

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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STATE HOUSE NEWS

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CAPS ON BINDING INTEREST ARBITRATION AWARDS

Despite the fact that the 2% cap on binding interest arbitration awards expired on December 31st, NJAC and the New Jersey State League of Municipalities (NJSLOM) are continuing to urge Governor Elect Phil Murphy and members of new State Legislature to permanently extend the cap in the wake of stern warnings from Moody's Investors Services and Fitch Ratings about failure to reinstate the measure.

Moody's noted "that salary costs are among the largest of municipal expenditures, the cost implications are obvious and considerable," and that "the effect of this is, in most cases, unlikely to be rapid, but ultimately, the loss of the arbitration cap is likely to cause the public sector's credit quality to deteriorate." Moody's also reported that "although the cap has expired, it may not be finished. Numerous local governments and local advocacy groups support the arbitration cap. It is possible that the new Governor and the New Jersey State Legislature will revisit the matter. Until and unless that occurs, there will be a potentially dangerous mismatch between revenue and expenditures."

Fitch Ratings concluded that "the arbitration cap is beneficial to local government credit quality as it helps to align revenue and spending measures and supports structural balance in the context of statutory caps on property tax growth." Fitch also noted that "bargaining groups may become more emboldened to pursue arbitration as opposed to voluntary settlement if the arbitration cap expires. Arbitration awards were significantly higher prior to the cap, ranging from 2.50% to 5.65% from 1993-2010, according to a report of the New Jersey Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC)." Moreover, Fitch emphasized that "the elimination of the arbitration cap could force local governments to reduce governmental services and/or rely on one-tie resources to accommodate higher wage expenses."

NJAC and NJSLOM are also alarmed that the public safety union representatives on the Police and Fire Interest Arbitration Impact Task Force are refusing to release the Task Force's final Report, which was due on December 31st. As you may recall, the Governor's appointees to the Task Force released their findings following a meeting where the eight-member committee was deadlocked on adopting the report and delivering it to the Governor and Legislature. All four Governor's appointees supported

adopting and releasing the report, while all four public safety union representatives opposed taking any action. In summary, the Governor's appointees decided that the *"information was too important to keep from the public"* and released their findings accordingly. In summary, the Governor's appointees to the Police and Fire Public Interest Arbitration Impact Task Force made the following recommendations: permanently impose the 2% cap well in advance of the December 31st expiration date; and, eliminate the dynamic status quo doctrine to require that increment and longevity schemes cease upon the expiration of a collective negotiations agreement.

For nearly a decade, the 2% cap on binding interest arbitration awards has kept public safety employee salaries and wages under control simply because parties have been closer to reaching an agreement from the onset of negotiations. Moreover, the 2% cap on binding interest arbitration awards has established clear parameters for negotiating reasonable successor contracts that preserves the collective bargaining process and takes into consideration the separate 2% tax levy cap on overall local government spending. Failure to permanently extend the 2% cap on binding interest arbitration awards will inequitably alter the collective bargaining process in favor of labor at the expense of taxpayers, In addition to raising taxes, county and municipal governments across the State will need to consider imposing employee furloughs; privatizing services; freezing salaries for non-affiliated employees; and, reducing or eliminating non-mandated services such as transportation for the aged and disabled, meals on wheels, mental health and addiction services, and more. Without question, the 2% cap on binding interest arbitration awards has proven to be a vital tool for controlling personnel costs; negotiating reasonable successor contracts; and, avoiding arbitration awards granted by third party administrators who are not accountable to taxpayers.

COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM

On January 4th, the Senate Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee cancelled its hearing to review the State's medical examiner system because of the inclement weather, but plans to reschedule the hearing shortly. NJAC is prepared to provide the following overview of the county medical examiner system.

Under current law, [N.J.S.A.52:17B-83](#) requires "the office of county medical examiner is hereby created and shall be maintained in each county, except that several counties may jointly maintain the office on a cooperative basis. The office shall be directed by a county medical examiner who shall be appointed by the board or boards of chosen freeholders of the county or counties maintaining such office for a term of five year.... Whenever the State Medical Examiner shall have taken over the duties of a county medical examiner, he shall have all the authority conferred by law upon a county medical examiner and he may appoint such assistants, aides, investigators or other personnel as he may deem necessary. In such event, the treasurer of the county or counties, as is the case may be, shall reimburse the Office of the State Medical Examiner

or its designee for all costs incurred in property conducting the county's death investigating and performing all other functions of the county medical examiner."

