Board Member Training's Moment has Arrived

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Last year in this publication, I told you about something CAI-NJ was building: a free, New Jersey-specific, online Board Leadership Development Program designed to give every board member a solid grounding in what the job actually requires. The program has thus far been a tremendous success but remains merely optional. That may be about to change.

"A board member elected on Tuesday can be signing contracts and approving assessments by Thursday..."

Community association board members are not spectators. They set budgets, interpret governing documents, oversee reserve funding, manage vendor relationships, and make decisions that directly affect their neighbors' homes and finances. They do this all as volunteers and many directors do so without prior experience. A board member elected on Tuesday can be signing contracts and approving assessments by Thursday, with only their own good judgment (and hopefully a well-run management company) standing between the association and a costly mistake.

The law has always assumed board members act as fiduciaries. However, it has not required them to be trained as to what this responsibility entails. Bill A1946, currently pending before the Assembly Housing Committee (with a Senate companion, S4157), would change that.

In its current form, the legislation directs the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to establish a mandatory training program for newly elected or appointed members of community association executive boards. Under the bill, every incoming board member would need to complete at least three hours of training within 180 days of taking office. The curriculum would need

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to cover good business practices, recordkeeping, the legal requirements boards operate under, budgeting and reserve funding, and information about state resources available to associations. Board members who don't complete the training could ultimately be removed by the Commissioner.

This isn't a brand-new idea. A predecessor version of the bill, sponsored by Assemblywoman Annette Quijano, has been moving through the Legislature since 2024. What's changed is that it now has real momentum — and CAI-NJ's Legislative Action Committee has been at the table for all of it.

The LAC's position on this bill has never been about opposition or support — it's been about engagement. From the outset, the committee recognized the value in mandatory training: an educated board is a better-functioning board, full stop. But the LAC also raised a practical concern with the bill as originally drafted. Did it really make sense for a state agency to build community-association-specific curriculum from scratch, when an organization built entirely around this industry, with volunteer attorneys, managers, accountants, and engineers who do this work every day, already had, or could build, exactly that expertise?

So, the LAC went to work on amendments, and those conversations with the bill's sponsors are ongoing. Among the changes CAI-NJ has proposed: clarifying that the training obligation applies only to a member's first term (not every re-election), confirming that training can be delivered remotely (through webinars, videoconferences, or self-paced online modules, not just in-person sessions) and, most significantly, positioning CAI-NJ's own training curriculum as the model the state relies on rather than requiring the DCA to reinvent it.

Here's what makes this moment particularly gratifying: CAI-NJ didn't wait for a mandate to build a solution. The Board Leadership Development Program already covers the same ground the legislation contemplates. Course-takers work through the structure and terminology of community associations, the differences between condominiums, homeowners' associations, and co-ops, and the governing documents that every board member is expected to know

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cold. From there, the program moves into the board's fiduciary and legal obligations, the distinction between board authority and day-to-day management, financial oversight including budgeting and capital reserves, and the maintenance and insurance responsibilities that keep a community running and protected.

Each chapter ends with a short knowledge check, and participants who complete the course receive a Certificate of Completion. In other words, if A1946/S4157 becomes law in a form resembling what the LAC has proposed, New Jersey board members may not need to go looking for a state-approved course at all. It is already sitting in their CAI-NJ member portal.

That's not a coincidence. It's the result of a task force — staff and volunteers alike — anticipating where this legislation was heading and making sure our members would be ready for it before it arrived, not scrambling to catch up afterward.

Legislation can stall, get amended beyond recognition, or die in committee and return two sessions later under a different bill number (e.g., this one has already lived through more than one version). But none of that changes the underlying reality: undertrained boards make expensive mistakes. Reserve studies get ignored. Insurance gaps go unnoticed until there's a claim. Meeting minutes get sloppy in ways that create real legal exposure. A three-hour investment of time prevents a lot of that.

So my advice to every association reading this doesn't hinge on what happens in Trenton. Make the Board Leadership Development program part of your onboarding for every newly elected trustee whether the law requires it or not. Encourage your veteran board members to work through it too. I suspect that most will tell you they learn something they didn't know, even after years of service. And if you're an owner considering a run for the board, there's no better way to find out what you're signing up for.

Whatever happens to A1946/S4157 this session, CAI-NJ's Legislative Action Committee will keep working to make sure that if and when New Jersey mandates board member training, the law reflects what actually works. And our members won't have to wait for Trenton to catch up. The program is ready today. Visit https://cainj.org/bld/ to register! ■

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