

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Landmark Affordable Housing Legislation

03/20/2024

## Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good morning, everyone.

Let me thank Mayor Helmin Caba for that warm introduction, and for welcoming us to Perth Amboy.

We are gathering, today, to celebrate a monumental piece of legislation that will make housing more affordable and more accessible for working families all across New Jersey.

And I want to thank each one of our legislative partners, who made this victory possible, starting with: Senate President Nick Scutari, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, who has been a huge champion on housing, along with Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, Yvonne Lopez, and Senate Majority Whip, Troy Singleton, who is sadly not able to be here today.

We are also joined by Adam Gordon, Executive Director of Fair Share Housing Center, whose hard work and expertise were invaluable in putting this bill together.

This is a victory that is, frankly, decades in the making.

With this legislation, which I will be signing into law in just a few moments, we are going to — significantly — streamline the process for advancing affordable housing development across our state.

Because ensuring that every family has a safe, dignified place to call home — where parents can raise their children, and senior citizens can live out their golden years — is a cornerstone of the American dream.

Affordable housing has been a central public policy challenge in New Jersey for nearly half a century.

49 years ago this week, in a case brought by two local branches of the NAACP, the New Jersey Supreme Court held in a landmark ruling that every municipality must “make realistically possible an appropriate variety and choice of housing.”

The Court went on to say that towns cannot stand in the way of opportunities for low- and moderate-income housing.

This principle became known as the Mount Laurel doctrine. To this day, it is studied by law students and lawyers all across the nation.

For decades, all three branches of government have wrestled with how to apply the principles of Mount Laurel in practice. At times, our state legislature has tried to address this issue. At other times, the process for determining affordable housing obligations was left to an executive branch agency.

But more recently, over the last 10 years, this process has mainly played out in the courts, through litigation.

I have long said that the issue of affordable housing should not just be left to the courts.

Since day one of my Administration, we have worked with the Legislature to provide significant support from the state level. For instance, we have invested more than half a billion dollars to expand affordable housing and protected the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

And our efforts are paying off.

To offer one example, in 2023, New Jersey permitted more new housing units than New York state for the first time ever. Even though they have ten million more residents than we do.

But, despite this progress, we still have a lot more work to do.

Because New Jersey is popular. And our population is growing at a rate that continues to outpace our supply of affordable housing.

In fact, some estimate that our state is facing a shortage of more than 200,000 affordable housing units.

In other words: We need to keep building — and fast.

So, as we look to how we determine our affordable housing obligations over the next 10 years, and beyond, we can't be satisfied with the status quo.

Over the last few months, my Administration has worked closely with our legislative partners to craft a new process where all three branches of government are involved.

And with the main bill I am signing today, we are going to establish clear rules for how municipal affordable housing obligations should be calculated. It incorporates the standards that courts have used that have proved workable in practice.



And this legislation will give municipalities bonus credits, as well, for constructing affordable housing where it is needed most, like near transit hubs, or for providing housing for vulnerable populations, like our senior citizens.

Under the rules of this legislation, we will bring greater efficiency to this process by having the Department of Community Affairs run the numbers. Towns will then have the freedom to come up with plans to meet those numbers. And, if there is a dispute, it will be handled through a mediation program run by the courts.

This process ensures that each branch of government is doing what it does best. And it means that the affordable housing obligations, of towns across our state, will be determined much more quickly than in decades past.

In short: This legislation will enable us to build new, affordable housing, where it is needed, with far fewer hurdles.

And creating more affordable housing will also help close the racial wealth gap and help more families escape generational poverty.

And today, I am also signing five other bills, most of which are focused on lowering construction costs for affordable housing – from their tax treatment to insurance. This is particularly important given lingering inflation as well as the supply chain challenges that we continue to face.

Of course, this historic legislative package would not have been possible without the legislative sponsors, and the members of their staff, who have worked tirelessly over the last few months.

From our team, I want to give a special shout-out to Derek Fischer, who recently left my Counsel's Office but spent his last months in government making sure that this would get over the finish line.

And in that same spirit, I want to give major credit to my Chief Counsel, Parimal Garg, who worked day and night to get this done.

I also want to thank the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, Jacquelyn Suarez, Deputy Commissioner Kate McDonnell, and Executive Director of the Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, Melanie Walter. Each one of them will be crucial to ensuring that this new process gets off the ground smoothly.

And let me quickly thank, as well, the Urban Mayors Association, the NAACP, the Latino Action Network, the Housing and Community Development Network, Habitat for Humanity, and the Coalition to End Domestic Violence.

Let's be clear: today's legislation is a major victory for the working families of New Jersey.

Because nobody, in our great state, should ever have to worry about finding a safe, comfortable place to call home.

And thanks to the progress we are making, together, we are putting the dream of homeownership, and affordable housing, back into reach for millions of New Jerseyans.

So, thank you all again.

And with that, I will now turn the podium to one of our great champions behind this legislation, Middlesex County's very own, Speaker Craig Coughlin!

## Governor Phil Murphy

[Home \(/governor/\)](#)

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[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about\)](#)

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[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](#)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](/governor/initiatives/#Education)  
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[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Justice)  
[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

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