments struggle with its overly burdensome implementation as a layoff plan requires providing adequate notice to affected employees; obtaining CSC approval of the plan; navigating seniority and bumping rights, contesting appeals; and more. Given the tenuous nature of grant funding, particularly at the federal level, NJAC recommends that local governments have the autonomy to hire all grant funded employees as “at-will” employees under the mutual consideration that their employment is contingent on full funding of the grant in question or when a local government discontinues its participation in a grant program.

*Trainee Titles:* Current CSC laws provide entry-level employees with a pathway to develop the skills necessary to assume a primary title. While the intent of these titles is sound, their practical application presents significant operational challenges for appointing authorities. Under the existing framework, employees serving in trainee titles often attain permanent status early in their tenure. As a result, when an employee fails to demonstrate the competency required to advance to the primary title, separation is not administrative in nature but instead requires the initiation of a major disciplinary action. This process, which includes notice, hearing, and appeal rights, can extend over several months. During this time, employers are left with limited options to retain an employee who has already demonstrated an inability to perform the duties of the title, or place the employee on unpaid suspension pending the outcome of a protracted disciplinary process. Both scenarios create operational inefficiencies, impact service delivery, and may negatively affect workplace morale. To address this structural limitation, NJAC recommends aligning trainee service more closely with a Working Test Period model of six and twelve months during which appointing authorities may evaluate performance and competency in a meaningful way. Both employees and employers would benefit from this approach, and it would strike an appropriate balance between maintaining employee protections, while providing employers with the necessary flexibility to manage performance effectively. It would also reinforce the original intent of trainee titles to ensure that only those employees who successfully acquire the required skills advance to permanent positions in the primary title. Absent such reform, the current structure continues to place an undue administrative burden on public employers and limits their ability to respond promptly and appropriately to performance deficiencies during the critical training phase.

## **JOB POSTINGS**

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, NJAC testified before the Assembly Labor Committee in opposition to **A-1161** (*Danielsen D-17/Speight D-29*), which would require employers to include certain information in job postings.

After reviewing the measure, county personnel directors reported concerns with the additional burden this legislation would impose on county governments as employers already heavily regulated by collective bargaining agreements, civil service rules, statutory law, and more. County officials also contend that absent applicant tracking software, these proposed requirements would be difficult to implement; and further submit that applicant tracking software would require time and money to build and integrate accordingly. The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) and the New Jersey State League of Municipalities (NJLM) joined NJAC in requesting the Committee amend the bill to local governments from its requirements. Although the Committee favorably reported the **A-1161** to the Assembly Commerce and Economic Development Committee, Assemblyman Danielsen promised to work with local governments to make the measure more palatable for counties, municipalities, and school districts. The companion version in the Senate **S-2136** (*Moriarty D-4*) is currently in the Senator Labor Committee awaiting consideration.

In general, this legislation would require an employer or a third-party job posting company to include in any posting for a publicly advertised job, information concerning whether the posting is for an existing, vacant position, and remove a job posting when a position has been filled within two weeks after the position being filled or 30 days after the original posting, whichever is later. If the posting is for a position which is vacant, the employer or third-party job posting company would be required to provide an estimated timeframe of when the position will be filled. If the employer interviews an applicant for the position, the employer is required, within the timeframe provided in the job advertisement, to provide the applicant with an affirmative response as to whether the position has been filled, or if the position has not been filled, whether the employer is still considering the applicant for the position. The employer must make reasonable efforts to give notice that the position has been filled to any third-party job posting company that also posted the vacant position.

The legislation would further require that if the posting is for a position which is not vacant, the employer must include a disclaimer that the employer is accepting applications for an anticipated vacancy. Such a posting and disclaimer is not allowed unless the employer has, in the preceding 18 months, listed the same position at least three times or hired not less than four employees for similar roles. The posting and disclaimer shall expire after 120 days and be removed. A person who violates the bill's provisions would be subject to a warning from the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development and provided seven business days to rectify the violation. If the violation is not rectified, a person would be liable to a penalty of \$300 for a first offense and \$600 for a subsequent offense.

