



NEWS RELEASE

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New Law Swelled County Party Coffers During 2023 Election Year

An overhaul of state campaign finance laws last year made it easier for county party officials to raise money and replenish their bank accounts, according to an analysis of reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

Summary information for 2023 shows the 42 county political party committees combined raised 12 percent more funds than average fund-raising in eight state election years since 2009.

The committees spent 8.1 percent more than average and ended the year with a 40.2 percent difference in cash reserves.

Table 1
Fund-raising by County Party Committees
Through December 31, 2023

PERIOD	RAISED	SPENT	CASH
2023 State Election Year	\$12,868,223	\$12,075,641	\$3,907,188
Averages for Eight State Election Years Since 2009	\$11,411,963	\$11,131,341	\$2,599,528
Difference	12%	8.1%	40.2%

Signed April 3 by Governor Phil Murphy, the Elections Transparency Act benefited county parties by substantially raising their contribution limits for the first time since 2005 and letting public contractors give more than just token contributions.

“County parties raked in about \$2.4 million more last year than they would have without the new law,” said Acting Executive Director Joe Donohue. “Minus the windfall, fund-raising would have been 6.5 percent below average instead of 12 percent above it.”

“Compared to the average for all 15 years between 2009 and 2023, the difference was 27 percent higher. As a result, county parties ended last year with the second healthiest cash reserves since 2009,” he said.

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Table 2
County Party Committee Fund-raising
During Eight State Election Years

YEAR	RAISED	SPENT	CASH
2009	\$13,854,662	\$13,306,296	\$2,794,158
2011	\$ 8,449,211	\$ 8,545,440	\$1,113,770
2013	\$ 9,908,851	\$10,069,188	\$1,448,541
2015	\$ 9,161,877	\$ 8,883,225	\$1,724,814
2017	\$14,564,574	\$14,114,921	\$3,132,815
2019	\$ 8,191,320	\$ 8,821,224	\$2,504,889
2021	\$14,296,990	\$13,234,794	\$4,170,046
2023	\$12,868,223	\$12,075,641	\$3,907,188

Another sign fundraising was better in 2023 is that, even adjusting for inflation, it was the most funds raised by county parties in a year without an election for governor.

Table 3
County Party Fundraising
Adjusted for Inflation

YEAR	AT THE TIME	CURRENT DOLLARS	ELECTIONS*
2009	\$13,854,662	\$19,677,460	G/L
2017	\$14,564,574	\$18,104,826	G/L
2021	\$14,296,990	\$16,076,767	G/L
2013	\$ 9,908,851	\$12,960,532	G/L
2023	\$12,868,223	\$12,868,223	L
2018	\$ 9,709,931	\$11,782,369	F
2015	\$ 9,161,877	\$11,778,236	L
2011	\$ 8,449,211	\$11,445,287	L
2016	\$ 8,389,170	\$10,650,510	F
2010	\$ 7,591,065	\$10,607,425	F
2014	\$ 7,633,924	\$ 9,825,594	F
2019	\$ 8,191,320	\$ 9,762,735	L
2022	\$ 8,700,972	\$ 9,059,143	F
2012	\$ 6,407,139	\$ 8,503,132	F
2020	\$ 6,876,961	\$ 8,096,347	F

*Gubernatorial; Legislative; Federal

County party coffers often get extra money during gubernatorial elections because national groups often participate in those elections and send them contributions to help with activities like voter turnout.

Contribution limits for all party committees in New Jersey were raised when the Governor signed a new campaign finance law (P.L. 2023, Chapter 30) on April 3, 2023.

The law doubled the maximum annual contribution to county party committees from \$37,500 to \$75,000- the first increase since 2005.

In addition, the law created new “housekeeping” accounts. A donor can give \$75,000 to regular campaign accounts and \$37,500 to the new accounts for a total of ***\$112,500¹*** each year.

Housekeeping accounts are earmarked solely for expenses deemed administrative, including mortgages, rent, taxes, compliance costs, legal bills and collective bargaining outlays.

