



NYS Association of Counties



2026 Legislative Program

Protecting Taxpayers,
Strengthening Services

62 Counties

19.8 M New Yorkers Served

100 Years of Service

Executive Summary

The State of Counties in 2026

As we enter 2026, New York's 62 counties face extraordinary fiscal and operational challenges driven by federal policy changes, growing state mandates, and aging infrastructure. Yet counties remain New York's most essential service providers—delivering nearly every state and federal program that touches residents' daily lives.

The federal "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" has created cost and operational uncertainty for Medicaid and SNAP programs. Billions in potential cost increases threaten to cascade down to counties and New York City, with the final impact still unknown. Without State intervention, these federal changes could force dramatic property tax increases or devastating service cuts across the state.

At the same time, the State faces its own fiscal challenges. Out-year budget gaps nearly doubled from the FY 2025 Enacted Budget projections to the FY 2026 Midyear Update—from \$14 billion to \$27 billion—and will likely climb higher as federal impacts become clear. These pressures make it more critical than ever that the State and counties work together to protect both state and local taxpayers.

Counties value our strong partnership with New York State and want to be part of the solution through enhanced government efficiency, shared services, and innovations in service delivery. Our 2026 priorities reflect this collaborative approach—protecting taxpayers while maintaining the essential services that keep New York communities safe, healthy, and economically resilient.

Take Action: Partner With Counties

The challenges facing New York in 2026 are significant, but they are not insurmountable. With the right partnerships and policies, we can protect taxpayers, maintain essential services, and build stronger communities across our state.

Counties are committed to being part of the solution. We stand ready to work with the Governor and Legislature to navigate federal uncertainty, modernize outdated systems, and invest strategically in our shared future. Our priorities reflect a simple principle: ensuring affordability for taxpayers while maintaining the quality services New Yorkers deserve and expect.

What Counties Bring to the Partnership

- **On-the-ground delivery** of nearly all state and federal programs
- **Direct connection** to and understanding of community needs and local solutions
- **Proven track record** of innovation and efficiency
- **62 diverse perspectives** representing urban, suburban, and rural New York

What Counties Need from the State

- **Protection from federal cost shifts** during unprecedented uncertainty
- **Continuation of the Medicaid cap** to prevent an unsustainable property tax burden
- **Modernization of outdated laws** that create inefficiencies and increase costs for taxpayers
- **Strategic investments** in infrastructure, workforce, and essential services

Table of Contents

2	Executive Summary	11	Judiciary	19	Support Counties Through Federal Policy Changes
4	Top 10 County Priorities For 2026	11	Local Finance and Tax Relief	20	Cutting Costs Through Modernization
6	Did you know?	12	Medicaid		Update Outdated Procurement Laws
7	About NYSAC	13	Personnel & Public Employee Relations	20	Expand The County Workforce
8	Additional Priority Areas	13	Public & Mental Health	21	Revitalize Local Infrastructure
8	Aging	14	Public Infrastructure & Transportation	22	Expand The County Partnerships Program
8	Children With Special Needs	14	Public Safety	22	Invest In Water Infrastructure
8	Community Colleges & Higher Education	15	Veterans	23	Reforming Broken Systems
9	Economic Development and Agriculture	16	The Path Forward	24	Reform Raise The Age Funding
9	Elections	16	Contact Information	24	Fix The Competency Restoration Crisis
9	Environment And Energy	17	Appendix: Priority Fact Sheets	25	End Taxpayer Subsidies for Packaging Waste
10	Gaming	17	Make New York More Affordable	26	
10	General Government and Shared Services	17	Protect Counties From Federal Cost Shifts		
10	Human Services	18	Preserve The Medicaid Cap		

Top 10 County Priorities for 2026

Make New York More Affordable



1. Protect Counties from Federal Cost Shifts

Prevent billions in new costs from falling to property taxpayers

Federal policy changes threaten to shift massive costs to counties during a time of extraordinary uncertainty. Counties and the state must work together to avoid passing these federal cost increases to local property taxpayers. Without partnership, New Yorkers face dramatic tax increases or devastating cuts to essential services.



2. Preserve the Medicaid Cap

Maintain the \$7.6 billion cap on local Medicaid costs

New York counties pay more in mandated Medicaid costs than all other counties in America combined—driving our nation-leading property tax burden. The Medicaid cap provides critical protection, but new federal cuts threaten to blow through this safeguard. Without continued protection, billions of additional costs would fall directly on property taxpayers.



3. Support Counties Through Federal Policy Changes

Provide state assistance to manage sweeping federal requirements

New federal rules for SNAP and Medicaid create massive new compliance burdens for counties. Without robust state support—funding, training, IT systems, and technical assistance—counties risk federal penalties, loss of critical funding, and service disruptions for vulnerable families. State partnership is essential to navigate these changes without forcing property tax increases.

Cutting Costs Through Modernization



4. Update Procurement Laws

Give counties modern procurement tools while safeguarding labor protections

Counties need commonsense procurement reforms to save taxpayer dollars: make piggybacking authority—which expires in June 2026—permanent; update bidding thresholds set more than 15 years ago that now force expensive bid processes for routine purchases; and clarify piggybacking authority for public works projects while maintaining strong labor protections.



5. Expand the County Workforce

Help counties recruit experienced professionals for essential services

Counties face critical staffing shortages in public health, emergency services, child and family welfare, and other essential areas. The retired employee earnings cap has been frozen for 18 years, making it harder to recruit experienced professionals to fill vacancies. Raising the retiree earnings cap from \$35,000 to at least \$50,000 (S.6956-B Ryan C./A.8720-A Stirpe) would let counties tap into a pool of experienced talent to maintain critical services.

Revitalize Local Infrastructure



6. Expand the County Partnerships Program

Reduce barriers for counties to access economic development funding

The \$50 million County Infrastructure Grant Program supports economic development, housing, and infrastructure projects, but the 50% county match is too high for many smaller, rural counties. Reducing the match to 25% and increasing the appropriation to \$100 million would unlock transformative projects across all regions of the state.