N.J.S.A. 52:17B-85 further requires "the salaries and expenses incurred by the office of county medical examiner shall be included in the annual budget of the county or counties served by such office and the respective boards of chosen freeholders shall fix the compensation to be paid by the county medical examiner, deputy or assistant medical examiners and other personnel in the office. The board or boards of chosen freeholders shall provide suitable quarters and equipment necessary for the performance of the duties of the office of county medical examiners."

As of this writing, Bergen, Burlington, Hunterdon, Ocean, and Union counties operate county medical examiner offices; Camden, Gloucester, and Salem counties utilize the Gloucester, Camden, Salem County Medical Examiner Office for medical examiner services operated by the Gloucester County Department of Health and Human Services; Mercer, Middlesex, and Monmouth Counties utilize the Middlesex Regional Medical Examiner Office for medical examiner services operated by Middlesex County; Morris, Sussex, and Warren counties utilize the Morris Tri-County Medical Examiner Office for medical examiner services operated by Morris County; Essex, Hudson, Passaic, and Somerset contract with the Northern Regional Medical Examiner Office operated by the State of New Jersey under the direction and supervision of the Department of Law and Public Safety; and Atlantic, Cape May, and Cumberland contract with the Southern Regional Medical Examiner Office also operated by the State.

GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES

- A. Counties that contract with the Department of Law and Public Safety to provide medical examiner services provided by the northern or southern regional medical examiner offices, generally budget between \$1.0 million to \$4.0 million per year per county for such services depending on the size, case load, and other relevant factors. Pursuant to these 5-year agreements, medical examiner services typically include staff compensation, facilities and equipment management, but does not include a defense or indemnification for lawsuits, claims, losses, or other damages arising from certain negligent acts or omissions.
- B. Counties that operate regional medical examiner offices generally budget between \$1.0 million to \$2.0 million per year for general operating expenses that typically include staff compensation, facilities and equipment management, but may not include a defense or indemnification for lawsuits, claims, losses, or other damages arising from certain negligent acts or omissions.
- C. Counties that contract with regional medical examiner offices to provide examiner services provided by county governing bodies, generally budget between \$200,000.00 to \$1.2 million per year per county for such services depending on the size, case load, and other relevant factors. Pursuant to these agreements, medical examiner services typically include staff compensation,

- facilities and equipment management, but may not include a defense or indemnification for lawsuits, claims, losses, or other damages arising from certain negligent acts or omissions.
- D. Counties that independently operate medical examiner officers generally budget between \$300,000.00 to \$1.0 million per year for general operating expenses that include staff compensation, facilities and equipment management, and a defense or indemnification for lawsuits, claims, losses, or other damages arising from certain negligent acts or omissions.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. *Staff Turnover*: Counties that contract for medical examiner services with a State medical examiner's office report a high turnover of professional staff and are often required to compensate former medical examiner personnel for travel, expert witness, and other related fees to testify at trial and other venues. *Recommendation*: Require pathologists and other medical examiner staff to sign employment contracts that include a daily rate of pay if they're required to testify at trial following separation of employment. An additional recommendation includes providing county stakeholders with substantive input on staff compensation and other employment compensation matters.
- B. *Delay in Receiving Toxicology Reports*: Counties that contract for medical examiner services with a State medical examiner's office report a delay in receiving toxicology reports, which is vital information used for assessing, preventing, and prosecuting drug and other related offenses; and, used for receiving final autopsies and dispositions of death. *Recommendation*: Streamline collecting, summarizing, and disseminating toxicological reports at a centralized location and with clear guidelines on a date certain for publication as provided for in **SENATE, No. 3605 (Vitale D-19/Madden D-4)** 2016/17 legislative session.
- C. *Vetting of Pathologists*: Counties that contract for medical examiner services with a State medical examiner's office report personnel issues with certain medical examiner staff that led to having cases being reviewed by a second pathologist and compromised the prosecution of cases. *Recommendation*: Establish a comprehensive employment screening process for State medical examiners and other professional staff that includes a task force comprised of county stakeholders charged with reviewing and making recommendations on potential candidates.
- D. *Antiquated Facilities*: Counties that contract for medical examiner services with a State medical examiner's office report the use of antiquated facilities that may not meet industry standards. *Recommendations*: Appropriate State monies through a dedicated funding mechanism to construct, retrofit, renovate, or make other necessary capital improvements to State medical examiner facilities that meet or exceed industry standards. An additional recommendation includes authorizing the State to enter into agreements with licensed health care facilities for medical examiner services as provided for in S-3065.

