

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

County Government with a Unified Voice!

SHAUN C. VAN DOREN
NJAC President
Camden County Commissioner

JOHN G. DONNADIO, ESQ.
Executive Director

STATE HOUSE NEWS

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FISCAL YEAR 2025 STATE BUDGET

On February 27th, Governor Murphy delivered the Fiscal Year 2025 State Budget before both house of the State Legislature at the State House in Trenton. NJAC will spend the next several weeks reviewing the \$55,900,000,000.00 billion dollar spending plan and will testify at public hearings before budget committees in both houses later this month. Please note that although you may review the “Budget in Brief” at www.nj.gov/treasury/omb/publications/25bib/BIB.pdf, the document only provides a summary of the Governor’s budget recommendations. The State Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should make the comprehensive line-item budget available shortly and we’ll make sure to share that as well.

NJAC LEGISLATIVE GOALS

With dozens of new legislators, NJAC is working with county leaders from across the State to establish the Association’s legislative goals for the 2024/25 legislative session based on the following parameters: 1) Recommendations should benefit county governments in a unified manner and enjoy nonpartisan support. 2) Recommendations should be specific and tangible, so that we may accurately quantify any potential cost savings or other benefits. 3) Recommendations should be realistic and achievable with some initial examples to include:

1. Increasing Local Aid Allocations under the Transportation Trust Fund.
2. Permitting local governments to publish legal notices online.
3. Streamlining the use of the Open Public Records Act.
4. Modernizing the civil service system.
5. Prohibiting the imposition of unfunded State mandates.
6. Securing funding for the purchase, storage, and upgrade of body worn cameras.
7. Boosting grant monies for county 911 centers.

NJAC will adopt its legislative priorities for the 2024/2025 at its first Board of Directors meeting of the year set for 10:00 a.m. on March 15th by video conference with the agenda and additional details for board members to follow any minute now.

LOCAL AID ALLOCATIONS UNDER THE TRANSPORTATION TRUST FUND (TTF)

With the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) set to expire on June 30th, NJAC is working with the New Jersey State Association of County Engineers (NJSACE) to update the county inventory and annual need required to operate and maintain an estimated 7,140 bridges and more than 6,775 centerline miles of roads. NJAC has long been an advocate of reauthorizing the TTF as a stable, dependable, and long-term source of constitutionally dedicated funding necessary to ensure a safe and reliable network of roads and bridges. As a vital component of the TTF, Local Aid Allocations provide critical property tax relief, promote economic growth and development, and protect the motoring public on local roadways and bridges of which carry approximately 55% of the State's overall traffic.

In general, in 2016 Governor Christie eventually signed into law legislation that reauthorized the TTF as an 8 year \$2.0 billion per year capital program, which increased the State's motor fuels tax by .23 cents per gallon; reduced the State's sales tax to 6.875% in 2017 and then 6.625% in 2018; increased the earned income tax credit from 30% to 35% of the federal benefit amount; increased the New Jersey gross income tax exclusion on pension and retirement income for seniors; provided a personal exemption on State income taxes for all New Jersey veterans honorably discharged from active military service; and, phased out the estate tax by 2018. Under the leadership of then Senate President Steve Sweeney and Senator Steve Oroho, the law increased Local Aid allocations for counties and municipalities from \$190.0 million to \$400.0 million year as outlined in the table below.

CURRENT LOCAL AID ANNUAL ALLOCATIONS TO END JUNE 30, 2024

ALLOCATION	%	AMOUNT	COMMENT
County Local Aid Program	37.5%	\$150,000,00.000	Available as traditional County Aid
Municipal Local Aid Program	37.5%	\$150,000,000.00	Available as traditional Municipal Aid
Local Bridges Fund	11.0%	\$44,000,000.00	Available as Local Bridges Future Needs program monies
Local Freight Impact Fund	7.0%	\$28,000,000.00	Available as DOT Commissioner discretionary funding for freight travel
Local Aid Infrastructure Fund	7.0%	\$28,000,000.00	Available as traditional DOT Commissioner discretionary funding

NJAC looks forward to working with the New Jersey State Association of County Engineers (NJSACE) and a broad coalition of businesses, local governments, and other important stakeholders from across the Garden State in reauthorizing the TTF and protecting current Local Aid allocations.

CODE BLUE GRANT FUNDING

On February 15th, NJAC noted its support for **S-972** (*Corrado R-40/Pou D-35*) before the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee as the measure would enhance funding opportunities made available to nonprofit community-based organizations that provide shelter services during Code Blue alerts.