7. Invest in Water Infrastructure

Enact the Safe Water Action Program (SWAP)

Counties maintain critical water systems but face aging infrastructure and emerging contaminants like PFAS and 1,4-Dioxane. Unlike local transportation infrastructure—which is supported by direct state aid from the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) program—water infrastructure has no guaranteed annual state support. The Safe Water Action Program (S.1850 Hinchey/A.6012 Kelles) would provide predictable funding to protect public health and prevent dramatic rate increases.

Reform Broken Systems



8. Reform Raise the Age Funding

Provide predictable funding without property tax penalties

The current Raise the Age funding scheme forces counties to pay upfront for costs associated with raising the age of criminal liability and wait months for reimbursement. Even more concerning, counties that breach the 2% property tax cap lose their reimbursement entirely. With federal policy changes threatening to force counties to override the tax cap, this funding should be decoupled from the property tax cap and converted to a grant model that provides predictable upfront funding.



9. Fix the Competency Restoration Crisis

Modernize CPL § 730 to reduce costs and deliver mental health treatment

Counties face skyrocketing costs for competency restoration, with some seeing 6,000% increases since 2019. The system keeps some defendants in restoration for years without providing actual treatment, all while diverting hundreds of millions from community mental health services. The reforms in S.1004 (Brouk)/A.5567 (Simon) are critical to rein in costs and ensure individuals receive appropriate treatment instead of years of costly, non-therapeutic restoration.



10. End Taxpayer Subsidies for Packaging Waste

Require producers—not taxpayers—to fund packaging waste management

New York's 25 municipal landfills are nearing the end of their useful life, with only 16–25 years of combined capacity remaining statewide. A major driver of that problem is packaging waste, which local governments must manage and pay to dispose of, even though they have no control over how much packaging is generated or how it is designed. The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (S.1464 Harckham/A.1749 Glick) would shift those costs from taxpayers to producers, incentivize better packaging design, divert waste from landfills, and modernize New York's recycling system.

Did You Know?

\$14 BILLION

Total amount of county taxes used to pay for state programs each year—with \$7.6 billion paid in Medicaid by the 57 counties and New York City, which is more than all other counties in the nation combined. This drives New York's nation-leading (non-school) property tax burden.

90%

90% of the county property tax levy is dedicated to paying for state and federal mandates—leaving little local control over spending.

\$1,300+ PER DAY

What competency restoration costs county taxpayers. Some counties have seen costs increase over 6,000% since 2019, diverting hundreds of millions from community behavioral health services.

18 YEARS

How long the \$35,000 retiree earnings cap has been frozen, hampering counties' ability to recruit experienced professionals for critical services.

24/7/365

Critical county services never close. From 911 dispatch to emergency shelters, from jail operations to road maintenance, counties provide round-the-clock essential services that keep New Yorkers safe.

87%

Local highway departments maintain 87% of New York's 110,000 miles of roads and over 50% of the state's 18,000 bridges—yet receive a small fraction of state transportation revenues.

\$1 BILLION

Counties fund the largest local share of preschool special education programs of any state in the nation—approaching \$1 billion annually.

\$5.2+ BILLION

The cumulative cost shift to counties since the state reduced its Safety Net share from 50% to 29%, forcing local property taxpayers to absorb billions in poverty assistance costs.

\$300 MILLION

The amount of annual relief that the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act would provide local taxpayers by requiring companies to reduce overall packaging use, improve recyclability, and fund recycling infrastructure.

1 in 3

More than one in three New Yorkers receives services through county social services departments—including 7 million Medicaid enrollees, 3 million SNAP recipients, and thousands more receiving child welfare, housing assistance, and other vital services.

About NYSAC



The **New York State Association of Counties** (NYSAC) is a bipartisan municipal association that has represented the interests of New York's 62 counties since 1925. NYSAC provides a **unified voice for county government**, advocates for policies that strengthen county operations and local taxpayers, and serves as a resource for county officials on legislative, regulatory, and operational matters.

Our mission is to foster excellence in county government and unite the voice of New York's county leaders.

Our Values

- **Partnership:** Counties are essential partners in delivering state and federal programs
- **Innovation:** Supporting creative local solutions to state and national challenges
- **Efficiency:** Promoting smart government that maximizes taxpayer value
- **Service:** Strengthening counties' ability to serve their residents
- **Bipartisanship:** Working across party lines for the common good

County Impact by the Numbers

- **62 diverse counties** from New York City to the North Country
- **19.8 million New York residents** served by counties
- **Hundreds of thousands of county employees** delivering essential services
- **\$14 billion in county revenues** directly finance numerous state and federal programs each year

NYSAC Services

- **Legislative advocacy** and policy analysis
- **Training and technical assistance** for elected and appointed county officials
- **Research and data** on county operations and best practices
- **Legal guidance** on state and federal statutory and regulatory changes
- **Networking** and peer-learning opportunities

Leadership

NYSAC is governed by a Board of Directors composed of 15 members, with one representative from each of the state's 12 judicial districts, ensuring representation of diverse geographic and demographic perspectives.

Additional County Priority Areas

Aging

- Fully fund the implementation of the **State Aging Master Plan**.
- **Maintain state funding for core aging services** to address waiting lists.

Children with Special Needs

- Work with counties and school districts to **establish new transportation partnerships**.
- **Provide equal access to Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)** for preschool special education students.
- **Fund incentives for students to become special educators** in speech, occupational, or physical therapy and other special education fields.
- **Increase the administrative cost reimbursement rate** for counties to equal the rate paid to school districts for their students.
- **Renew the New York State Health Care Reform Act (HCRA)** designating the Early Intervention Covered Lives Fund at \$40 million annually and amend the disbursement methodology to ensure counties receive 49% of total Covered Lives funding consistent with current EI reimbursement practices.
- **Direct NYSED to integrate EI core competencies into licensure requirements** for early childhood special education, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and allow EI fieldwork hours to count toward professional licensure.
- Fund and direct the Bureau of Early Intervention to **conduct a statewide analysis of Early Intervention age-out policies at age three** and their impact on provider capacity and service delivery timelines.

