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2023 Annual
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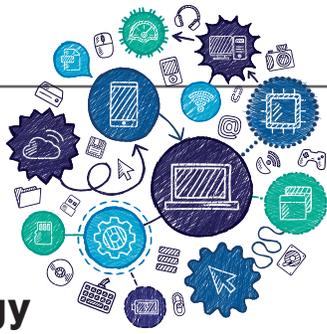
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AI is on the cutting edge of technology, but what are the risks and how can it work for municipalities? Marc Pfeiffer examines the issue for a unique take on the topic.



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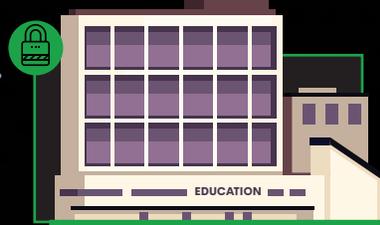
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We'll continue to keep an eye on the latest technology & discuss it & other topics at next month's League Conference.



We Have Been Warned... AI: Friend, Foe, or Maybe Both?

A computer that can think on its own and generate information going from the government to the public. What could possibly go wrong with that?

From *Star Trek's* Ultimate Computer to *Space Odyssey's* HAL, and even numerous warnings from the folks who brought you the *Terminator's* Skynet, we certainly can't say that we haven't been warned about the risks of giving artificial intelligence (AI) too much power, particularly in a government setting.

But we are also always hopeful and looking to the future for what can help local governments do more with less and serve their constituents with quality information delivered conveniently. Some AI offers just that.

This month, we look at AI as a potential tool to be used-wisely. A new author, Claude.AI (a chatbot), prompted and assisted by Marc Pfeiffer, explains what a municipal government elected official should know about AI and generative AI (page 18) and how chatbots can be used in municipal government administration (page 22).

You'll note, for factual accuracy, the AI scribe needed quite a bit of human help before the pieces were ready for publication. But they are not without potential. As these technologies will be honed and sculpted to suit our needs, assistance with matters such as alerts during public emergencies may get a boost to assist the human officials, professionals, and residents.

Technology in municipalities is changing to meet new tech options, as our Affiliate partners at the Jersey Access Group note (page 28) report. Media consumption has changed since the early days of local access cable channels and municipal communications are facing the challenge of getting information to cord cutters who have left the traditional cable TV model. The MEL-JIF (page 34) also discusses another challenge from technology's threats, particularly the skyrocketing premiums for cyber insurance and how to minimize the dangers and the costs.

We'll continue to keep an eye on the latest technology and discuss it and other topics at next month's League Conference.

We are steadily working toward your Annual League Conference and are optimistic about new features and benefits, including free Wi-Fi in the Exhibit Hall and new and evergreen sessions to help keep your municipality moving safely forward. Check out our Preview starting on page 55.

While we look forward to gathering in November, we do so with the memory of the loss of some of the League's dear friends and partners. In NJ Now, we salute NJLM Past President Jim Perry, Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver, and NJBPU President Joseph Fiordaliso, all gone too soon. We continue building our good work upon their many contributions to the League and the State of New Jersey. 🇺🇸

