

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

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LEGAL NOTICES

On June 30th, Governor Murphy signed into law **S-4654** (*Scutari D-22/Bucco R-25*)(*Schnall D-30/Inganamort R-24*), which provides for the publication of legal notices on government internet websites and through certain online news publications.

For over a decade, NJAC has advocated for this important and timely new law as it will streamline the antiquated and overly burdensome public notice process to save valuable time, resources, and property taxpayer dollars. Moreover, this long overdue change will allow counties, municipalities, and school districts across the State to publish legal notices in a clear and transparent manner along with making this information available to the public free of charge. NJAC commends Senate President Scutari, Senate Republican Leader Bucco, Assemblyman Schnall, Assemblyman Inganamort, and Governor Murphy for their leadership in making sure this legislation became law.

In summary, the new law requires that whenever a public entity must publish or advertise a legal notice, the public entity must publish or advertise the legal notice on the public entity's official Internet website beginning on March 1, 2026. The law further requires the public entity's official Internet website to be accessible and available to the public free of charge. The website must include a direct hyperlink to the legal notices, which must be conspicuously placed on the public entity's Internet homepage. The law also requires that the Secretary of State establish an Internet webpage that includes the hyperlinks to the legal notices' webpage of each public entity in the State and that all public entities submit their hyperlinks to the Secretary of State accordingly. Additionally, public entities must maintain an Internet archive of legal notices that are no longer displayed for at least one year and must display a legal notice on the entity's legal notices' webpage for at least one week before transferring it to the archive beginning on July 1, 2026. Under the new law, a local governing body, may in addition to the publication on its official website, publish or advertise a legal notice on an eligible online news publication.

Additionally, the new provides that whenever a corporation, individual, or any other entity that is not a public entity is required by law to publish or advertise a legal notice, the corporation, individual, or other entity must publish or advertise the legal notice in an online news publication that satisfies the eligibility requirements to function as an online news publication, Moreover, beginning on January 1, 2026 and through December 31, 2026, a public entity must provide an

advertisement at least twice per month in an eligible online news publication with the following information: 1) states that the complete text of each legal notice may be obtained or viewed by the public on the official Internet website of the public entity; and, 2) provides the hyperlink to the Secretary of State's legal notices hyperlink Internet webpage. Public entities may continue using qualifying newspapers for required public notices and legal advertisements until March 1, 2026 and the new law took effect on July 1st.

FY 26 NJAC BUDGET MATTERS

On June 30th, Governor Murphy signed into law the State's Fiscal Year 2026 budget with a summary below of where NJAC stands on matters that we advocated for throughout the budget process.

- **LOCAL PENSION OBLIGATIONS:** *The budget includes \$7.2 billion for pensions.*
NJAC supported Governor Murphy's commitment to making full contributions to the State's pension systems of \$7.2 billion in this year's budget as it will help to preserve the long-term health, viability, and solvency of the retirement systems. Please note however that employer contributions for both the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) and the Police and Firemen's Retirement System (PFRS) increased again this year at 17.11% and 37.0% respectively.
- **COUNTY COLLEGES:** *The budget restores \$20.0 million in operational.*
NJAC urged the Legislature to restore the historic investment of \$169.0 million included in the last two budget cycles as it helped offset significant increases in operating costs faced by the State's 18 community colleges. County governments remain committed to supporting community colleges that provide residents with an affordable and quality education while building a skilled workforce.

COUNTY REENTRY COORDINATOR: *The budget includes \$2.1 million for reentry coordinators.*
NJAC supported the budget's continued commitment to grant funding of \$2.1 million, or \$100,000 per county, for each county to hire a re-entry coordinator responsible for helping inmates navigate the broad spectrum of services available upon release from a county jail such as reentry and rehabilitative programs, substance abuse initiatives, housing alternatives, food security, job training, and much more.

- **COUNTY 911 CENTERS:** *The budget includes \$5.0 in funding for county 911 centers.*
NJAC was disappointed to learn that Governor Murphy's budget included a 50% cut in funding for county 911 centers from \$10.0 million to \$5.0 million. Despite making monies available for county 911 centers in the last three budget cycles, the State of New Jersey has remained one of the worst offenders of diverting 911 fees in the entire nation. In fact, the State has collected approximately \$1.75 billion in 911 fees since 2006 with only 11% of such monies spent on federally eligible expenses at the State level pursuant to guidelines established under the NET911 Act. Moreover, the State failed to provide any

funding for expenses incurred by local 911 centers operated by counties and municipalities until allocating \$10.0 million in grant funding under the “Public Safety Answering Upgrades and Consolidation” in the last three budget cycles as noted above.