Community Colleges & Higher Education

- **Set the base state aid formula allocation for each community college to 100% of the prior year** or increase \$100 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, whichever is greater.
- **Fully fund the NYS Opportunity Promise Scholarship** with state resources and enhance the program to include BOCES certifications in high-demand trades.
- **Modify the institutional classification of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)** from a community college to a SUNY university and/or ensure 100% state reimbursement to counties with students attending FIT for post associate degree instruction.
- **Increase the state share for community college base aid** to 40% of a school's operating budget to reduce the costs to counties and students.
- **Provide the following appropriation increases** to allow community colleges to remain competitive with private and public higher education facilities:
 - \$30 million to stabilize faculty and staff, covering the contractual cost increases for existing faculty and staff.
 - \$10 million to address student success services, which lead to retention and improved student outcomes.
 - \$60 million to reduce the financial losses from high-cost programs such as nursing and advanced manufacturing.

Economic Development & Agriculture

- **Oppose any decrease to the 60-hour farm worker overtime threshold** adopted by the Farm Laborers Wage Board and the NYS Department of Labor.
- **Repeal section 674-a of the Labor Law** to eliminate the three-member Farm Laborers Wage Board.
- **Require providers build out middle-mile and final-mile broadband infrastructure** before obtaining ConnectALL grant funding.
- **Support communities impacted by state prison and juvenile justice facility closures** by allocating a portion of Downtown Revitalization Initiative and New York Forward funding to affected counties.
- Direct the Department of Environmental Conservation, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Department of Agriculture and Markets, **to establish a multi-stakeholder working group including county representatives to evaluate biosolids management practices** and identify science-based alternatives to land application of biosolids contaminated with PFAS and other emerging contaminants.
- **Oppose S.6530 (Brisport)/A.6928 (Rosenthal)**, which would prohibit the Department of Environmental Conservation from issuing new permits for large Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) or expansions of existing operations, as this legislation would undermine New York's dairy industry and responsible environmental stewardship.

Elections

- **Provide county boards of elections with more** flexibility when identifying and operating early voting polling sites.
- **Provide \$20 million in state operating aid and \$15 million in recurring aid** to counties to help administer federal, state, and local elections.
- Conduct a comprehensive study of the potential benefits, challenges, and costs of establishing a **centralized election and voter registration management system** to enhance cybersecurity, accuracy, and fraud prevention, with findings and recommendations made publicly available by the end of 2026.

Environment & Energy

- **Enact S.270 (Harckham)** to allow local governments to build solar canopies above parking lots without State Legislative approval.
- **Prioritize solar energy production along the New York State Thruway**, excluding land protected by agricultural easements, to minimize development pressure on farmland and support clean energy goals. Additionally, study the feasibility of installing solar canopies above state and federal highways.
- **Require utilities to engage local governments** in planning and implementing distribution system upgrades to align them with local zoning, planning priorities, and clean energy objectives.
- **Amend the Bigger Better Bottle Bill** (S.5684 May/A.6543 Glick) to provide local governments with reimbursement for the loss of recycling commodity value resulting from expanded redemption, using a portion of the additional unclaimed deposit revenue generated under the bill.
- **Establish an EPR program for solar panels** to ensure the responsible recycling and reuse of materials, reducing the environmental impact of solar infrastructure and require developers to address end-of-useful life remediation.
- **Authorize counties to create Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) programs** with a local opt-out for residents and businesses.
- **Address barriers to participation in weatherization and energy efficiency programs** by streamlining application processes and investing in clean energy advisors to guide New Yorkers through the process.

- **Increase education on the costs and benefits of climate transition** by creating a practical roadmap and plain language summary that clearly outlines the financial, health, and environmental impacts of the state's climate goals.
- **Exempt highway construction and maintenance vehicles and equipment from the ACT Rule**, as these vehicles are vital for maintaining safe roadways and current limitations in zero-emission vehicle availability could hinder essential public services and safety.
- **Enact S.1463-E (Kavanagh)/A.1209 (Paulin)** to reduce local government costs and landfill waste by ensuring manufacturers take responsibility for recycling and reusing mattress components.

Gaming

- **Immediately make municipalities whole** for gaming revenue that is being withheld by the state.
- **Provide advance payments** to counties impacted by ongoing negotiations with the Seneca Indian Nation.
- Make a permanent annual appropriation of **\$20 million** to offset any local funding decrease that results from the state's private casino tax reductions made to date.
- Ensure that any loss in revenue for downstate counties within the Resorts World Catskills catchment area will be offset so that these **communities are held harmless** from the development of a New York City based casino.

General Government & Shared Services

- **Expand the Pro-Housing Communities Program** to include county governments and establish additional county-eligible actions, such as incentives for water and sewer infrastructure expansion, to support local participation and accelerate housing development.
- **Enact S.4719 (Fahy)/A.1766 (Steck)** to ease the creation of local government health insurance consortia under Article 47 of the Insurance Law.
- **Provide funding for a dedicated, full-time FOIL Officer** in each county to assist with FOIL compliance.

Human Services

- **Focus on children and hard-to-serve populations** including the homeless and those with substance use disorders and mental health struggles.
- **Restore and enhance child welfare funding** to a 65/35 state/county statutory share for preventive, protective, and independent living services.
- **Expand the Empire State Tax Credit income threshold by \$25,000** for married filing jointly, single, head of household, qualifying surviving spouse, and married filing separately, so more middle-class families can achieve this benefit.
- Create an additional 50 **in-patient psychiatric beds** for adolescents and children.
- **Restore Safety Net state matching funds to a 50/50 state and local match.** The disinvestment of state resources has increased costs to local taxpayers by over \$5.2 billion since the cost shift was enacted over a decade ago. The lack of state investment has directly contributed to the worsening homelessness crisis in every corner of the state.

