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Changes to Local Government Operations Under HEA 1161

On February 26, 2026, Indiana Governor Mike Braun signed into law House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1161–2026. HEA 1161 introduces changes related to local government matters, including provisions governing appointing authority, county personnel policies and employee handbooks, and park board requirements.

Changes to Appointing Authority

Beginning July 1, 2026, HEA 1161 amends numerous sections of the Indiana Code to address how appointed members of local boards and commissions may be removed from office. Under the amended statutes, certain appointed members serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority only under certain conditions.

Specifically, an appointed member serves at the pleasure of the appointing authority as long as:

- The officeholder who appointed the individual continues to hold the same office; or
- The board, committee, or body that appointed the individual retains all of the same members who served on the board, committee, or body when the individual was appointed.

If either condition does not apply, the appointed member may only be removed for cause.

County Personnel Policies and Employee Handbooks

HEA 1161 adds a new chapter to the Indiana Code, I.C. § 36–2–21, requiring counties to adopt documents establishing minimum standards for county employee conduct and applicable policies. This chapter does not apply to a county containing a consolidated city (e.g., Marion County) or to certain employees, including employees of courts, prosecutors' offices, and public defenders' offices.

Beginning July 1, 2026, each county executive shall adopt and maintain a written personnel policy, employee handbook, or other equivalent documents. In addition, all county employees must sign an acknowledgment of receipt of the documents as a condition of their employment. This new chapter also requires that results of employee evaluations be maintained as part of the employee's personnel record.

Park Board Requirements

HEA 1161 amends Indiana Code § 36-10-3-11 to impose additional requirements on park boards. Beginning after June 30, 2026, a park board must obtain approval from the executive of the applicable unit before taking certain actions.

Specifically, approval is required before the board may:

- Exercise the power of eminent domain;
- Enter into a contract exceeding the lesser of \$500,000 or 10% of the department's annual budget;
- Acquire real or personal property exceeding the lesser of those amounts; or
- Approve capital improvements to park facilities or property exceeding the lesser of those amounts.

What the New Law Means

This new law introduces changes affecting local government operations across several areas. To prepare, local units should review appointment practices, personnel policies, and park board procedures to ensure compliance with these new requirements.

For more information or assistance, please contact the author or any attorney with FBT Gibbons' [Government Services Practice Group](#).

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