NJAC generally supports S-3065, which would provide for the uniform testing and reporting of drug overdose deaths, and the use of consolidated service purchasing by medical examiners in the State. The bill would also expand the list of places where the State Medical Examiner may be authorized to use laboratory and office facilities. The bill would clarify that it is the duty of each county medical examiner and personnel employed by the county medical examiner's office to: cooperate fully with the State Medical Examiner; comply with directives, guidelines, standards, and protocols issued by the State Medical Examiner; and, promptly provide the State Medical Examiner with any case information that the State Medical Examiner requests or deems necessary. The bill would further require the State Medical Examiner to establish uniform standards and protocols for the conduct of autopsies; and, establish uniform standards and protocols applicable to the testing and reporting of certain deaths.

As counties are responsible for paying for the salaries, equipment, facilities, and other expenses incurred by county medical examiner offices through the collection of the county general purpose tax, this legislation should include a funding mechanism to offset the costs associated with implementing new standards and protocols. At a time in which all local governments are struggling to make ends meet in the wake of the expiration of the 2.0% cap on binding interest arbitration awards, county officials will find it very difficult to allocate the necessary resources to comply with new standards. This regulatory unfunded mandate would be similar to the one imposed by the Administrative Office of the Courts through the "Court Securitization Act." Although the Act through regulations and directives attempted to create a uniform standard for security at county judicial and prosecutorial facilities across the State, it significantly increased the costs associated with the operation and maintenance of these facilities. NJAC also recommends that county governing bodies and county prosecutors as major stakeholders in the medical examiner system have a seat at the table when promulgating any new relevant regulations, directives, standards, or other protocols.

The bill would also require the State Medical Examiner to provide county medical examiners with the opportunity to purchase toxicology or other laboratory testing services as part of a contract that is entered-into on behalf of the State, pursuant to existing law, for the purchase of such services. The Attorney General would also be authorized to enter into agreements with the Department of Health, with any State-operated facility, college, or school of medicine, or with any licensed health care facility for the use of its laboratories, morgues, and other technical facilities, and for the use of space in its buildings as offices and laboratories for the State Medical Examiner and any staff employed by the State Medical Examiner. Current law authorizes the Attorney General to only enter into such agreements with the Department of Health and a State-operated college or school of medicine. NJAC commends the sponsors for their leadership in authorizing county governments to take advantage of economies of scale through cooperative purchasing agreements with the State. County governments have proven to be leaders in regionalization, shared services, and consolidation where

feasible. As the only true regional form of government in the State, county governments have led the way in creating innovative shared service initiatives that deliver essential services in a cost-manner.

ANIMAL CRUELTY ENFORCEMENT LAWS

On January 8th, both houses passed **SENATE, No, 3558/ASSEMBLY, No. 5231** (*Lesniak D-20/Cruz-Perez D-5*)(*Benson D-14/Vainieri-Huttle D-37*), which would revise animal cruelty law enforcement in the State.

With respect to counties, the bill would revise the way animal cruelty law is enforced in the State by transferring the power of humane law enforcement from the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NJSPCA) to the county prosecutor in each county; and would further require the designation of a municipal humane law enforcement officer in each municipality with an existing police department. The bill would require the county prosecutor of each county to designate an animal cruelty prosecutor, and would allow for the designation of any assistant prosecutor, to investigate, prosecute, and take other legal action as appropriate for violations of the animal cruelty laws of the State. The county prosecutor would also be required to either designate, in consultation with the county sheriff, a county law enforcement officer to serve as the chief humane law enforcement officer of the county, or enter into a memorandum of understanding with the county society for the prevention of cruelty to animals authorizing the county society, under the supervision of the county prosecutor, to assist with animal cruelty law enforcement and designate humane law enforcement officers to assist with investigations, arrest violators, and otherwise act as officers for detection, apprehension, and arrest of animal cruelty law offenders.