Given the well documented increase in the State's homeless population and county governments daily challenge to find temporary shelter for those in need, NJAC supports this much-needed initiative as it would provide new financial resources for community-based nonprofit organizations struggling to deliver essential services. As recently published by the Office of Homelessness Prevention (OHP) in its annual report, the State of New Jersey experienced a year-over-year increase of 20% in "Unsheltered Homelessness" and a 17% increase in the "Point-in-Time Count." In general, the "Point-in-Time Count" is a count of sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. "Unsheltered Homelessness" means individuals who are living on the streets or in other public spaces, such as parks or under bridges, whereas "Sheltered Homeless" refers to individuals who are staying in shelters, such as emergency shelters or in a transitional housing program. Although not included in the "Point-in-Time" for federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) purposes, homelessness may also include couch surfing, vehicle homelessness, and temporarily staying with friends or family.

In general, this legislation would make community-based nonprofit organizations eligible for a matching grant award from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), provided that the grant applications relate to an underlying grant from a county or municipality received by the community-based nonprofit organization not more than 12 months prior to the date of application. The bill would require DCA to maintain a record of underlying grants provided by each county and municipality, but would prohibit the Department from providing a matching grant for an application if an award of the amount requested would result in DCA awarding matching grants in an amount exceeding \$50,000 in that calendar year. The Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee Second Referenced the measure to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee and the companion version in the General Assembly **A-1241** (*Sauikie R-12/Murphy D-7*) is currently in the Assembly Community Development and Women's Affairs Committee awaiting consideration.

COUNTY TOURISM GRANTS

On February 6th, NJAC noted its support for **S-159** (*Polistina R-2/Beach D-6*) before the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism, and Historic Preservation Committee as the measure would direct certain excess tourism dollars to support county tourism advertising and promotion.

With outstanding beaches, boardwalks, farmlands, vineyards, downtowns, cities, historic sites, parks, museums, amusements parks, fairs and festivals, restaurants, casinos, racetracks, and much more, NJAC supports this long overdue bill as it would help counties promote tourism destinations and further capitalize on the estimated \$50.0 billion industry in the Garden State. In summary, this bill would establish the “County Tourism Incentive Grant Fund” and provide for the appropriation and distribution of excess State hotel and motel occupancy fee revenues for deposit into the Fund, which would provide funding for grants to counties to support tourism advertising and promotion. The bill would further provide that the amount of each incentive grant issued to a county will equal the county’s share of the excess State hotel and motel occupancy fee revenues deposited to the Fund. The Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism, and Historic Preservation Committee favorable reported the bill to Second Reading, and the companion version in the General Assembly **A-137** (*Guardian R-2*) is currently in the Assembly Tourism, Gaming, and Arts Committee awaiting consideration.

PUBLIC WORKS CONTRACTS

On February 2nd, NJAC noted its concerns with **A-547** (*Stanley D-18/Hall D-28*) before the Assembly Labor Committee and is meeting later next month with the bill’s sponsors along with the New Jersey Association of County Purchasing Officials (NJACPO) to discuss these concerns and possible solutions.

In general, this legislation would require a public agency that is receiving State funds for the purpose of public work to post on its main website for public inspection an accounting of how much of those funds were used for public work contracts in which the public agency contracted with businesses owned by minorities, women, and veterans. The accounting would require how much of those funds were used for public work contracts in which the public agency contracted with other businesses that are not owned by minorities, women, or veterans, and the accounting is required to be updated monthly. Whenever a public agency does not maintain a website, the bill would require the public agency to forward the information to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and for posting on the department’s main website.

Although NJAC commends Assemblyman Stanley and Assemblywomen Hall for their leadership in introducing this well-intentioned legislation concerning the reported inequities in public contracting opportunities, county and municipal purchasing officials are concerned about how the legislation would impact daily operations. More specifically, purchasing officials cite the lack of adequate staffing and resources necessary to accurately track, manage, and upload such information to public websites on a regular basis, especially when including projects utilizing grant funding from the State. The Assembly Labor Committee favorably reported **A-547** to Second Reading and the companion version in the Senate **S-2547** (*Moriarty D-4*) is currently in the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism, and Historic Preservation Committee awaiting consideration.

COUNTY VETERAN TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

On February 8th, the Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee favorably reported and second referenced to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee for consideration, **S-1069** (*Greenstein D-14/Lagana D-38*), which would establish a county veteran transportation grant program.

In summary, the legislation would establish a program to provide reimbursement, subject to available State or federal funding, to qualified county governments that provide transportation services to disabled veterans to and from medical counseling appointments to any United States Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare facility for healthcare services. The bill would define "disabled veteran" to mean any citizen and resident of this State now or hereafter honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances from active service in any branch of the Armed Forces of the United States, a Reserve component thereof, or the National Guard and who has been or will be declared by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to have a service-connected disability. The measure would also appropriate \$2.0 million to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to effectuate the purposes of the bill. The companion version of the bill in the General Assembly **A-518** (*DeAngelo D-14/Tucker D-28*) is currently in the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee awaiting consideration.

COUNTY HOSPITAL OPTION FEE

On February 22nd, NJAC noted its support for **S-1252** (*Beach D-6/Schepisi R-39*) and **A-3364** (*Murphy D-7/Wimberly D-35*) in health committees in both houses as the measure would clarify the cap on fees imposed under the "County Option Hospital Fee Program Act."