- **HOMELESS GRANTS:** *The budget does not include funding for homeless grants.*
To help combat the alarming 45% increase in the State’s homeless population over the past two years, NJAC advocated for the budget to include: \$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; and, a \$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.
- **HEALTH BENEFITS INCREASES:** *The budget does not include funding for local governments.*
NJAC is alarmed with the projected double digit increases in health benefit premiums for local governments participating in the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP) and is urging the Legislature to implement long-term structural reforms to more effectively manage these ever-increasing costs. If State leaders fail to act on the much needed and long overdue changes to SHBP by enacting potential solutions such as referenced base pricing and identifying the factors driving medical inflation, local government employers will have no choice but to cut vital services, lay-off employees, or increase property taxes.

CODE RED ALERTS

Also On June 30th, the Senate unanimously passed **S-2346** (*Turner D-15/McNight D-31*), which would establish a three-year pilot program in the State Office of Emergency Management (OEM) under which participating counties must formulate plans to issue a Code Red alert under certain circumstances.

In general, this legislation would require OEM to select 10 willing counties to participate in the pilot program, where the county’s OEM coordinator would develop consistent Code Red alert plans throughout the county along with municipal emergency management coordinators in towns with a documented homeless population of at least 10 people. These plans would provide for communication and outreach, cooling centers, and transportation during the implementation of a Code Red alert. The legislation would authorize designated a volunteer organization to carry out the plan. Although the organization would operate independently, it would receive cooperation and logistical support from municipal coordinators. The bill would further require each municipality, social service agency, and non-profit organization to report the location of its cooling centers to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Heat Hub NJ for inclusion on its website.

Additionally, the measure would require a county emergency management coordinator 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. Importantly, the bill would provide "Good Samaritan" protection from civil liability to the State and local governments and their employees, as well as to volunteer organizations and their members who, during implementation of a Code Red alert plan, provide emergency cooling centers to at-risk individuals. The legislation would appropriate \$5.0 million from the General Fund to OEM, which would issue grants in the amount of \$500,000 to the governing body of each county selected to participate in the pilot program. With the bill as amended last year, NJAC is generally supportive of the changes as the Association has long requested amendments that would establish a voluntary pilot program along with an appropriation to support those in need in a resourceful, manageable, and meaningful manner. The companion version **A-2258** (*Lopez D-19/McCoy D-14*) is currently in the Assembly Housing Committee awaiting consideration.

WORKING TEST PERIOD

Still on June 30th, the General Assembly unanimously passed **A-5146** (*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).

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. 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. The companion version **S-3892** (*Polistina R-2*) in the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism, and Historic Preservation Committee awaiting consideration. NJAC is meeting with the Chairman of that Committee later this month to advocate for its passage.

BOND ORDINANCES

Finally, for now, on June 30th, the Senate unanimously passed **S-4472** (*Lagana -D-38*), which 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. The companion version **A-5859** (*Abdelaziz D-35/Tully D-38*) is on Second Reading in the General Assembly.

UPCOMING NJAC EVENTS: Don't miss NJAC's next virtual workshop on "A County Overview of SNAP & MEDICAID" set for 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday 7/9. This workshop is free for public officials, but you must register by visiting www.njac.org.

The top 5 all-time greatest Independence Day songs to celebrate while whipping sparklers at your younger brothers, launching bottle rockets as close as you can to your neighbor's house, chucking unlit packages of firecrackers into a hot charcoal grill, and barbecuing real beef hot dogs served with mustard and maybe some onions.

5. You're a Grand Old Flag *by George M. Cohan*
4. My Country Tis of Thee *by the Tabernacle Choir*
3. God Bless America *by Kate Smith*
2. This Land is Your Land *by Woody Guthrie*
1. America the Beautiful *by Ray Charles*

"May we think of freedom not as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to do what is right." Peter Marshall