Additionally, the bill would provide for a county prosecutor to be responsible for designating a county society for the prevention of cruelty to animals. The charter system applicable to county societies under current law would be abolished by the bill. A county society chartered by the NJSPCA at the time of the substitute's enactment would then become the county society designated by the county prosecutor. If a county society chartered prior to enactment does not wish to be designated as the county society, or if there is no chartered county society in the county, the county prosecutor is required to select a non-profit corporation that is organized to promote the interests of, and protect and care for, animals to be designated as the county society for the prevention of cruelty to animals. Following abolishment of the charter system, the bill would not require a chartered county society to surrender any assets to the State or any political subdivision or other entity thereof. A county society so designated by a county prosecutor would be responsible for efficiently providing or locating humane shelter and care for any animals at the request of a municipal humane law enforcement officer, a county prosecutor, or a county sheriff.

This bill would also require the governing body of each municipality with a police department to designate at least one municipal humane law enforcement officer who is responsible for animal welfare within the jurisdiction of the municipality, and who is required to enforce and abide by the animal cruelty laws of the State and ordinances of the municipality. An animal control officer or police officer may be appointed to serve concurrently as a municipal humane law enforcement officer, and a municipal humane law enforcement officer may be appointed concurrently by more than one municipality, so long as the officer is able to carry out the duties and responsibilities required of each position held. Under current law, animal control officers may be empowered by a municipality to enforce, investigate, and sign complaints concerning any violation of the animal cruelty laws of the State or ordinances of the municipality, and to act as an officer for the detection, apprehension, and arrest of offenders against the animal welfare and animal cruelty laws of the State and ordinances of the municipality. This legislation would instead grants those powers to the municipal humane law enforcement officer. A municipal humane law enforcement officer may be authorized by a municipality to use a firearm in the furtherance of the officer's duties, if the officer has completed a firearms training course approved by the Police Training Commission and twice annually qualifies in the use of a revolver or similar weapon.

All third and fourth degree criminal offenses under the animal cruelty laws of the State received by a municipal humane law enforcement officer would be required to be referred to the county prosecutor for investigation and prosecution as appropriate. Civil and disorderly person offenses under the animal cruelty laws of the State may be handled by the municipality in which the violation occurred or in which the offender resides, or may be referred to the county prosecutor. In light of the fact that the New Jersey Association of County Prosecutors supports the measure noting that the bill would not require any new resources or impose any new liability for county prosecutors during a recent Senate Budget and Appropriations Committing hearing, NJAC no longer opposes the measure. It's unclear if Governor Christie will sign the reform into law.

ELECTRONIC PROCUREMENT

On January 8th, both houses passed and sent to the Governor's Desk **ASSEMBLY, No. 2220/SENATE, No. 1729** (*Benson D-14/Webber R-26*) (*Whelan D-2/Oroho R-24*), which would authorize local governing bodies to use electronic procurement technologies under the Local Public Contracts Law and is a lame duck goal of NJAC.

In summary, the measure would authorize local units, joint purchasing units, or cooperative pricing systems to use electronic procurement practices for the following purposes: to purchase electric generation service, electric related service, gas supply service, or gas related service, for use at its facilities so long as the purchase otherwise complies with the provisions of the "Electric Discount and Energy Competition Act"; for the sale of surplus personal property under certain circumstances; and, for the sale of

real property that would otherwise comply with the sale and lease provisions of the "Local Lands and Buildings Law."

Additionally, contracts awarded for the administration of electronic procurement practices would be subject to the requirements of the "Local Public Contracts Law," and the "Public School Contracts Law." The bill would also require the Director of the Division of Local Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs, in consultation with other State government entities, to promulgate rules and regulations to effectuate the provisions of the bill. NJAC supports this legislation as it would modernize the procurement process saving valuable time, money, and resources. The amendments would require that a local unit using electronic procurement technologies must continue to publish any required notices, advertising bids, and requests for proposals in an official newspaper of the local unit. Governor Christie is expected to sign the measure into law.

INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUNDS

On January 8th, both houses passed and sent to Governor Christie **ASSEMBLY, NO. 3612/SENATE NO. 2118** (*Greenwald D-6/Lampitt D-6*)(*Beach D-6/Cruz-Perez*) as Jake's Law, which would incentivize counties to design and construct inclusive playgrounds as a priority for State funding for recreational and conservation purposes. Special thanks to Assembly Majority Leader Lou Greenwald, and to the New Jersey Parks and Recreation Association, for working with NJAC early in the legislative process to craft a measure that enhances the accessibility for individuals with disabilities at our county parks, and establishes a fair and equitable process to secure important grant funding.