In summary, this bill would amend the "County Option Hospital Fee Program Act," to remove the requirement that the fee implemented under the program be subject to a cap as determined by the Commissioner of Human Services. The bill would instead require that the fee is subject to review and approval by the Commissioner of which would not impact the Commissioner's authority to annually review and approve county option programs. The bill would also specify that the fee would not exceed the aggregate amount specified under federal law minus one percent of total net patient revenues. The Committee amended the bill to provide that neither the State nor a participating county would be liable for any amount of local-healthcare-related fee imposed on a hospital pursuant to this act that the hospital fails to pay or does not pay in a timely manner to the assessing county. The Committee further amended the bill to provide that with the exception of the period of time during which a participating county or Medicaid Managed Care Organization is in possession of payments prior to disbursement, neither a participating county nor Medicaid Managed Care Organization would be liable for any amount related to an approved expenditure plan determined to be impermissible by a federal agency.

The County Option Hospital Fee Program was established in November of 2018 to support local hospitals in designated high-need areas to ensure continued access to critical healthcare services for vulnerable populations. To effectuate this goal, the program authorizes participating counties, and hospitals within those counties, to partner with the State through a provider assessment mechanism that enhances financial support through the Medicaid program. The current participating counties are: Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Passaic. **S-1252** and **A-3364** are on Second Reading in both houses.

DEFIBRILLATORS

On February 22nd, the Senate Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee combined **S-1250** (*Beach D-6/Schepisi R-39*) with **S-1210** (*Beach D-6/Schepisi D-39*) and Second Referenced **S-1210** to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee for consideration.

In summary, this legislation would require certain places of public assembly and youth athletic events to acquire and maintain an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED). The measure would define a “place of public assembly” to mean an indoor or outdoor facility, building, or other site, which has the capacity to accommodate large public assemblies of at least 1,000 people at a time, including, but not limited to, a stadium, ballpark, gymnasium, race track, field house, arena, civic center, or other similar facility used for the conduct of sporting events; and any concert hall, recital hall, theater, indoor or outdoor amphitheater, or other auditorium space used for the presentation of musical renditions or concerts. A “place of public assembly” would not include any hall owned by a church, religious organization, grange, public association, or free library.

The measure would also establish certain requirements for the owner or operator of each place of public assembly to acquire and maintain on-site at the place of public assembly at least one AED. The owner or operator of each place of public assembly would be further required to develop and implement a cardiac event response protocol. Any person who would violate the bill’s requirements for places of large public assemblies would be liable to a civil penalty. Additionally, the bill would require a municipal or county recreation departments and certain nonprofit youth serving organizations who organize or sponsor youth athletic events to have an AED available on site at each youth athletic event and practice that is organized or sponsored by the department or organization. A recreation department or youth serving organization would be deemed in compliance with the AED requirement if a State-certified emergency services provider, licensed athletic trainer, or other certified first responder is on site at the athletic event or practice and has an AED available for use on site.

A municipal or county recreation department will not be held liable for any act or omission of any person who uses a defibrillator solely on the basis that the defibrillator was used on a field owned by the recreation department during a youth athletic event that was not sponsored or organized by the department. The measure would also provide certain immunity from civil

liability to places of public assembly, their owners and operators, and their employees and volunteers, and to recreation departments or youth serving organizations and their employees and volunteer umpires, coaches, and licensed athletic trainers in association with the acquisition and use of an AED. In addition, a place of public assembly, its owner and operator, and its employees and volunteers would be immune from civil or criminal liability resulting from the malfunctioning of an AED if the AED has been maintained and tested in accordance with the manufacturer's operational guidelines.

The companion version **A-5452** (*Jimenez D-32/Danielsen D-17*) is currently in the Assembly Community Development and Affairs Committee awaiting consideration. NJAC is working with the New Jersey Recreation and Park Association (NJRPA), the New Jersey State League of Municipalities (NJLM), and the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) to quantify the potential costs associated with implementing the legislation and looks forward to meeting with the sponsors to address our collective concerns.

UPCOMING EVENTS: Exhibit space is going superfast, so don't miss the opportunity to join us for county governments' premiere event set for 5/1 – 5/3 at Caesar's in Atlantic City.

As you travel along the eastern seaboard spending time in several cities on business, don't forget this handy reference of the top 14 items that should never appear in and/or around your pork roll, egg, and cheese breakfast sandwich on an everything bagel.

14. Avocado
13. Sun dried tomatoes
12. Alfalfa Sprouts
11. Parsley
10. Feta cheese
9. Goat Cheese
8. Blue Cheese Crumbles
7. Balsamic Drizzle
6. Arugula
5. Sauteed Spinach
4. Field Mushrooms
3. Sheep's Milk
2. Caviar
1. Baby Kale

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." Will Rogers