- **Partner with counties** to address shelter and emergency housing needs by:
 - **Updating rental allowances and the standard of need**, which have not changed in decades, to fully address the dramatic increase in housing, energy and food costs, as long as the state restores Safety Net to 50/50.
 - **Making permanent housing the central focus** of state homelessness prevention goals. Coordinate a timely transition to supportive housing for the highest need individuals with mental health and substance use disorders.
 - **Expanding transitional housing opportunities** for the highest need individuals by subsidizing a recurring \$100 million capital component for counties to build new facilities.
- **Restore county authority to audit individuals** applying for Medicaid and other social service programs to ensure program integrity.
- **Invest in childcare and early learning programs** with the goal of creating and funding year-round, full-day universal care, including:
 - **Expanding the number of childcare professionals and facilities** to ensure eligible families can access state childcare incentives, prioritizing investments in childcare deserts.
 - **Expanding modalities of childcare** by incentivizing schools, nursing homes, and employers to open childcare centers.
 - **Sustaining childcare investments and incentives** to ensure local taxpayers are not burdened with increased costs in the absence of state support.
- As state and federal funding becomes insufficient to cover childcare to eligible families, **protect local taxpayers** by:
 - **Establishing funding predictability** at the local level to prevent disruptions for children and families when funding runs out;
 - **Ensuring a funding methodology for providers that is secure and predictable** to induce expansion in childcare slots, making it easier for parents to locate needed childcare and ameliorate existing childcare deserts;
 - **Reconsidering new maintenance of effort provisions** that require local matching funds to draw down CCAP funds, which increased New York City's MOE by more than 500 percent from \$52 million to \$328 million; and
 - **Restoring administrative flexibility to local districts** in terms of how childcare dollars are administered and ensure that decisions regarding waitlists and denials of new applications are reflective of the budget and community realities occurring at the local level.

Judiciary

- **Allocate \$50 million** to offset the capital costs of increasing the number of Supreme Court judges.
- **Fully fund the mandated DA salary** increase as part of the 2023-24 state budget and thereafter, including a one-time amount for the retroactive salary increase that has not been funded to date.
- **Fully fund parental representation** in child welfare proceedings.
- **Fully fund 18-b rate increase** to live up to the intent of the Hurrell-Harring settlement agreed to by state leadership years ago.
- **Lower court judgment interest rates** by enacting S.3250 (Sanders) (2021) / A.5016 (McDonald) (2021), which links judgement interest rates to federal interest rates.
- **Appropriate \$50 million in grant funding** to support local government implementation of the Clean Slate Act. This amount should be allocated again in 2027 and adjusted based on need.

Local Finance & Tax Relief

- **Grant counties sales tax permanency** at their existing rates and authorize all counties to raise sales tax rates to 4% as outlined in Part O, S.4009/A.3009 (2023) Part U, S.8009/A.9009 (2022) and S. Part L, S.2509/A.3009 (2021).
- **Allow counties to set other home rule revenue tax rates** up to the most common rate existing in other counties without state legislative approval, including mortgage recording, occupancy, and real estate transfer taxes.
- **Consider broadening the sales tax base** in cases that level the competitive playing field across different delivery mechanisms, especially as they mature—just as the state did by treating online retailers and brick-and-mortar local businesses the same regarding sales tax, and more recently with short-term rentals and other lodging.
- **Eliminate the use of “dark store theory”** to lower property tax assessments and create a task force to identify solutions.
- **Grant counties the authority to be included in the state’s debt set-off program** for any outstanding debt totaling \$50 or more.
- **Enact “No New Unfunded Mandates”** legislation.
- **Cap current state-mandated costs** at a rate that does not exceed the state-imposed property tax growth cap.
- **Allow reserve funds to be used for public health and safety emergencies** and update tax stabilization reserve fund provisions.
- **Streamline adult-use cannabis sales tax distribution**, which are inconsistent due to multiple state agency involvement.
- **Require all state legislation to include a statement of fiscal impact** affecting local governments as outlined in S.5380 (Harckham).

Medicaid

- **Enhance state technical assistance** by providing dedicated state staff and resources to offer real-time guidance to counties on complex federal reporting requirements.
- **Streamline reporting systems** by investing in modernized, user-friendly reporting platforms that reduce administrative burden and minimize the risk of reporting errors while ensuring data accuracy and timeliness.
- **Establish proactive communication protocols** by creating regular communication channels between state and local departments to identify potential compliance issues before they result in federal penalties or withheld reimbursements.
- **Provide comprehensive training programs** by offering ongoing, intensive training for local district staff on evolving federal requirements.
- **Increase administrative support** recognizing that meeting federal reporting standards requires significant local administrative capacity and provide adequate state funding to support the additional staffing and technology infrastructure needed for compliance.
- **Finalize unfinished Medicaid eFMAP Affordable Care Act reconciliations** for state fiscal years 2017-2023 and COVID eFMAP reconciliations for 2020-2023.
- **File an 1115 Medicaid waiver** with the federal Centers for Medicaid and Medicaid Services (CMS) to assist high-risk incarcerated individuals, including those held in county jails, to enroll in Medicaid/CHIP prior to their release.
- **Preserve the county Medicaid zero percent growth cap** to ensure counties have the resources to provide local health and human services and reduce pressure on property taxes.

- **Provide fiscal resources and incentives to address the severe deficit of qualified home healthcare professionals** in many areas of New York, including career ladders, assistance with transportation (car loan forgiveness) or bus passes, a traveling per diem, staff pool, assistance with childcare, job sharing, career milestone incentives, and standardizing language and communication needs.

Personnel & Public Employee Relations

- **Reform Scaffold Law** to include a pure standard of comparative negligence S.1703 (Gallivan) (2021).
- **Amend Public Officers Law § 3** to allow for home rule authority to set employee residency rules.
- **Expand the acceptable zone of “band scoring”** of civil service examinations.
- **Eliminate the competitive status** for any position that requires the applicant to hold a valid Professional License issued by the State of New York.
- **Eliminate the need for applicants to cross-file** in adjacent municipalities to have their test scores counted for the same title in multiple jurisdictions.
- **Allow all civil service tests to be administered locally**, or as many as practicable.
- Change all or certain subsets of exams to **pass/fail**.
- **Follow county success models** in constructing reforms, such as Livingston County's "GLOW With Your Hands" initiative and Monroe County's RETAIN and Mpower.
- Establish a new exempt class of employees for **airport positions**.