Michael Cerra

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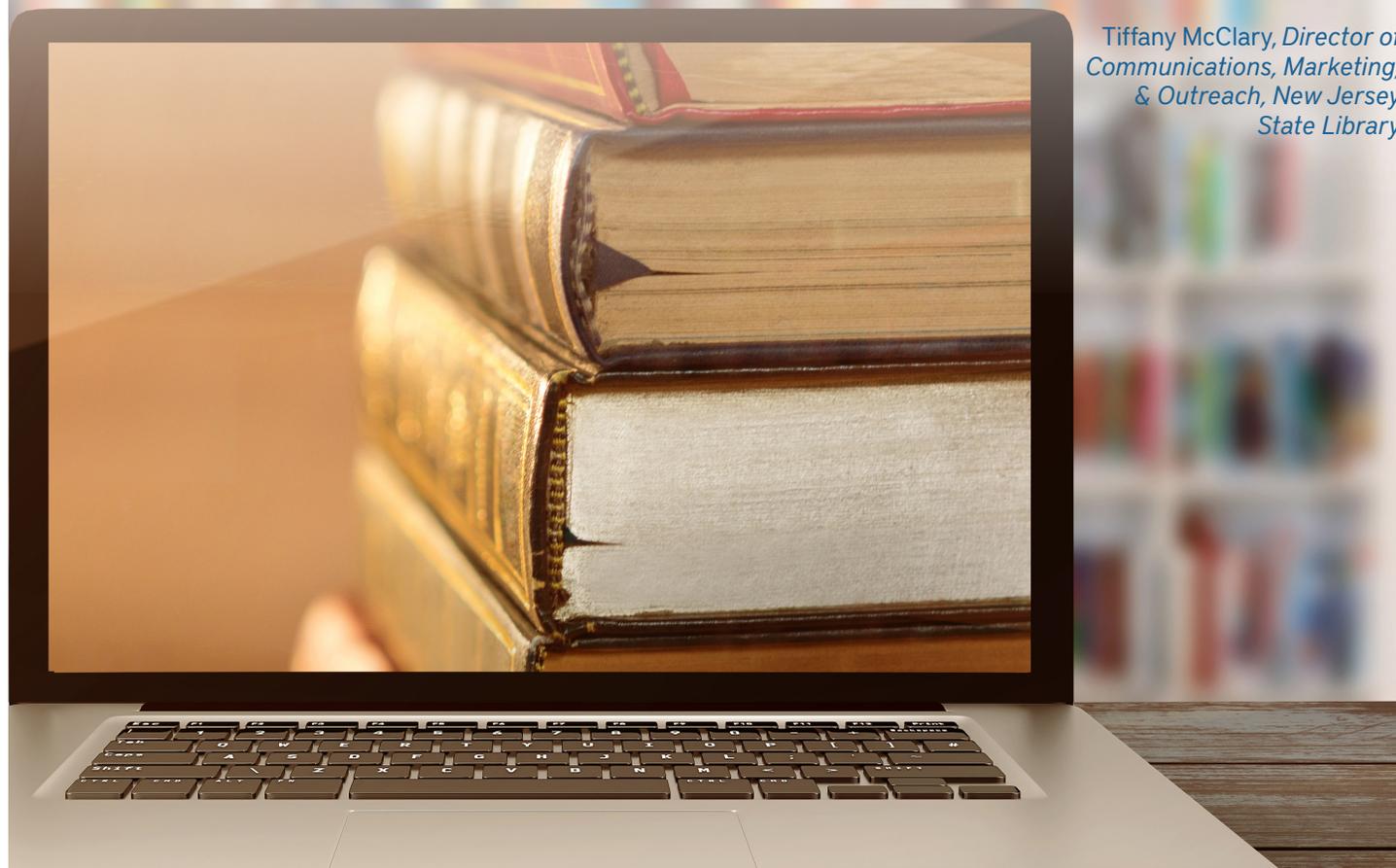
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ACP Connects NJ

NJ State Library and NJ Department of Health partner to assist eligible NJ residents with enrolling in federal Affordable Broadband Benefit

Tiffany McClary, Director of Communications, Marketing, & Outreach, New Jersey State Library



The New Jersey State Library (NJSL), an affiliate of Thomas Edison State University, and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) have partnered to launch ACP Connects NJ to help build awareness and participation in New Jersey for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). ACP is a national broadband affordability initiative of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that helps households afford the broadband they need for work, school, health care, and more.

By the Numbers: Benefits

\$30 Eligible households receive a discount of up to \$30 per month toward broadband service.

\$100 The benefit also provides a discount of up to \$100 per household toward a one-time qualifying purchase of a computer, laptop, or tablet.

Connecting struggling households

NJSL received a federal ACP grant for \$400,000 from the FCC to support New Jersey households struggling to afford internet service. NJSL and NJDOH will collaborate with other community partners, including food pantries and Federally Qualified Health Centers, to host enrollment and outreach events. The ACP Connects NJ initiative will concentrate on communities in Central and South Jersey.