### **SNAP & WFNJ FRAUD PROTECTION**

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee favorably reported **S-445** (*Stack D-33/Scutari D-22*), which would require the Department of Human Service and the Department Health to provide information to SNAP, WFNJ, and WIC recipients concerning card skimming, cloning, and other fraudulent activities

In general, this bill would direct the commissioners of the Departments of Human Services and Health to provide information to certain benefit recipients regarding card skimming and cloning and to replace stolen benefits under fraudulent circumstances. This legislation would require the Commissioner of Human Services implement these provisions for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Work First New Jersey Program (WFNJ), while the Commissioner of Health must implement the provisions for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The legislation would importantly appropriate necessary funds. As used under the bill, "skimming" means the illegal installation of devices on point-of-sale or automatic teller machine terminals to capture a cardholder's personal identification number and other data stored on the magnetic strip of the electronic benefits transfer card; and "card cloning" means making an unauthorized copy of an electronic benefits transfer card. S-445 is currently in the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, and the companion version **A-3717** (*Collazos-Gill D-27/Rodriguez D -33*) is currently in the Assembly Children, Families, and Food Security Committee awaiting consideration.

## **NJ PACT/REAL RULES**

On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, NJAC submitted written testimony to a joint hearing of environment committees in both houses in support of **SCR, No. 106** (*Scutari D-22*), which would determine that the New Jersey Protection Against Climate Threat (PACT)/Resilient Environmental and Landscape (REAL) rules are inconsistent with legislative intent. NJAC continues to oppose the rules as written and remains alarmed with the long-term consequences the NJ PACT/REAL rules will inflict on new development, redevelopment, along with the renovation of existing development and is urging all twenty-one counties to adopt the following resolution.

A RESOLUTION supporting Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 106 (*Scutari D-22*), which would determine that the New Jersey Protection Against Climate Threat (PACT)/Resilient Environmental and Landscape (REAL) rules are inconsistent with legislative intent.

WHEREAS, on January 20, 2026, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) adopted the NJ PACT/REAL rules, which will drastically increase the size of the State's "Flood Hazard Area" along with sweeping changes to stormwater management, wetlands conservation, and coastal area protection; and,

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Association of Counties (NJAC) is alarmed with the long-term consequences the NJ PACT/REAL rules will inflict on new development, redevelopment, and the renovation of existing development; and,

WHEREAS, the NJ PACT/REAL rules fail to address how the new standards will increase the State's cost of living, devalue property, and diminish county governments ratable base of which is critical for delivering essential services to those in need; and,

WHEREAS, DEP neglected to conduct a comprehensive and independent fiscal analysis of the NJ PACT/REAL rules to determine how the rules will affect businesses, local governments, residents; and,

WHEREAS, DEP circumvented the State Legislature by enacting the rules and disregarded the opportunity to adopt a more measured and reasonable approach to effectively balance the risks imposed by climate change and sea level rise with the long-term economic and social needs of the Garden State.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that NJAC does in fact, hereby support Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 106 (*Scutari D-22*), which would determine that the New Jersey Protection Against Climate Threat (PACT)/Resilient Environmental and Landscape (REAL) rules are inconsistent with legislative intent.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution shall be sent to Governor Mikie Sherrill, 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.

**UPCOMING NJAC EVENTS:** It's almost never too late to register for NJAC's 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration of County Government set for 5/6 – 5/8 at Caesar's in Atlantic City. However, online registration ends on April 30<sup>th</sup>; and although you may register onsite, we finger paint your names and titles on index cards and then staple it to your clothing.

*The top 11 informercial products that you almost purchased but came to your senses once the commercial ended and realized that you really didn't need it no matter how awesome it was or that there was a limited supply and the special offer wouldn't last forever.*

11. Bacon Bonanza Copper Pan
10. HD Night Vision Wraparounds
9. Onion Blossom Maker
8. Topsy Turvey Upside Down Tomato Planter
7. Thigh Master
6. Tornado Can Opener
5. Snowball Launcher
4. Particle Face Cream for Men
3. George Foreman Grill
2. Life Alert
1. The Clapper

*"Failure is nature's plan to prepare you for great responsibilities." Napoleon Hill.*