In summary, this legislation would require that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) prioritize any application submitted by a county seeking to acquire or develop lands for recreational and conservation purposes using Green Acres funds, provided that the Green Acres funds requested by the county are to be used for the design and construction of an inclusive playground. The Committee further amended the bill to require that the Commissioner grant additional prioritization to the applications submitted by counties that do not currently operate and maintain an inclusive playground, in an effort to ensure at least one such playground is operated and maintained by each county.

The bill would also clarify that the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) would be required to: promulgate rules and regulations specifically for inclusive playgrounds that generally exceed current State and federal standards within 90 days of the effective date of the bill; consult with nonprofit organizations with a demonstrated expertise in the design and construction of inclusive playgrounds; and, promulgate rules and regulations mandating that inclusive playgrounds would be designed to facilitate access by adults and children with disabilities. Governor Christie is expected to sign the measure into law.

STANDARDIZED CHANGE CONDITION CLAUSES

On January 8th, both houses passed On December 18th, the Senate unanimously passed **SENATE, No. 3409/ ASSEMBLY, No. 5071** (*Gordan D-38/Sacco R-25*) (*Vainieri-Huttle D-37*), which would establish standardized changed condition clauses for construction contracts awarded under the "Local Public Contracts Law."

In summary, this bill would require that local public construction contracts include standardized changed condition clauses for differing site conditions, suspensions of contract work, changes in the character of the contract work, and changes in the amount of work to be performed by a contractor. Under the bill, a contractor that encounters differing site conditions in the performance of a contract would be required to promptly notify the contracting unit of the conditions. The bill defines differing site conditions as "conditions at a contract work site that are subsurface or otherwise concealed, and that either differ materially from those indicated in the contract documents or are of such an unusual nature that they differ materially from those ordinarily encountered and generally recognized as inherent in the work of the character provided for in the contract." After receipt of a differing conditions notice, the contracting unit would be required to promptly investigate the conditions and issue directions on how to proceed. Based on those directions, the contract price and completion date may be adjusted. If the contracting unit refutes that differing site conditions exist, the contractor must continue to perform the contract, but would have the right to pursue a claim for additional compensation or time. The measure would require the contracting unit to make a fair and equitable adjustment to the contact price and contract completion date for increased costs and delays resulting from the agreed upon differing site conditions.

With respect to suspensions of contract work of more than 10 days and material changes in the character of the contract work, the bill' would require the contractor to first notify the contracting unit of the issue, and then the contracting unit must evaluate the issue and respond. A possible adjustment of the contract price or timeframe may then be made, and if the contracting unit determines that the contractor is not entitled to additional compensation or time, the contractor may pursue a claim. The bill defines "material change" as a character change, which increases or decreases the contractor's cost of performing the work, increases or decreases the amount of time by which the contractor completes the work in relation to the contractually required completion date, or both.

The measure would further require that whenever a work suspension exceeds 60 days, either party shall have the option to terminate the contract for cause upon and seek compensation upon 7 days written notices. The bill would authorize a contracting unit to increase or decrease the quantity of work to be performed by the contractor and provide how the contract price is to be adjusted depending on whether the quantity change qualifies as a major or minor quantity change. For a

minor quantity change, the bill would require the contracting unit to make payment for the quantity of the pay item performed at the bid price for the pay item. For a major quantity change, the measure would authorize the contracting unit and contractor to renegotiate the price. If the parties do not reach an agreement, the bill would require that payment be made for actual costs of the change plus an additional 10% for overhead and an additional 10% for profit.

After seeking advice and counsel from our county purchasing officials and making recommendations concerning standardized notices, permissible overhead, and profit costs, NJAC supports the legislation as the sponsors and Utility Transportation Contractors Association (UTCA) agreed to incorporate our recommendations into the final draft of the bill. Governor Christie is expected to sign the measure into law.

HOMELESSNESS TRUST FUND GRANTS

On January 8th, both houses passed and sent to Governor Christie **SENATE, No. 3449/ASSEMBLY, No. 5211** (*Bell D-2/Van Drew*)(*Mazzeo D-2/Mukherji D-33*), which would allow counties to prioritize county homelessness trust fund grants for homeless veterans.