“The digital divide and challenges to access are very real for New Jerseyans. A 2022 Rutgers University study showed more than 10% of NJ households do not have broadband internet access, and many more cannot afford or get home internet at speeds and prices that truly provide universal access,” said Jen Nelson, New Jersey State Librarian. “By bringing people affordable access through ACP enrollment, libraries and health care organizations are bridging the divide in a meaningful way.”

Lessons learned

“The pandemic has shown us the importance of providing timely, personalized information and outreach to vulnerable communities and increasing access to care and education, including telehealth, to improve positive health outcomes,” said Nashon Hornsby, Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Community Health at NJDOH.

The FCC has targeted approximately \$66 million to fund the ACP initiative, to drive awareness and enrollment across the country. Building on its current community partnerships, the FCC is providing financial support to partner organizations nationwide to serve as trusted community messengers about the ACP and equipping them with funding to pursue innovative outreach strategies to reach historically underserved and unserved communities.

“The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) offers low-income New Jersey residents a connection to the myriad of opportunities made

possible by internet access—education, healthcare, government services, and more,” noted Nelson. She added, “now is a perfect time for local governments to work with community partners, including public libraries, to make sure all people in their community are well-connected.”

@ More information on enrollment

is available at: www.getinternet.gov.

Eligible households can enroll by going to GetInternet.gov to submit an online application or print a mail-in application.

For questions about the ACP Connects NJ initiative, contact Mimi Lee, NJ State Library, at mlee@njstatelib.org, or 609-278-2640 x191.



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League Mourns James Perry

Past President and Former Mayor of Hardwick

The League Executive Board, Past Presidents, and staff expresses its deepest sympathies and condolences to the family of Jim Perry, Past President of the League, and the

former Mayor of Hardwick.

Mayor Perry served as League President from November 2019 through November 2020. He came into the office with a very ambitious agenda on several policy issues. But of upmost importance to him was addressing the opioid crisis that runs through our communities. Jim knew the pain of the crisis personally as he was very open about the tragic loss of son Jesse in 2015. During his acceptance remarks, he commented that he was taking this on as a priority because he didn't want anyone to go through what he did. To him, it was personal, and he willingly shared his loss and his pain when bringing his message to State leaders.

His upbringing pointed him in the direction his life would take him. Perry noted: "My father ran for Mayor of East Rutherford in 1963 and was always active in organizations such as the Board of Education, and my mother was a county committee person. Also my childhood best friend Bob Ever's father was on the Town Council in East Rutherford and my Little League coach was long time East Rutherford Mayor Jim Plosia. I always was involved in school activities and was even the president of the inter-fraternal Counsel at Farleigh Dickinson University. My late brother, George, who passed away in 2018 was also a longtime council member in East Rutherford, and my sister Barbara was president of the Board of Education in Wallington for many years. So I guess you can say it is in my blood to get involved."

He said in a January 2020 *NJ Municipalities* magazine profile that his "primary goal was to find solutions to many of the problems that face New Jersey year after year that are always talked about but no action is ever taken."

Jim's term as President was not a typical year. Then League Executive Director Michael Darcy announced his retirement and Jim oversaw the transition process that resulted in the hiring of current Executive Director Mike Cerra and Deputy Director Lori Buckelew. Also, during his term, COVID hit the State and resulted in a shutdown. It also resulted in virtual advocacy from

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In Memory of Groundbreaking Leader: Lt. Gov. Sheila Y. Oliver Passes

New Jersey's Lieutenant Governor, Sheila Y. Oliver died August 1.



The first Black woman to serve as Speaker of the General Assembly and in State Executive Leadership, she is remembered by many for her work in Trenton and around the state. Her passing was marked with three days of events remembering her many contributions to the Garden State. Mourners had opportunities to pay their final respects at the New Jersey State House in Trenton and the Essex County Courthouse in Newark, where she lay in state. In addition, a state funeral was held at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark.

Oliver was born in Newark, New Jersey, and devoted much of her life to serving her state. She received her master's in social work from Columbia University, then went on to a career in education, teaching at Essex County College and Caldwell University, and serving on the East Orange School District Board of Education. She was also the executive director of The Leaguers, Inc., a nonprofit group devoted to providing social services to those in need.

