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## The Government Where You Live By Phyllis Naegeli

How does the government work where you live? Do you live in a big **city**? Or, do you live in a small **town**? In America, the national government makes laws for the whole country. Each state has a government, too. Local governments work to keep the people who live in a city or town safe.

Governments need money to do their job. They get this money when citizens pay taxes. Each **community** has different **taxes**. Most of the money comes from taxes on property. Taxes may also be collected on food, retail goods, or income. Local governments charge **fees** for some services. Fees may be charged for water. When someone registers a car, they pay a fee. All this money helps the government do its job.

Do you have a **park** or playground where you live? The government builds parks for people to enjoy. They are great places to relax and play. Larger cities may have **recreation centers** for its citizens. These are fun, safe places for everyone.

Have you ever met a **police officer** or **fire fighter**? Their job is to help keep people safe. The police officer is a friend to the people he or she serves. Police officers fight **crime** and help enforce laws. Fire fighters put out fires and help at accidents. They also teach about fire **safety**. These are important jobs in your community.

Cities and towns have **courts** to take care of local cases. Local laws are made to protect the people where you live. The local government sets speed limits. They also make laws to keep people's property safe and control noise. When someone breaks one of these laws, the local court decides on the penalty.

Most cities and towns have a **public works department**. These men and women take care of the streets and roads. They plow snow, sweep off dirt, and repair potholes. Keeping roads safe and clean is a big job.

The local **health department** keeps hospitals safe. They check on restaurants and grocery stores to be sure they are clean. Drinking water is also checked for safety by the health department.

The government also gives **licenses**. Doctors and lawyers must prove their skills. Licenses help to make sure people who do certain jobs are qualified. Plumbers and electricians also need special licenses. Without these, people wouldn't know if they could **trust** a doctor or electrician.

The local government runs schools. A local **school board** approves money to pay teachers and take care of the buildings. They help choose the books and approve money for sports and buses.

Do you like to go to the **library**? Did you know the government runs the library? They buy the books and magazines. This is why most library services are free.

Cities and towns have special leaders. Cities have a **mayor** and a **council**. Towns may have a manager or selectmen. All of these people work together to help protect citizens.