Public & Mental Health

- **Enact S.453 (Hoyleman) / A.765 (McDonald)** to require healthcare providers to enter adult immunizations into the New York State Immunization Information System (NYSIIS)/Citywide Immunization Registry (CIR).
- **Enact S.5196 (Hoyleman-Sigal)/A.2128 (Rosenthal)** to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and close statutory loopholes that undermine the efficacy of the ban on flavored vapor products.
- **Introduce and pass legislation to require a state system or mechanism for vetting volunteers** for public health emergency response.
- **Amend subdivision 14 of Cannabis Law Section 77** to ensure that sites that receive on-site consumption licenses are not located on the same premises as sites subject to the Clean Indoor Air Act (CIAA).
- **Support LHDs in developing targeted public health interventions** to combat the opioid epidemic by amending County Law § 677 to allow local health officials to access reports and records related to deaths within their county.
- **Reimburse LHDs for costs incurred during state-led communicable disease investigations** and establish a mechanism to request state support when necessary.
- **Create a permanent carve-out for School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs)** from the Medicaid Managed Care Program to enable SBHCs to receive reimbursement directly from NYSDOH.
- **Increase the lead poisoning prevention appropriation by \$30.3 million** to fully fund the costs of lowering the elevated blood lead level (EBLL) from 10 to 5 ug/dL and provide an additional \$30 million in funding should the EBLL be lowered to 3.5 ug/dL per the CDC's recommendation.
- **Provide additional reimbursements to county coroners and medical examiners** for the purpose of carrying out their duties in accordance with County Law § 671 and 677.
- **Provide a 20% state aid increase** for Local Government Units (LGUs) to support county-based SPOA programs.

- **Support the implementation of 2025 Mental Hygiene Law amendments**—which expand criteria for intervention to include individuals unable to meet basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, or medical care—by aiding the development of local procedures and pilot county programs.
- **Extend legal protections for mental health professionals, crisis responders, and 988/Mobile Crisis Team personnel** by classifying both physical assault and repeated emotional abuse in the course of their duties as serious offenses and authorize victims to use their employer's business address on official records.

Public Infrastructure & Transportation

- **Provide additional funding** in the next state transportation budget (SFY 27) for the 5-Year Transportation Capital Plan to account for recent inflation.
- **Provide a funding offset for counties** to comply with the 2035 ZEV requirement.
- **Pause implementation of the Advanced Clean Truck (ACT) Rule** until there is strong evidence that the State has in place the necessary direct financial assistance, incentives, and charging infrastructure and can definitively determine that vehicle manufacturers are prepared to supply vehicles without disrupting the work needed to maintain our vast and aging infrastructure.
- **Expand the ACT Rule exemption** for transit buses, motor coaches, and emergency vehicles to include municipally owned highway construction, maintenance vehicles, and equipment.
- **Enact A.426 (Magnarelli) to increase the CHIPS bidding threshold** to \$750,000 to give localities more flexibility to perform in-house projects that can reduce costs for local taxpayers.
- **Extend design-build authority** to counties.
- **Link economic development to adequate local transportation funding** by pairing major economic development investments with increased state funding for targeted local roads, bridges, and culverts to handle increased demand and vehicle weights.
- **Oppose legislative proposals that impose inflexible standards on road salt** use that override local decision-making and threaten municipalities' ability to safeguard the traveling public.
- **Support the continued implementation of voluntary Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force recommendations** while maintaining local authority over winter road maintenance decisions.
- **Build on state investment in Upstate Airports** by maintaining a \$250 million appropriation in SFY 2027 State Budget.
- **Enact S.2725 (Skoufis) (2023)** to authorize DEC to issue enhanced special airport air strike hazard permits to federal or state government employees and professionals responsible for wildlife management at airports.

Public Safety

- **Initiate a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) system of care for first responders**, including law enforcement, fire, EMS, corrections, probation, and 9-1-1 dispatchers.
- **Modernize New York's Peace Officer statutes**, which were written in the 1950s and restrict weapon-carrying authority to civil defense threats, even though today's Peace Officers—particularly within DHSES and other security agencies—protect against domestic terrorism, critical infrastructure threats, and modern public safety risks.
- **Enact S.192 (Martinez)/A.4369 (Rajkumar)** to require NYS to build the Next Generation Emergency Services Internet Protocol Network (ESINet).
- **Enact S.1982 (Harckham)/A.3836 (Jones)** to ensure sheriffs and undersheriffs continue to have police officer powers without additional certifications.
- **Enact A.5128 (Solages) / S.6495 (Cleare)** to expedite the distribution of state aid for the Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (STSJP).

Public Safety, continued

- **Enact S.7501 (Mayer) / A.8086 (Otis)** to grant counties the option to create county-wide EMS taxing districts for underserved communities and exclude this initiative from the property tax cap calculation.
- **Provide home rule authority** to local governments to ban sex offenders in short-term rentals.
- **Enact S.1471 (Stec)/A.3219 (Simpson)** to allow any county within the state to conduct electronic court appearances for defendants.
- **Grant county probation departments** the flexibility to quickly apply for a temporary order of protection as a part of the adjustment process.
- **Eliminate the requirement** for a sentence of conditional discharge or probation for Leandra's Law cases when a defendant is sentenced to prison.
- **Authorize court consolidation.**
- **Create a methodology for ambulance reimbursement** under Medicaid that more closely approximates the true cost of delivering EMS services, S.3768 (Sanders) / A.2442 (Hevesi).
- Provide our EMS partners with the ability to establish joint, **inter-municipal taxing districts** to properly fund EMS services, S.7501 (Mayer) / A.8086 (Otis).
- **Exempt EMS funding** from the tax cap calculation, S.1515 (May) / A.2177(Lupardo).
- **Allow municipalities to establish a joint EMS special taxing district** with any county, city, town, or village, S.2658 (Stec).
- Allow volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers to claim both **state income and local property tax credits**, S.6019 (Baskin) / A.288 (Barrett).
- Increase the volunteer firefighters' and ambulance workers' **personal income tax credit to \$800** for eligible individuals and \$1,600 for married joint filers, S.6233 (Martinez) / A.6790 (McMahon).