In 1996, she took her first major step toward a career as a public official when she was elected to the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders. After a few unsuccessful local races, she ascended to the New Jersey State Assembly in the 2003 election. She would serve in that capacity until 2018, including four years as Speaker of the Assembly, the first Black woman in the state to hold the position.

In 2018, Oliver assumed the role of Lieutenant Governor of New Jersey, after running and winning with Gov. Phil Murphy. This made her the first woman of color elected to statewide executive office in the Garden State. In 2021, she ran for and won reelection, again alongside Murphy.

Her family noted, "Sheila Y. Oliver leaves behind a legacy of dedication, service, and inspiration. We will remember her commitment to the people of New Jersey and her tireless efforts to uplift the community.

The League of Municipalities sent its deepest condolences to the family, friends, and partners in

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League Mourns James Perry

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Then Executive Director Michael Darcy, Jim Perry, Mayor and Past President Janicie Kovach of Clinton Town, and Executive Director Michael Cerra at League headquarters.

Jim, which he embraced. The League Conference could not be held in-person and Jim made the ultimate decision to transition to a virtual Conference in 2020 and played a vital role in that Conference.

Jim's advocacy went beyond our State. Before the shut-down, Jim joined League staff at the Lobby Day for the National League of Cities in Washington. There he met with leaders across the country on issues like broadband access in urban and rural areas, preserving the tax exemption for municipal bonds, and investments in infrastructure.

He embraced the fact that he was speaking not just for Hardwick, but for all of New Jersey's municipalities and advised newly elected officials to have a strong backbone.

"You will be attacked. Don't take things personally, although some people will attack you personally. Do what you know is right, and remember you were elected by the people so vote the way the majority of the people want you to vote, not the way you personally want to vote," he said, adding, "After all, you are the spokesperson for them, not their ruler. Also, get involved around the state, not just in your community. I have met many elected officials from all around the state and have learned a great deal from them. Do not let political parties stand in your way of speaking with and getting to know any of them. You might not always agree on every issue, but you will make many great contacts and get many different ideas on how things are handled in other communities."

Shortly after his term as League President ended, he left public office and moved to Florida for a fresh start. Unfortunately, health issues hindered that fresh start, and we lost him far too soon. But the League continues to prioritize a comprehensive response to the opioid crisis, working with Legislative leaders and the Administration. The League worked hand-in-hand with the Attorney General's office and helped achieve 100% participation from eligible municipalities in the recent opioid settlements. That funding can help make the type of difference Jim envisioned when he asked that his son's loss not be in vain.

Services were private but the family plans a celebration of Jim's life at a future date. The League will share those details.

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In Memory of Groundbreaking Leader: Lt. Gov. Sheila Y. Oliver Passes (continued from page 8)

government of Lieutenant Governor Sheila Y. Oliver, attending her viewing at the State House. Her loss will be felt in communities throughout New Jersey, and we will remember her with gratitude and respect for her rich legacy.

League President Mayor Ray Heck of Millstone Borough noted, “The Lieutenant Governor was a friend to communities large and small around the State. She helped expand the reach of the Neighborhood Preservation and Mainstreet New Jersey Programs; and in the pandemic and beyond, she helped communities through the Department of Community Affairs—aid that will be felt for years to come. Lt. Gov. Oliver was committed to making New Jersey better, stronger, and more inclusive. We appreciate her lifetime of civic work. She will be missed.”

NJLM Executive Director Michael Cerra said, “Sheila Oliver was a trusted and valued partner to the League, harkening back from her days as the State’s first Black Woman Assembly Speaker and through her critical recent work as the State’s first Black Woman Executive Leader. She never stopped trying to be the type of public servant who spoke up for those she represented. We appreciate her efforts on lead paint removal, affordable housing, the distribution of American Rescue Plan Funds, and a wide variety of issues through her work leading the Department



of Community Affairs and in the Lt. Governor’s office, serving her State very well and with lasting impacts.”

At the League Conference in 2021, Lieutenant Governor Oliver said, “I have always felt compelled to speak for the people who can’t speak for themselves and to make certain that opportunity is extended to everyone, and that everyone is able to live a good quality of life.” Her work illustrated that statement, and we thank her for her service. 🇺🇸



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