

Insights

Take Five: 5 Things You Need to Know About Indiana Government - March 2026

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The Indiana General Assembly concluded its work for the year on February 27th, bringing an end to a session that began in December with the failed effort to draw new Congressional maps, and concluded with lawmakers trying to attract the Chicago Bears to northwest Indiana and authorizing a new casino license in northeast Indiana. Below are some important policy changes enacted this year that impact Hoosiers across the state.

1. Scaled-back housing bill passes

Legislation designed to address Indiana's housing shortage was enacted into law by the General Assembly this year after lawmakers removed many of the provisions that were most objectionable to local government units.

House Bill 1001, authored by Rep. Doug Miller (R - Elkhart), seeks to make home ownership more attainable for Hoosiers primarily by ensuring predictable permit fees and zoning rules.

With the age of average first-time homebuyers today being more than 40-years-old, Rep. Miller and Republican leaders pointed to burdensome regulations and high construction and development costs as primary barriers to home ownership.

Previous versions of the bill expanded what was considered a "permitted use" to include duplexes on lots that were zoned residential, and mixed-use or multifamily housing on commercially zoned property. By being considered a permitted use, a developer could move forward with these projects without a zoning hearing. The bill had also previously restricted the ability of local units to impose certain exterior design features unless they adopted an ordinance to opt-out of those prohibitions.

But those provisions were removed in the final version of the bill, which instead limits the ability of local units to impose or raise certain permitting fees for 180 days after the ordinance is published, and prohibits a local unit from changing zoning and design rules after a development application is filed. Finally, the bill also requires local units to review their unified development ordinance, zoning regulations, and land development rules, with the goal of increasing housing development. Cities, towns and counties must also annually issue a housing progress report to the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority.

You can expect legislators to tackle housing affordability measures again next session.

2. "One Big Beautiful Bill" provisions codified along with other healthcare proposals

Hoosier lawmakers advanced several bills in the healthcare space aimed at tightening public assistance programs, improving provider protections, and strengthening care delivery systems. Senate Bill 1, authored by Senate Majority Floor Leader Chris Garten (R – Charlestown), was the most sweeping in healthcare reform and codified provisions of the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” enacted by Congress in 2025 by tightening eligibility and verification standards across public assistance programs. Notably, the bill imposed significant reforms on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid, including stricter citizenship verification, expanded income assessment rules, and further expanded work requirements within the Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP).

Alongside these structural reforms, lawmakers advanced several provider-focused measures. Senate Bill 189 delivered a notable win for healthcare providers by prohibiting insurers from imposing administrative fees or penalties ties to out-of-network care, classifying such actions as unfair or deceptive insurance practices. The bill also refined Indiana’s use of the No Surprises Act’s independent resolution process by adding new notice and negotiation requirements. House Bill 1271 targeted billing fairness, strengthened patient financial disclosures, and curbed unfair insurance practices such as downcoding, retroactive reimbursement changes, and automated claim downcoding. Rounding out this session’s notable healthcare activity, House Bill 1277 advanced a long-term strategy to improve senior care and reduce Medicaid costs by carving out long-term care residents from managed care after 100 days, creating a standalone Assisted Living Waiver, establishing cost limits, and preserving patient choice in care coordination. Together, these four measures delivered meaningful system-wide changes that will have a lasting impact on the healthcare landscape in Indiana.

3. Rewrite of Environmental Code enacted despite opposition

Senate Bill 277, authored by Sen. Rick Niemeyer (R - Lowell), was the agency bill for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). The bill as introduced was intended to combine, streamline, simplify, and eliminate outdated provisions within Ind. Code Title 13 so that the agency could be more efficient, improve clarity, reduce burdens, and better serve customers while preserving existing environmental protections. This bill was in response to Gov. Braun’s Executive Order 25-38 and suggestions from the public. IDEM clearly stated that it was designed to be a substantial reduction in complexity, words, sections, and unnecessary mandates from the environmental title, but environmental groups argued that the changes would relax important regulatory safeguards. Because of this opposition, the bill narrowly passed the Senate by a vote of 26-21 and the House by a vote of 53-45. The 146-page bill was signed into law by Governor Braun on March 5th and becomes effective on July 1st of this year.

The new law makes technical updates across Indiana’s environmental statutes. It requires a rigorous fiscal analysis for any state rule that is more stringent than federal law, recommends that the Environmental Rules Board prioritize economic reasonableness and technical feasibility in the rulemaking process, and narrows IDEM’s reliance on certain federal risk values by specifying that IDEM may not base a decision solely on federal risk values that have not been promulgated through federal rulemaking, including values developed or issued under EPA’s Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS). Additionally, it removes the requirement that all state agencies and institutions report to IDEM any plans or activities that affect or may affect the environment of Indiana, eliminates the Division of Pollution Prevention and the Office of Voluntary Compliance, removes the requirement that IDEM designate an ombudsman for regulatory and permitting matters under the Technical and Compliance Assistance Program, restructures aspects of citizen suits and voluntary remediation provisions, changes certain hearing and permitting procedures, makes changes to public hearing requirements and criteria for public rule proposals, and provides that certain new policies put into effect after July 1, 2026 expire after five years unless reauthorized. Every environmental practitioner should thoroughly read the bill, as the final enrolled version of the bill includes updates to most provisions contained in Ind. Code Title 13.

4. “Hammond” Bears could attract significant investments in Northwest Indiana

Perhaps garnering the most media attention this legislative session was Senate Bill 27, which creates the Northwest Indiana Stadium Authority and empowers it to issue bonds to construct and operate a new stadium for the Chicago Bears. This new law is Indiana's attempt to entice the Chicago Bears to leave the city of their birth for northwest Indiana. State leaders are serious about competing for this storied football franchise, making a realistic proposal that would build the facility without dipping into the state's general fund or raising income or property taxes on residents. News media reports during the legislative session identified Wolf Lake Memorial Park in Hammond as a potential site for the project, with additional interest from Gary Mayor (and former State Senator) Eddie Melton in sites in his community. Arlington Heights, Illinois, countered with its own offer after the Bears indicated genuine interest in Indiana's proposal. Nabbing the Bears would be an economic boost and point of pride for the long-overlooked residents of "The Region," but for now, we don't know which option the Bears will choose, or if a third alternative will emerge.

5. Hoosiers to vote on bail reform, new casino license

Two measures passed by the General Assembly this year will seek the approval of voters on the 2026 general election ballot. First, Senate Joint Resolution 1 looks to amend the Indiana Constitution by keeping dangerous offenders in custody while they await trial. Currently, murder is the only charge where courts do not automatically set a bond for each offense. SJR 1 would expand that practice to other offenses with a two part test: people charged with any crime would not be granted bail if 1) the proof against them was evident or the presumption strong, and 2) the state proves by clear and convincing evidence that no conditions of release could protect the safety of any other person or the community. This proposal has passed two general assemblies and will now go to the entire Indiana electorate on the 2026 general election ballot. Additionally, voters in Allen, DeKalb, and Steuben counties will have the opportunity to vote on a public question regarding locating an inland casino to their communities thanks to House Bill 1038. This legislation began as an effort to relocate a facility in southern Indiana, but lawmakers instead chose to authorize a new license in northeast Indiana to promote economic development efforts in the area and entice customers from Ohio and Michigan. The requirement for a public ballot question was added by Senate sponsor Justin Busch (R - Fort Wayne) in order to gain enough support for Senate passage. The question will be on the November ballots for residents in the three aforementioned counties.

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