Veterans

- **Increase state funding to county veterans' service agencies to a minimum of \$50,000** to help counties hire a part-time Veteran Service Officer to assist in processing benefit claims, link veterans to peer support services, and develop robust Dwyer programs, for a total of \$1,550,000 in new state investment.
- **Increase the base aid for Joseph P. Dwyer grants to \$185,000 per county**, which will level that playing field among counties. (\$3,585,000 in new funding.)
- **Create a veteran green energy jobs program** to train veterans for sustainable, environmentally friendly jobs to meet the goals of the CLCPA. The NYS DOL, SUNY and DVS should partner to create the guidelines and program requirements for a new Veteran Green Energy Workforce Development program.

The Path Forward

The challenges facing New York in 2026 are significant, but they are not insurmountable. Counties are committed to being part of the solution and stand ready to work with the Governor and Legislature to navigate federal uncertainty, modernize outdated systems, and invest strategically in our shared future.

Our priorities reflect a simple principle: ensuring affordability for taxpayers while maintaining the quality services New Yorkers deserve and expect.

We invite legislative and executive branch leaders to partner with counties by:

- **Meeting with county officials** to understand local impacts of state and federal policies,
- **Considering county expertise** when crafting legislation affecting local service delivery,
- **Evaluating the cumulative fiscal impact of mandates** on property taxpayers,
- **Recognizing counties as essential partners** in achieving state policy goals.

The coming year will test New York's commitment to cooperative governance. Counties are ready to meet that test.

We look forward to working together to build a more affordable, sustainable future for all New Yorkers.

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Make New York More Affordable

Protect Counties from Federal Cost Shifts

Do No Harm to County Finances

THE CHALLENGE

Counties deliver essential services that keep communities safe, healthy, and economically strong—from public health and elections to mental health, transportation, and emergency response. But while counties operate these state and federally mandated programs, they do so without control over the policies that drive their costs. Counties are already absorbing federal cost pressures they cannot control, and they cannot sustain additional state cuts or cost shifts without increasing property taxes or reducing essential local services. These pressures leave counties with few options to balance budgets while maintaining the core services that residents and businesses rely on every day.

THE IMPACT

Without state protection:

- Property tax increases across New York State
- Cuts to essential local services
- Double burden on counties: direct federal impacts + new state costs

THE SOLUTION

State commitment: Avoid shifting any additional costs to local governments while counties manage cascading state and federal policy changes. **Partner with counties** through enhanced government efficiency and service delivery to keep both State and counties on fiscally sustainable paths **without major tax increases and cost shifts.**

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Protects property taxpayers statewide
- ▶ Maintains essential county services
- ▶ Preserves state-county partnership
- ▶ Ensures both state and local governments are on sustainable fiscal paths



Make New York More Affordable

Preserve the Medicaid Cap

**New York Counties Shoulder \$7.6 B
More Than All Other Counties Nationwide**

THE CHALLENGE

Counties and New York City are mandated by the state to pay \$7.6 billion annually for Medicaid—more than all other U.S. counties combined. This contributes to New York's property tax burden being among the highest in the nation. The Medicaid cap (established 2012) provides critical protection, but the enactment of OBBBA imposes deep federal funding cuts and costly new requirements.

THE IMPACT

Without the Medicaid cap protection:

- Unsustainable pressure on county budgets
- Billions in additional property tax burden
- Forced choice: raise taxes or cut services

THE SOLUTION

Maintain the existing Medicaid cap to prevent counties from absorbing federal cost shifts. The cap is **essential to prevent an unsustainable property tax burden** and safeguard counties' ability to deliver core services.

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Prevents dramatic property tax increases
- ▶ Safeguards counties' ability to deliver core services
- ▶ Maintains affordability for New York residents



Make New York More Affordable

Support Counties through Federal Policy Changes

Bolster State Aid to Manage OBBBA Impacts

THE CHALLENGE

The federal “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” created extraordinary fiscal uncertainty for New York. New requirements related to Medicaid and SNAP eligibility, program integrity, and reporting necessitate dramatic capacity increases over a very short timeframe. Counties need significant state financial and administrative assistance to comply, maintain federal funding, and avoid penalties.

THE IMPACT

Without robust state support counties face:

- The risk of significant federal financial penalties
- IT systems inadequate for new federal requirements
- Significant service challenges for eligible families and individuals
- Property taxes increase to cover compliance costs
- A fraying safety net that will impact our most vulnerable populations

THE SOLUTION

Provide **significant state financial, technical, and administrative assistance** including:

- **Funding for expanded local workforce capacity** to handle new requirements
- **IT system enhancements** to meet new federal reporting standards
- **Greater centralization** of functions to improve efficiency
- **Intensive state-supported training** to build local capacity
- **Clear guidance** with dedicated state staff for real-time support
- **Proactive communication protocols** to identify compliance issues before federal penalties are imposed

Additionally:

- **Preserve core public health funding** as federal support decreases
- Allow **greater flexibility** for local health departments to shift funding between programs to meet community needs
- **Invest in state-level infrastructure** to offset other expected reductions

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Maintains critical safety net services for vulnerable families
- ▶ Avoids federal penalties and funding loss
- ▶ Protects families from service disruptions during federal transition
- ▶ Builds sustainable local capacity and institutional knowledge
- ▶ Ensures counties can meet federal requirements without unsustainable local costs



Cutting Costs through Modernization

Update Outdated Procurement Laws

Update Outdated Laws to Save Taxpayer Money

THE CHALLENGE

Counties operate under a patchwork of outdated and uncertain procurement laws that unnecessarily increase costs. Conflicting interpretations of General Municipal Law §103(16) have also left counties unsure whether they may use cooperative purchasing for public works projects. At the same time, bidding thresholds in GML §103 (\$20,000 for purchase contracts and \$35,000 for public works) have not been meaningfully updated since 2009-10 and no longer reflect real-world prices, forcing full formal bidding for many routine purchases. Wicks Law thresholds, unchanged since 2008, now push even modest construction projects into multiple separately bid contracts, adding cost, delay, and administrative complexity for county governments. Additionally, the “piggybacking” authority that allows local governments to purchase off other governments’ competitively bid contracts—a tool widely used since 2012 to generate documented savings and avoid duplicative bids—is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2026, creating planning uncertainty.

