

Assisting Local Officials with Legislative and Administrative Advocacy

Although members of the Government Affairs staff testify and work with legislators on many bills, it is always more compelling when local officials participate directly in the process. Hearing from local officials reminds legislators that the staff is representing the interests of “real people.” It is, of course, especially helpful when legislators hear from officials in their own districts. There is also a continuing need for local officials to serve with legislators and state agency representatives on various policy boards and commissions.

NHMA strongly encourages local officials to testify and contact their legislators and state regulators on matters of importance to their municipalities. The staff is always happy to do whatever it can to facilitate this process. In addition, NHMA’s *Guide to Legislative Advocacy for Local Officials*—available at no cost—provides a thorough look at the legislative process and how you can participate.

Limitations

New Hampshire law, RSA 31:8-a, permits cities and towns to belong to NHMA only so long as the association does not take positions on “matters which do not directly affect New Hampshire towns and cities, nor engage in partisan political activity by endorsing, or otherwise supporting, any political party or candidate.” NHMA is very careful about observing those limitations. It never supports, financially or otherwise, any candidate or party; and it does not take positions on legislation—however important it may seem—that does not directly affect municipalities.

NHMA also does not lobby on behalf of specific municipalities, although it will support (or oppose) legislation that a specific municipality is concerned about if it is of interest to members generally. NHMA is especially careful not to take positions on legislation when there are members on both sides of the issue and there is no clear member-adopted policy.



GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

A Service of New Hampshire Municipal Association



**New Hampshire
Municipal Association**

25 Triangle Park Drive
PO Box 617
Concord, NH 03302-0617
Phone: 603.224.7447
NH Toll-Free: 800.852.3358
Fax: 603.224.5406
E-mail: governmentaffairs@nhlgc.org
www.nhlgc.org



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The New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA) has represented the interests of cities and towns before the New Hampshire Legislature and state agencies since its founding in 1941. With NHMA's reorganization in 2003 under the umbrella of the New Hampshire Local Government Center (LGC), municipal advocacy remains a central element of NHMA's mission.

THE LEGAL SERVICES AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

LGC's Legal Services and Government Affairs Department performs two functions: (1) the Legal Services staff, which includes four attorneys and a Government Finance Advisor, provides general legal, financial and accounting advice to NHMA members; (2) the Government Affairs staff, as further described, represents municipal interests before the legislature and state agencies. Government affairs services are performed on behalf of NHMA and are funded solely by NHMA dues.

ADVOCACY SERVICES

The Government Affairs staff includes three attorney-lobbyists, one non-attorney lobbyist, a researcher and two support staff. The Government Finance Advisor also provides advocacy services as needed.

The Municipal Advocacy Committee (MAC), consisting of 31 local officials, is responsible for oversight of NHMA's government affairs function. The Government Affairs staff works closely with MAC during the legislative session and between sessions to ensure that NHMA's legislative policies and principles are promoted consistently and aggressively.

Policy Development

NHMA's legislative policies originate with its members and its Committee on Government Affairs (CGA). CGA consists of 75 elected and appointed local officials, including the 31 members of MAC, representing all regions of the state and every size of town and city. In the spring before each two-year legislative term, CGA collects legislative policy proposals that have been submitted by member municipalities. Three subcommittees of CGA review these proposals and make recommendations to NHMA's Legislative Policy Conference.

At the Legislative Policy Conference, which occurs in the fall before each legislative term, NHMA members consider and vote on the policies recommended by the CGA subcommittees. Every member, regardless of size, is entitled to one vote at the conference.

Policies adopted at the conference guide the actions of the Government Affairs staff in addressing legislation during the ensuing legislative term. For the highest-priority policies—those identified by the Legislative Policy Conference as “action positions,”—the Government Affairs staff will draft legislation to implement the policies and will identify and work with sponsors to introduce the bills and support them through the legislative process.

NHMA also uses a set of guiding “Legislative Principles,” which is reviewed and reaffirmed as appropriate by the Legislative Policy Conference, to develop positions on legislation that has not been expressly addressed by the Legislative Policy Conference. For example, some of the most important legislative principles are opposing unfunded mandates, working to maintain existing revenue streams to municipalities, and advocating to maintain existing local authority.

During the legislative session, the Government Affairs staff regularly reports to MAC on legislative developments. MAC also has authority to establish legislative policy positions when necessary between Legislative Policy Conferences, in order to provide guidance to the Government Affairs staff as new issues arise during the legislative session.

Legislative Advocacy

Members of the Government Affairs staff follow several hundred bills of interest to municipalities during each legislative session. They draft legislation to carry out NHMA's legislative policies, monitor legislative hearings, testify on bills when appropriate, and work individually with legislators and local officials throughout the process. The staff also follows the workings of numerous study committees, commissions and boards throughout the year. In addition, the staff works with state administrative agencies, commenting on proposed rules and assisting in the development of agency rules, and works with New Hampshire's congressional delegation as necessary on federal legislation affecting municipalities.

Every Friday during the legislative session, the Government Affairs staff publishes the *Legislative Bulletin*, which notifies members of upcoming hearings and votes on important issues, describes legislative activity during the past week and provides information on contacting legislators about important bills. The *Legislative Bulletin* is sent by first-class mail or e-mail to local officials throughout the state.