In summary, this legislation would allow counties to prioritize grants from county homelessness trust funds for the benefit of veterans. Grants from these trust funds may be used to develop affordable housing, provide rental assistance, and provide supportive and preventative services to aid the homeless or those at risk of homelessness. The bill would allow counties to give a preference in the award of grants for these services for veterans who fall into those categories. Under current law, a county governing body may adopt a resolution or ordinance that levies a surcharge of \$3.00 on certain documents to be recorded with the county. The funds collected from this surcharge are then placed in a homelessness prevention trust fund and are dedicated to local government initiatives to address the problem. NJAC generally support this legislation as it made its way through the Legislature, and Governor Christie is expected to sign the measure into law.

PENSION MEMBERSHIP

On January 8th, both houses passed **SENATE, No. 3620/ASSEMBLY, No. 5322** (*Cunningham D-31*)(*Mukherji D-31*), which would permit Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) membership for certain elected public officials.

More specifically, the legislation would permit an elected public official who held an elective public office on July 1, 2007, who was subsequently elected to another public office, and who continues to hold elective public office on the effective date of this bill to be eligible for enrollment in the PERS as long as there is no break in service and as long as the elected public official has at least 15 years of continuous

service in elective public offices of the State. Under the bill, such an eligible elected public official may reenroll in PERS. An eligible elected official may make a request to the Division of Pensions and Benefits in the Department of the Treasury that the enrollment in the PERS be made retroactive to the date of his or her assumption of an elective office without a break in service. The division would grant that request if the elected official fulfills certain terms and conditions to ensure compliance with federal law, to ensure that the elected official will not be eligible to receive a benefit from the PERS and another State-administered retirement program for the same period of service in the elective public office, and to ensure that the employer is reimbursed for any contributions made to such other program unless the contributions may be rolled over to PERS. NJAC did not take a position on this legislation and it's unclear if Governor Christie will sign the measure into law.

WHO'S WHO, WHO'S NEW, AND WHO'S BLUE IN 218TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Colleen O'Dea, NJ Spotlight, January 10, 2018

Gov. Chris Christie may have another week in office, but New Jersey now has a new, even-more-Democratic and less-experienced Legislature whose real work will begin after Gov.-elect Phil Murphy is sworn into office. On Tuesday at noon, the 120 Senate and Assembly members were sworn into office for the 218th Legislative Session, bringing in a larger-than-usual class of freshmen and a new speaker for the lower house in Assemblyman Craig Coughlin, a Middlesex County Democrat. The Democrats also have larger majorities: 54-26 in the Assembly and 25-15 in the Senate. While such majorities along with a Democratic governor should mean fast and easy passage of the party's agenda in the next two years, that is not necessarily a given, particularly in New Jersey politics.

"We are going to work as closely as possible," said state Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester) during a press conference following Christie's State of the State address. "We are not going to fight as much, and when we fight, we will probably do it in private. We fought with (former Gov.) Jon Corzine. There is no promise it is going to be very easy. It never is ... We will figure out how to get it done in some way." Coughlin struck a similar note. "I will always look for collaboration with the Senate and with our governor, but inevitably there will be times when the Assembly must set its own course and act as an independent and equal branch of government," Coughlin said after taking the oath as the 171st Assembly speaker. "I will not be afraid to chart that path when it is necessary."

Coughlin replaced Assemblyman Vincent Prieto of Hudson County as speaker as a result of a deal struck between Sweeney, South Jersey party boss George Norcross, and Central Jersey Democrats last year. Prieto had battled with Sweeney continuously. Coughlin pledged the Assembly will "focus on building a stronger system of opportunity and security for our middle class, while standing up for the least fortunate and encouraging success." The Woodbridge lawyer presides over the 80-member Assembly.

Democrats have held the majority since 2002 and hold an expanded 54-26 majority in the 2018-2019 session — the largest Democratic majority since 1978.

Sweeney, a 16-year legislator and union leader, begins his ninth year as head of the upper house and has a one-vote larger majority. He was honored by Christie during his State of the State as “a person of good will and honesty and character.” Following Christie’s address, he said one of his main priorities is going to be increasing the minimum wage. The current Legislature includes 14 people in new seats, though not all are new to Trenton. Three of the five new state Senators have moved up from the Assembly and a fourth was a member of the lower house for 13 years until two years ago. All of the 10 new Assembly members are newcomers to the State House, although one is a former state labor commissioner.

