



State Senator Douglas Steinhardt administered the oath of office as President of the New Jersey Association of Counties to Warren County Commissioner James R. Kern III, who was accompanied by his wife, Carina Sitkus.

## Commissioner Kern to Lead NJAC in 2026

By Art Charlton

TRENTON, NJ - January 23, 2026 - Warren County Commissioner James R. Kern III became the 85th President of the New Jersey Association of Counties (NJAC) in a ceremony today at the Senate Chambers of the State House in Trenton.

Kern is only the second Warren County resident to head the statewide group that advocates for counties and issues that affect them, after former Freeholder Richard D. Gardner headed the organization in 2012.

"I look forward to leading this exceptional organization as it continues to serve as a steadfast advocate and trusted resource for county governments across the State, with a unified, solution-driven, and nonpartisan approach to solving critical issues such as the diversion of 911 fees, homelessness, health benefits reform, and much more," Commissioner Kern said.

State Senator Douglas Steinhardt administered the oath of office to Kern, while Somerset County Commissioner Shanel Y. Robinson, the outgoing NJAC President, swore in the board of directors and slate of executive officers, which include Union County Commissioner Alexander Mirabella as 1st Vice President, Monmouth County Commissioner Dominick DiRocco as 2nd Vice President, and Bergen County Commissioner Tracy Zur as Secretary Treasurer. Robinson continues to serve on the NJAC board as Immediate Past President.

"As Garden State residents continue to struggle with paying the highest property taxes in the nation, county governments are uniquely positioned to deliver essential services to those in need in a more cost-effective manner, and I look forward to working with the Association's outstanding executive team and board members to alleviate this overwhelming burden," Kern said.

"NJAC represents the only true regional form of government in our state – and when counties speak with one voice, Trenton listens," Kern remarked.

NJAC is committed to advocating for legislation, regulations, and policy directives that empower county governments to operate more efficiently and effectively. As a nonpartisan organization that represents the only true regional form of government in the State with a proactive and unified voice, NJAC is dedicated to enhancing the level of service provided and saving valuable taxpayer dollars.

Kern told the crowd assembled in the Senate chambers that he was proud to be there representing Warren County, which he noted "is home to the Delaware Water Gap, New Jersey's winningest high school football program, and M&Ms. It's our state's beautiful northwest pocket, filled with patriotic town names like Liberty, Independence, and Hope. That spirit of patriotism runs deep – and it's fitting as our nation approaches its 250th anniversary. Out of all 21 counties in New Jersey, only two are named after Revolutionary War heroes: Mercer County, where we are today, named after Hugh Mercer who died at the battle of Princeton, and Warren County where I'm from— named for Dr. Joseph Warren, a patriot who gave his life at the Battle of Bunker Hill. It's an interesting coincidence and a powerful reminder that public service and patriotism has always been part of New Jersey's DNA."

## January is Poverty Awareness Month: Shining a Light on Financial Struggles in the Lehigh Valley

By CALV

LEHIGH VALLEY - January is Poverty Awareness Month, a reminder that many individuals and families in our region face significant financial challenges every day. The cost of living in the Lehigh Valley—and across the country—continues to rise, while wages often fail to keep pace.

In our community, a single working parent with two children must earn more than \$57 per hour, about \$118,000 a year, just to reach a living wage. Community Action Lehigh Valley knows many of our neighbors do not earn this amount and struggle to make ends meet.

As an anti-poverty nonprofit, we are committed to addressing these realities. We work closely with partners such as United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley to understand and support those living at the ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) level. Nearly one-third of our neighbors are living on the edge financially.

When costs rise faster than wages, CALV is here to widen access to opportunity and help families chart a path to stability. We live this mission through programs that advance housing stability, food access and nutrition, youth and family development, neighborhood revitalization, and small-business/economic empowerment—the everyday building blocks of financial security for local families.

This month, we are launching our monthly e-newsletter, which will give a brief update on our programs throughout the year and tell the story of how we're helping our community.

We invite you to share this email with your network and help spread our mission throughout the Lehigh Valley and beyond. We also ask for your support to ensure we can continue to do this vital work in our community. Thank you for your continued support!



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