THE IMPACT

Without modernization:

- Loss of proven cost-saving purchasing tools
- Excessive administrative burden for modest purchases
- Higher costs for routine goods and services
- Delayed procurement of needed items
- Counties can't properly plan procurement strategies

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Saves taxpayer money through better pricing and economies of scale
- ▶ Reduces administrative costs and burden
- ▶ Provides procurement planning certainty
- ▶ Faster delivery of needed goods/services
- ▶ Maintains all competitive safeguards and labor protections

THE SOLUTION

- **Make the piggybacking authority permanent** so local governments can continue to avoid duplicative bidding and achieve volume pricing
- **Explicitly authorize cooperative purchasing for public works projects** under GML §103(16) while retaining prevailing wage and labor protections
- **Increase bidding thresholds in GML §103** to reflect inflation (at least \$50,000 for purchase contracts and \$100,000 for public works) and index them to inflation going forward
- **Increase Wicks Law thresholds** and provide for annual adjustments of \$100,000 to keep pace with rising construction costs
- **Authorize design-build authority for counties**, with appropriate safeguards, to reduce timelines, lower change orders, and improve accountability
- **Raise the CHIPS bidding threshold** to expand in-house flexibility for routine construction and maintenance projects



Cutting Costs through Modernization

Expand the County Workforce

Raise Retiree Earnings Cap to Address Staffing Crisis

THE CHALLENGE

The public sector retiree earnings cap has remained at \$35,000 since 2007—unchanged for 18 years. Counties face severe recruitment challenges for essential services, including public health, social services, corrections, and emergency services, and must provide higher salaries to compete in tight labor markets. The current cap hampers efforts to recruit experienced professionals and penalizes retirees who want to return to public service.

THE IMPACT

Without raising the retiree earnings cap:

- Critical staffing shortages continue across essential services
- Accelerates the loss of institutional knowledge
- Disrupts service delivery
- Retirees are penalized for returning to serve communities

THE SOLUTION

Raise the earnings cap from \$35,000 to at least \$50,000 (**S.6956-B Ryan C./A.8720-A Stirpe**).

Additionally:

- **Extend the NY HELPS program through at least 2026** for local governments
- **Allow a title approved by the State Civil Service Commission for any civil service jurisdiction** to be used by any other jurisdiction if, at the time of the appointment, there is no mandatory civil service list
- **Expand “band scoring”** for civil service examinations
- **Eliminate competitive status** for positions requiring professional licenses
- **Allow local test administration** wherever practicable
- **Invest in recruitment and retention incentives for public and mental health staff**—including loan forgiveness, tuition support, and clinical licensure assistance—to address severe workforce shortages in community health and crisis services

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Addresses critical staffing shortages
- ▶ Leverages experience of professional retirees
- ▶ Maintains essential service levels
- ▶ Allows counties to compete for talent
- ▶ Retains institutional knowledge



Revitalize Local Infrastructure

Expand the County Partnerships Program

Reduce Local Match to Unlock Economic Development

THE CHALLENGE

The SFY 2026 Enacted Budget included \$50 million for the County Infrastructure Grant Program to support economic development, affordable housing, and infrastructure investment. Counties strongly support this program, but the 50% county match requirement is a significant barrier for smaller counties with fiscal constraints, limiting their ability to leverage funding for critical projects.

THE IMPACT

Without a lower match:

- Smaller, rural counties unable to participate
- Critical infrastructure projects delayed
- Housing creation slowed
- Economic development opportunities missed
- Uneven access to state investment across regions
- Main street revitalization efforts stalled

THE SOLUTION

Increase the appropriation for the County Infrastructure Grant Program to **\$100 million** in SFY 2027 and **reduce the county match requirement from 50% to 25%**. Make the program **permanent** to provide long-term planning certainty for counties investing in transformative projects.

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Accelerates infrastructure and housing projects
- ▶ Strengthens Main Street and regional economies
- ▶ Provides predictable, recurring support
- ▶ Promotes equitable access across all counties



Revitalize Local Infrastructure

Invest in Water Infrastructure

Enact the Safe Water Action Program (S.1850/A.6012) as Part of the SFY 2027 State Budget

THE CHALLENGE

Access to safe, reliable drinking water and effective wastewater systems are fundamental to public health. Counties are responsible for safeguarding water systems that serve millions of New Yorkers, yet they are doing so with aging infrastructure, rising contamination risks, and increasing service demands. Unlike transportation infrastructure, which receives direct state support through the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), there is no comparable guaranteed state assistance for water infrastructure.

THE IMPACT

Without predictable annual state funding:

- Aging systems continue deteriorating
- Localities forced to raise water/sewer rates dramatically
- Rural and underserved communities lack resources
- Public health risks from contaminated water
- Economic development hindered by infrastructure limitations

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Ensures safe drinking water for all New Yorkers
- ▶ Provides predictable infrastructure funding
- ▶ Reduces burden on water/sewer ratepayers
- ▶ Supports rural and underserved communities
- ▶ Prevents dramatic rate increases

THE SOLUTION

Adopt the Safe Water Action Program (SWAP)—S.1850 (Hinchey)/A.6012 (Kelles)—to provide direct assistance to local governments for drinking water, stormwater, and sanitary sewer infrastructure. This program would provide **predictable, recurring funding** for essential water infrastructure.

Additionally:

- **Hold PFAS polluters accountable**—ensure manufacturers (not taxpayers) bear remediation costs
- **Increase drinking water enhancement grants** to protect public water supplies from harmful contaminants
- **Fund lead service line replacement**
- **Amend Public Authorities Law § 1285-u** to reimburse counties for expenses incurred administering the State's Septic System Replacement Fund
- Establish a **multi-stakeholder working group** on biosolids management



Reforming Broken Systems

Reform Raise the Age Funding

Convert to Grants and Delink from Tax Cap

THE CHALLENGE

The current Raise the Age (RTA) reimbursement model forces counties to pay upfront for youth justice costs and then seek approval through a lengthy, multi-agency process. These delays create serious cash-flow challenges for county budgets. Because RTA reimbursement is tied to the 2% property tax cap, counties that exceed the cap can lose their funding entirely—even when that spending is driven by state-mandated costs. With federal policy changes threatening to force counties to override the tax cap, this structure leaves counties financially exposed. At the time, the closure of state youth detention facilities has intensified public safety and operational pressures, further limiting counties' ability to meet RTA obligations.