Here is a scorecard of who’s who in the 218th Legislature:

In the 2nd District, which includes Atlantic City and other parts of the county, Chris Brown, a Republican, moved up from the Assembly to the Senate, replacing Democrat Colin Bell, who was seated only briefly to replace longtime Sen. Jim Whelan on his death last summer and who lost his bid to replace Whelan. This was the only seat the Republicans picked up in last November’s election. Brown, an attorney, spent six years in the Assembly. He considers himself a fiscal conservative and social moderate. After being sworn in, Brown pledged to “put people before party.” Brown’s move opened an Assembly seat, which is now filled by Democrat John Armato. A former member of the Buena Vista Township Committee, Armato served in the Air Force and then worked as an HVAC mechanic in Atlantic City and has been a volunteer firefighter for 45 years. He said he plans to work “with my new colleagues in the Assembly to lower the tax burden for our working families, to support local businesses and new employers in Atlantic County and to expand support for our veterans,” as well address the opioid and heroin crisis. He has been named to the Assembly commerce and health committees.

In the 7th District, which covers part of Burlington County, Democrat Troy Singleton moved from the Assembly to take the seat vacated by Republican Diane Allen, who spent two decades in that spot. This is one of two Senate seats that flipped from red to blue. Singleton, a union officer, joined the Assembly in 2011 and had chaired the state and local government committee in the lower house. He has been named vice chair of the Senate Economic Growth Committee and a member of the Budget and Appropriations and Legislative Oversight Committee. Replacing Singleton is Carol Murphy, a Mount Laurel Democrat. She most recently had served as a policy director for the state Legislature, where she had worked on such issues as pay equity, raising the minimum wage, and reducing gun violence. On the latter issue, she worked with state lawmakers and former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords to gain passage for a groundbreaking law that removes domestic violence abusers’ access to firearms. She was named to the Assembly budget, financial institutions and insurance, and judiciary committees.

Having lived paycheck-to-paycheck, having paid my own way through college, having served as a caregiver to both of my parents before they passed, I can relate to the struggles many people in our state face on a daily basis,” Murphy said at her swearing in. “One of the reasons I ran for Assembly is so that I could channel these experiences into real-life solutions to address the rising cost of living in this state, the crushing burden of student-loan debt, and the everyday needs of our working families. Today that work begins.”

The 8th District, which encompasses parts of Atlantic, Burlington, and Camden counties, has a new Republican Assemblyman, Ryan Peters. The lieutenant commander of SEAL Team 18 in the Naval Reserve replaces Maria Rodriguez-Gregg, who served two terms and did not seek re-election. Peters was in his first term as a Burlington County freeholder when he won his seat last November. He lives in Hainesport with his wife and three children.

Monmouth County’s 11th District is now represented in the Senate by Democrat Vin Gopal, who defeated Republican Jennifer Beck, an 11-year lawmaker from Red Bank, in the Democrats’ second Senate pickup. Gopal is the former chair of the Monmouth County Democratic party who owns a marketing firm that runs two local magazines. The Long Branch resident is the only member of the Senate with no previous legislative experience. Gopal has been named vice chair of the Senate Transportation Committee and a member of the economic growth and health, human services and senior citizens committees.

The new senator for the 13th District, which also covers part of Monmouth, is Republican Declan O’Scanlon, who moved up from the Assembly after a decade in the lower house. The chief executive and founder of a wireless telecommunications consulting and public relations firm is replacing Joseph Kyrillos, who spent three decades in the Legislature, most of them in the upper house. O’Scanlon has been known for his crusade against red-light cameras and more recently for releasing a draft report of a task force on binding arbitration in a futile effort to get legislators to renew a 2 percent cap on arbitration awards to police and firefighters. He was named to the Senate community and urban affairs, budget and appropriations, and law and public safety committees.

O’Scanlon’s move to the Senate opened a seat in the Assembly now filled by Serena DiMaso, also a Republican. The Holmdel woman is chair of the Bayshore Medical Center Foundation and serves on the board of Meridian Hospital. She was a Monmouth freeholder from 2012 to 2017 and, prior to that, a 10-year Holmdel committeewoman who served as the township’s mayor from 2006 to 2010. DiMaso holds a bachelor’s degree in business management, as well as a law degree, and is a member of the Holmdel First Aid Squad.