Only the two state parties and the 42 county parties can create such accounts. National parties also have housekeeping accounts under federal law.

An analysis of 6,144 contributions identified 45 larger than the previous contribution limit of \$37,500. The net difference was an extra \$1,005,431 in contributions. Only donors subject to the former and current contribution limits were included in the analysis. Party committees can donate unlimited sums to other party committees.

County parties in 2023 prospered in a second way from the new law.

The new law eliminated a \$300 limit on contributions by public contractors that had existed since the mid-2000s to discourage public officials from steering lucrative contracts to donors who provide them with large checks.

“That tight cap under so-called “pay-to-play” laws might have deterred such behavior but it also left party coffers badly depleted and was part of a complicated, confusing regulatory system that needed streamlining,” said Donohue.

“Since party committees must disclose their contributions each quarter, voters will quickly know if the committees receive checks from public contractors. It won’t be secret,” he said.

“This disclosure should continue to discourage questionable pay-to-play deals and help expose them if they do occur,” he said.

In 2022, county parties raised about \$150,000 directly from public contracting firms that filed annual disclosure reports with ELEC. Following the enactment of the new law in 2023, the amount was nearly ten times more at \$1.4 million.

In addition to the effects of the new law, which should provide a permanent boost to fund-raising, counties also enjoyed a short-term windfall from actual or potential candidates for governor in 2025.

New Jersey has a long history of some gubernatorial candidates spreading around contributions to help build support for their candidacies for the state’s top political seat.

In 2023, two declared and three possible candidates for governor, mostly through existing campaign funds, donated \$471,305 to county parties.

¹ Revised August 20, 2024.

Table 4
Contributions by Actual or Potential
Gubernatorial Candidates in 2023

ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL CANDIDATES	CONTRIBUTIONS	DECLARED?²	PARTY
Former State Senate President Steve Sweeney	\$126,000	Yes	Democrat
Josh Gottheimer For Congress	\$122,205	No	Democrat
Mikie Sherrill For Congress	\$100,350	No	Democrat
State Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin	\$ 85,500	No	Democrat
State Senator Jon Bramnick	\$ 37,250	Yes	Republican
Grand Total	\$471,305		

Democratic county committees raised and spent more funds than their GOP counterparts and reported more cash reserves. Both parties ended the year with their second largest cash-on-hand totals since 2009.

Table 5
2023 Campaign Finance
Activity by County Parties

PARTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*
Democrats	\$8,590,742	\$8,081,762	\$3,008,265	\$2,880,309
Republicans	\$4,277,481	\$3,993,880	\$ 898,922	\$1,346,592
Combined	\$12,868,223	\$12,075,641	\$3,907,188	\$4,226,901

*Cash-on-hand plus or minus debts owed to or by committee.

² Media reports regularly have cited Coughlin, Gottheimer and Sherrill as potential gubernatorial candidates in 2025. None has publicly denied such speculation. Bramnick and Coughlin both ran for reelection last year so their donations also could have been related to their legislative campaigns.

Among Democratic county committees that have filed their quarterly reports, nine committees- Bergen, Camden, Essex, Gloucester, Mercer, Middlesex, Passaic, Somerset, and Union - reported cash balances above \$100,000. Hudson reported a negative balance after adjusting for outstanding debts.

Table 6
Campaign Finance Activity of
Democratic County Party Committees
January 1 through December 31, 2023

COUNTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*
Atlantic	\$ 178,330	\$ 197,471	\$ 2,383	\$ 2,383
Bergen	\$1,273,596	\$1,024,290	\$ 325,614	\$ 325,614
Burlington	\$ 490,910	\$ 463,234	\$ 54,595	\$ 48,220
Camden	\$ 600,674	\$ 595,424	\$ 282,313	\$ 282,313
Cape May	\$ 28,035	\$ 16,930	\$ 18,456	\$ 18,456
Cumberland	\$ 39,512	\$ 79,677	\$ 18,649	\$ 18,649
Essex	\$ 766,863	\$ 875,520	\$ 249,432	\$ 249,432
Gloucester	\$ 693,459	\$ 489,465	\$ 213,134	\$ 186,710
Hudson	\$ 370,161	\$ 367,748	\$ 28,595	\$ (80,179)
Hunterdon	\$ 46,884	\$ 40,436	\$ 26,042	\$ 26,042
Mercer	\$ 222,468	\$ 244,709	\$ 340,716	\$ 340,138
Middlesex	\$1,221,035	\$ 973,194	\$ 358,619	\$ 358,619
Monmouth	\$ 356,056	\$ 378,628	\$ 5,863	\$ 5,863
Morris	\$ 262,953	\$ 231,640	\$ 58,188	\$ 58,187
Ocean	\$ 64,259	\$ 49,234	\$ 36,749	\$ 52,915
Passaic	\$ 895,767	\$ 965,593	\$ 242,884	\$ 242,884
Salem**	\$ 66,012	\$ 72,297	\$ 73,928	\$ 72,853
Somerset	\$ 436,063	\$ 405,215	\$ 227,444	\$ 227,444
Sussex	\$ 92,659	\$ 65,807	\$ 39,035	\$ 39,035
Union	\$ 464,012	\$ 529,136	\$ 399,644	\$ 399,644
Warren**	\$ 21,034	\$ 16,113	\$ 5,983	\$ 5,088
Democrats-Total	\$8,590,742	\$8,081,762	\$3,008,265	\$2,880,309

*Net worth is cash-on-hand adjusted for debts owed to or by the committee.

**Through third quarter

As for Republican committees, Cape May and Monmouth reported a cash balance above \$100,000. Gloucester and Passaic reported negative balances adjusting for outstanding debts.

Table 7
Campaign Finance Activity of
Republican County Party Committees
January 1 through December 31, 2023

COUNTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*
Atlantic	\$ 354,019	\$ 316,211	\$ 75,733	\$ 75,733
Bergen	\$ 164,311	\$ 152,697	\$ 11,128	\$ 1,128
Burlington	\$ 156,112	\$ 161,745	\$ 17,010	\$ 526,426
Camden	\$ 98,777	\$ 89,842	\$ 8,125	\$ 8,120
Cape May	\$ 326,177	\$ 149,560	\$367,736	\$ 367,736
Cumberland	\$ 200,879	\$ 161,861	\$ 42,289	\$ 37,973
Essex	\$ 169,800	\$ 194,671	\$ 2,810	\$ 2,810
Gloucester	\$ 97,363	\$ 88,668	\$ 11,883	\$ (2,117)
Hudson	\$ 4,000	NA	NA	NA
Hunterdon	\$ 150,362	\$ 164,040	\$ 10,459	\$ 10,459
Mercer	\$ 20,822	\$ 15,689	\$ 7,696	\$ 7,695
Middlesex	\$ 133,967	\$ 126,382	\$ 20,333	\$ 20,205
Monmouth	\$ 604,239	\$ 547,702	\$109,946	\$ 109,946
Morris	\$ 235,136	\$ 219,942	\$ 23,267	\$ 17,067
Ocean	\$ 525,892	\$ 574,939	\$ 12,270	\$ 12,270
Passaic	\$ 427,802	\$ 412,068	\$ 18,933	\$ (7,836)
Salem	\$ 86,663	\$ 77,692	\$ 38,509	\$ 38,509
Somerset	\$ 211,957	\$ 205,005	\$ 19,128	\$ 19,128
Sussex	\$ 62,780	\$ 123,885	\$ 11,134	\$ 11,134
Union	\$ 74,595	\$ 56,151	\$ 56,461	\$ 56,461
Warren	\$ 171,827	\$ 155,130	\$ 34,071	\$ 33,746
Republicans-Total	\$4,277,481	\$3,993,880	\$898,922	\$1,346,592

*Net worth is cash-on-hand adjusted for debts owed to or by the committee. NA-not available

The numbers in this analysis are based on reports filed by noon February 14, 2023.

Individual reports can be reviewed on ELEC's website (www.elec.state.nj.us).

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