THE IMPACT

Without reform:

- Difficulty budgeting for uncertain reimbursement timeline
- Limited ability to implement effective programs
- Difficulty securing youth placements

- ▶ Provides predictable, upfront funding
- ▶ Enables effective youth justice programming
- ▶ Reduces county liability and operational burden
- ▶ Ensures adequate capacity for youth detention
- ▶ Supports successful implementation of criminal justice reforms

THE SOLUTION

RTA funding should be decoupled from the property tax cap and converted to a predictable grant model that provides upfront support for counties. A grant structure would ensure counties can meet state-mandated youth justice obligations without risking reimbursement losses driven by tax cap factors outside their control. Providing timely, stable funding would protect local taxpayers, support safer outcomes for youth, and allow counties to plan responsibly for staffing, placement, and program needs.

Additionally:

- **Fund state-operated regional youth detention facilities** to address capacity crisis from state facility closures
- **Develop alternatives to jails and specialized secure detention facilities** to house 16- and 17-year-old Adolescent Offenders and Juvenile Delinquents
- **Provide full state reimbursement** for probation and alternatives-to-incarceration costs
- Mandate that the state's evidence-based criteria should account for existing **local best practice programs**
- **Let probation apply for a temporary protection order** as part of the adjustment process
- **Authorize law enforcement agencies to issue appearance tickets** if appropriate when Adolescent and Juvenile Offenders are charged with most D felonies
- Allow Adolescent and Juvenile Offenders to be **held in**

detention facilities after hours without a securing order until the Youth Part is in session.

- **Establish a dedicated funding stream** through DCJS/OPCA for 100% of all local probation costs associated with RTA
- Allow Youth Part Judges, Prosecutors, and Defense counsel to **see Family Court Records**
- **Amend CPL § Section 722.23** to:
 - Include all felony violations of Penal Law Article 265
 - Allow for the court's discretion in permitting District Attorneys to maintain prosecutions in certain additional circumstances, including but not limited to when a defendant participated in a crime that resulted in significant physical injury while other charges are pending
 - Close the Robbery Loophole



Reforming Broken Systems

Fix the Competency Restoration Crisis

Modernize CPL § 730 to Reduce Costs and Deliver Treatment

THE CHALLENGE

Under state law, individuals deemed incompetent to stand trial must receive restoration services before they can proceed to trial. These services—provided at state-operated forensic psychiatric centers—primarily involve courtroom training to familiarize defendants with legal procedures, not comprehensive mental health treatment.

The SFY 2021 State Budget shifted 100% of these costs onto counties, creating an unfunded mandate with no local control over services rendered or length of stay. Counties now face overwhelming financial pressure from competency restoration costs. Some counties experienced increases over 6,000% between 2019 and 2024. The current system results in lengthy confinements that have been declared unconstitutional—with defendants sometimes kept in restoration for 3, 6, or even 10 years. At over \$1,300 per day, these costs have diverted hundreds of millions from critical behavioral health programming in communities and adds to New York's affordability crisis.

THE IMPACT

Without reform:

- Continued exponential cost growth
- Hundreds of millions diverted from community behavioral health
- Defendants languish in restoration for years
- No actual treatment provided
- Property taxpayers bear unsustainable burden

THE SOLUTION

Enact comprehensive reform (**S.1004 Brouk/A.5567 Simon**) to:

- **Clarify restoration is not mental health treatment**
- Establish **specific criteria** for examiners
- Require assessment of **reasonable chance of restoration**
- Allow court diversion to **actual mental health treatment**
- **Limit time** defendants are ordered for restoration services

THE BENEFITS

- ▶ Reduces fiscal impact on county taxpayers
- ▶ Frees up funding for community behavioral health
- ▶ Provides actual treatment to those who need it
- ▶ Ensures only appropriate individuals are sent for restoration
- ▶ Modernizes archaic statute for 21st century needs



Reforming Broken Systems

End Taxpayer Subsidies for Packaging Waste

Enact the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (S.1464/A.1749)

THE CHALLENGE

For decades, local governments have been responsible for managing and paying to dispose of millions of tons of packaging waste, even though they have no role in the design choices that create that waste and drive-up disposal costs. As the state's 25 municipal landfills near capacity, counties face rising waste volumes, shrinking capacity, and increasing pressure to cut greenhouse gas emissions from waste—all without control over the upstream decisions that cause the problem.

THE IMPACT

Without action:

- Dramatic increases in waste disposal costs for local governments and residents
- Waste is transported longer distances, increasing greenhouse gas emissions
- Shrinking landfill capacity with no long-term plan
- Recycling programs unable to keep pace with waste generation

- ▶ Extends landfill life across New York State
- ▶ Shifts costs from taxpayers to producers
- ▶ Reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- ▶ Modernizes New York's recycling infrastructure
- ▶ Supports state environmental goals

THE SOLUTION

Enact the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (PRRIA)—S.1464 (Harckham)/A.1749 (Glick)—as part of the FY 2027 State Budget to shift waste management costs from local taxpayers to the producers who generate the packaging. PRRIA would require manufacturers to reduce packaging, improve recyclability, and fund the infrastructure needed to manage discarded materials. The State must also provide the necessary NYSDEC staffing and resources to ensure effective implementation and oversight.

Additionally:

- **Plan for future landfill capacity** as the state's largest landfill nears capacity
- **Invest in organics recycling** and innovative waste diversion technologies
- **Enact mattress EPR** to reduce local costs and landfill waste
- **Reform the e-waste recycling statute** (ENV § 27-2605) to eliminate the mail-in option and address an unintended cost burden on local governments
- **Create a centralized digital data system for recycling and solid waste reporting**—including standardized software, digitized annual reporting, and resources for technology, staffing, and infrastructure at transfer stations—so local governments can meet regulatory requirements efficiently

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