The 16th District, covering parts of Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, and Somerset counties, now has two Democratic Assemblymen, with the seating of Roy Freiman. The

Hillsborough resident won the seat vacated by Republican Jack Ciattarelli, who ran unsuccessfully for his party's gubernatorial nomination last spring, and gave the Democrats their second Assembly pickup. Freiman is a former Prudential Financial executive who led a team that managed data analytics, developed strategic plans, and sought to generate new business. He left his job at Prudential to run "because I saw a need for more strategic decision-making and collaborative leadership." Freiman said he plans to focus on common-sense ways to hold the line on property taxes, support policies that promote lasting economic development, and work to create jobs by supporting entrepreneurs and businesses. He was assigned to the Assembly's financial institutions and insurance and transportation committees.

Middlesex's 19th District is now represented in the Assembly by Democrat Yvonne Lopez. The Perth Amboy resident joins the speaker's district and is replacing John Wisniewski, who represented the district for more than two decades and gave up his seat in an unsuccessful bid for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Lopez is a Democratic state committeewoman who is the executive director and CEO of the Puerto Rican Association for Human Development, Inc. in Perth Amboy. She founded the Boys and Girls Clubs of Perth Amboy. Lopez said her work experiences have given her "a very good sense of what our constituents need" and she will work to meet those needs. She was named to the Assembly transportation, regulatory oversight, human services and financial institutions and insurance committees.

For the first time in 35 years, Union County's 20th District has a new state senator with the election of Democrat Joseph Cryan. The senator, who spent six terms in the Assembly before leaving in 2015 to become Union County sheriff, is replacing fellow Democrat Raymond Lesniak, who was one of the longest-serving tenured members of the Legislature and also made an unsuccessful gubernatorial run last year. The former state Democratic chairman was named vice chair of the Senate Commerce Committee and a member of the Law and Public Safety Committee. At his swearing in, Cryan said he "will be fighting every day to push back on the oppressive policies of the last eight years and against the divisive rhetoric and horrific mandates emanating from the White House."

In the northwest's 24th District, Christie's former Labor Commissioner Harold Wirths replaced fellow Republican Gail Phoebus, who spent little more than two years in office before retiring. A former Sussex County freeholder, Wirths owned and managed furniture stores for almost two decades. He serves on the board of Highlands State Bank, which he co-founded as Noble Community Bank. Wirths lives with his family in Hardyston.

Essex County's 29th District is now represented by Assemblywoman Shanique Speight, who replaced fellow Democrat Bonnie Watson. Watson spent 18 months in the Assembly and did not run for a full term. Speight, a lifelong Newark resident, is an Essex County sheriff's officer and a former member of the city's board of education. She said she sees service in the Assembly as "a great opportunity to serve my community at the

state level and to effect change.” Speight was named to the Assembly health, housing and women and children committees.

The new Assemblyman for the 40th District, encompassing parts of Bergen, Essex, Morris, and Passaic counties, is Christopher DePhillips. The former Wyckoff Township Committeeman and Northwest Bergen County Utilities Authority Commissioner replaced fellow Republican Scott Rumana, who gave up his seat to become a Superior Court judge. DePhillips is vice president and general counsel of a consulting and systems company that works with medical, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies.

While not totally new, also taking their seats were two Republicans who came aboard in the waning months of the last session to replace outgoing members and won full terms last November. They are Assemblyman Edward H. Thomson III, who replaced fellow Republican David Rible last August, and Sen. Kristin Corrado, sworn into office last October to replace Kevin O’Toole in the 40th District. And expect another new member to join the Democratic Assembly caucus soon. Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, a former speaker of the lower house, just won re-election to an eighth term representing the 34th District, which covers parts of Essex County and Clifton, but also was elected Murphy’s lieutenant governor and cannot serve in both offices so she will need to resign after being sworn in with Murphy next Tuesday.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please join us at 10:00 a.m. on January 19th at NJAC’s office in Trenton for our Conference Committee kick-off meeting as we begin planning for our 68th annual celebration of county government. And don’t miss NJAC’s Reorganization Meeting scheduled for 11:00 a.m. on January 26th in the Senate Chambers of the State House where Hunterdon County Clerk Mary Melfi will become our 77th President.

STATE HOUSE TRIVIA Did you know that in addition to 21 effectively and efficiently run county governments, New Jersey also includes the Gateway, Skylands, Shore, Delaware River, Greater Atlantic City, and Southern Shore regions?

“When I get tired and want to stop, I’d wonder what my next opponent was doing. I’d wonder if he was still working out. I’d tried to visualize him. When I could see him working out, I’d start pushing myself. When I could see him in the shower, I’d push myself harder.” Dan Gable