

## About the Association

The New Hampshire Association of Counties (NHAC) represents the interests of county government in New Hampshire. The organization is a state-wide association which includes the 30 elected county commissioners, all other elected county officials, and the professional staff who run county government in each of the ten counties.

NHAC's activities include: providing training programs, supporting intergovernmental relationships, advocating on behalf of county government and county taxpayers, and acting as a clearinghouse for information and best practices which relate to the efficient operation of county government.

## Our Affiliates

NHAC provides a forum to improve inter-county relations and to facilitate effective service delivery through seven active affiliates: Commissioners Council, County Attorneys, County Corrections, County Sheriffs, Human Resources, Nursing Homes, and Registers of Deeds.

## Our Leadership

### *President*

Grafton County Commissioner Wendy Piper

### *Vice President*

Rockingham County Register of Deeds Cathy Stacey

### *Treasurer*

Rockingham County Senior Finance Director Chuck Nickerson

### *Bylaws Chair*

Cheshire County Administrator Chris Coates

### *At-Large*

Hillsborough County Commissioner Toni Pappas

### *At-Large*

Merrimack County Administrator Ross Cunningham

### *Immediate Past President*

Cheshire County Commissioner Chuck Weed



# A Guide - to - NH County Government



New Hampshire Association of Counties

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[www.nhcounties.org](http://www.nhcounties.org)

## The History of NH County Government

### *New Hampshire's First Government*

County government was established in 1771 with five counties: Cheshire, Grafton, Hillsborough, Rockingham, and Strafford. The additional five counties we have today, for a total of ten, are : Belknap, Carroll, Coos, Merrimack, and Sullivan.

County government is comprised of a legislative and an executive branch. The executive branch, being the 3 elected county commissioners, is responsible for day-to-day operations related to fiscal and policy matters. The county delegation, being the elected members of the NH House of Representatives from a county, is responsible for budget appropriations that fund county government operations.

The original county responsibilities were infrastructure, land records, law enforcement and judicial. Overtime, county responsibilities have evolved. The courts are now a state system and infrastructure falls under the purview of the state and municipal governments. Counties today are financially responsible for some of the highest cost services provided in the state: long-term care and corrections.

Under state law, counties are responsible for funding the majority of the non-federal share of Medicaid and other programs that provide long-term care for eligible individuals. Counties must also operate county jails (or contract other facilities for placement of county inmates) where inmates are incarcerated pretrial or under sentence.

County functions also include the funding and operation of the offices of the elected Register of Deeds, County Attorney, Sheriff and County Treasurer. Other functions that individual counties are engaged in differ from county to county and depend on local decision making by commissioners and/or the delegation. Most counties also have Human Resources Offices which oversee personnel issues relating to county employees.

### The Role of the County Delegation

Under NH law, the members of the NH House of Representatives serve as the legislative body of state government as well as the legislative body of their respective county governments. The law refers to each counties' legislative group as the "county convention," though it is commonly referred to as the "county delegation."

Individuals who run for a seat with the NH House sign an affidavit that includes a statement acknowledging that their responsibilities include service as a delegate to the county convention.

The county delegation is responsible for appropriating the necessary funds that support the functions of county government. This role, while not always as visible as the state legislature, is also responsible for public spending.

County delegations convene for the purpose of organizing and electing a delegation chair, vice-chair and clerk shortly after the members are sworn in as members of the House. The delegation also meets annually to vote on county budgets as prepared and recommended by the county commissioners. Additional delegation meetings can be called to act on specific revenue or expenditure issues and many delegations also organize long-term planning, facilities and other subcommittees that address specific county functions.

## County Operating Budgets

NH county governments raise and spend approximately \$583 million per year (based on 2019 estimates), providing essential, high-cost services for residents. Individual county budgets and expenditures range widely, respective to their unique geography and demographics.

County expenditures support a broad range of programs mandated by state law including, but not limited to: the non-federal share of long-term care Medicaid offered by county and private nursing homes and by the Choices for Independence home care program, county attorneys, county jails, county sheriffs and the county register of deeds. County budgets are affected when the state shifts costs from the state's budget to the counties' budgets. These shifts force county government officials to fund agencies and programs through the county property tax.

Revenue sources include property taxes, Medicaid and Medicare payments to the nursing homes, and documents filing and sheriff's fees. However, taxes and fees collected do not fully cover the expenses of the functions required of and provided by county government.

