COLLECTION III — LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Your County Legislature Explained

How county legislatures are structured, what they do, and how citizens can participate.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026

What a county legislature does

The county legislature is the county's lawmaking body. It:

- adopts the county budget and sets the county property tax;
- passes local laws and resolutions;
- approves major contracts, borrowing and appointments;
- oversees county departments through committees and hearings.

In counties with an elected **county executive**, like Nassau and Suffolk, the executive runs day-to-day operations and proposes the budget. The legislature can amend it, approve it, and override vetoes. That's the separation of powers at work.

How it's organized

- **Districts.** Each legislator represents one district. Nassau County has 19 legislative districts and Suffolk County has 18.
- **Committees.** Most of the detailed work happens in committees, such as public safety, finance, health or public works. Committee meetings are often where bills are changed.
- **Full meetings.** The full legislature meets regularly to vote. Meetings are public under the Open Meetings Law.
- **Clerk of the Legislature.** Keeps the official records, agendas and minutes, and is a good contact for questions.

How to participate

1. **Find your legislator.** Use your county's district lookup.
2. **Follow the agenda.** Agendas and proposed resolutions are posted before meetings.
3. **Speak during the public portion.** Most legislatures set aside time for public comment, typically about three minutes per speaker. Check the sign-up rules.
4. **Testify at hearings.** Budget hearings and hearings on proposed local laws are your best chance to influence decisions.
5. **Contact your legislator's office directly** about district issues like roads, parks or county services.

What to watch

- How much the legislature changes the executive's proposed budget.
- Contracts approved with little discussion.
- How often legislators vote across party lines.
- Committee meetings, where most of the real decisions happen.

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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