

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Delivers Remarks at the 110th Conference of the New Jersey League of Municipalities

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*Remarks As Prepared For Delivery*

Good afternoon, everyone. It is such a treat to be back with you all – here in AC – for the marquee municipal event of the year: The New Jersey League of Municipalities Annual Conference!

To the League’s outgoing President, and the distinguished Mayor of Alpine, Paul Tomasko: Thank you for that very kind introduction.

And more importantly: Thank you for your valiant service to our neighbors and families, especially when it comes to lowering costs for local governments as a member of the Executive Board of the Bergen Municipal Joint Insurance Fund.

Paul, you certainly leave big shoes to fill as President. But there are few leaders better-equipped to fill them than the League’s current Vice President – and Mayor of Elsinboro – Sean Elwell.

I say that because, in addition to his role as Mayor, Sean serves his community every day as a medical professional, a volunteer EMS, and a volunteer firefighter.

And that legacy of service and leadership will be invaluable during his tenure as President.

So, congratulations, Sean – and best of luck!

I also want to thank the League’s Executive Director – and my friend – Mike Cerra for his leadership, and for always making sure Tammy and I leave this conference not just with full hearts – but with full stomachs, as well.

And finally, I want to give a shout out to all of this year’s Public Service Award Winners as well as the Women in Municipal Government Honorees. Congratulations to each one of you!

Now, seeing as this is my final League Conference, as Governor, I must say: I’m feeling a bit nostalgic today!

I can hardly believe it was eight years ago when I first addressed this gathering, as Governor-elect.

  
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And fast forward to today, here we are.

In absentia, I want to give the next Governor-elect, and the pride of Montclair, Mikie Sherrill a big shout out!

I cannot tell you how thrilled I am to be passing the baton to Mikie and our next Lieutenant Governor, Dale Caldwell.

As Mikie and Dale will soon discover: Serving as Governor and serving as Lieutenant Governor of the great Garden State are the best jobs in the world — and the highest honors.

And today, as I approach my final weeks in office, I have a simple message to all of you who lead our state's 564 municipalities:

Thank you.

Thank you for your partnership in building a stronger, fairer, and more affordable New Jersey.

Because, over the past eight years, we have succeeded in living up to our most fundamental responsibility as leaders:

Leaving our children a state that is better than we found it.

And we have not merely achieved that sacred goal.

We have done it together. As one New Jersey.

And I mean that.

Because, under the leadership of my Deputy Chief of Staff for Intergovernmental Affairs Rob Field — along with his entire team — our Administration has had the privilege of working directly with each one of you, at various points over the years.

I'd even wager that many of you have my personal number saved in your phones! And we have stayed in close touch — through the highs as well as the lows.

Whether we have mobilized in response to a natural disaster, or seized historic opportunities like next year's World Cup, we have worked together, at every stage of our Administration. From the pandemic to the launch of New Jersey's Commemoration of America's 250th birthday.

And, no matter the challenge: we have never allowed the smallness of politics to stand in the way of getting big things done for the people we serve.

Especially when it comes to delivering on the most pressing priority for our state's families: affordability.

For the second election in a row, the voters of New Jersey have sent a resoundingly clear message to those of us in power: "It's the economy, stupid!"

The people have spoken. And they are demanding that our leaders remain laser-focused on lowering costs.

And while the reality is – in today’s environment of global, economic uncertainty – there are so many factors that are out of our control when it comes to the skyrocketing cost of living, I am proud to say that together we have seized every tool at our disposal to make life more affordable for more New Jerseyans.

Just look at our record on property tax relief.

By the time I leave office, our Administration will have invested more than \$18 billion in supporting direct property tax relief for millions of households – through initiatives like the ANCHOR and Senior Freeze programs.

That total is \$10 billion higher than it was under the previous Administration.

In other words, with your help: We have nearly doubled the amount of money that the state has put back into the pockets of New Jersey’s homeowners and renters.

At the same time, we have also helped lower costs by increasing funding – at the state level – for New Jersey’s public education system by more than \$3.9 billion. That represents a nearly 50% increase in funding for our K-12 schools since I first entered office in 2018.

Now, this is not just an investment in our state’s students and educators. It is one that benefits every family.

Because every dollar that our state spends on public education is a dollar our families get to save in local property taxes.

And, in our ongoing efforts to lower costs in the long-term, we have also made significant progress in expanding shared services.

In total, we have allocated tens of millions of dollars to support the Local Efficiency Achievement Program, or LEAP. And, as we speak, we have helped initiate more than 1,700 active agreements that are lowering costs for our families by sharing services across neighboring towns.

That is the perfect example of good government in action. And it has been made possible by so many of you who are stepping up to help our neighbors save more of their hard-earned money.

And, to help your municipalities save even more money, our Administration has also drastically increased funding for infrastructure projects at the local level.

We have invested nearly \$3.4 billion into local and county aid for new – and often long-overdue – transportation infrastructure projects in the hearts of our cities and towns.

And thanks to the support of our partners in the Legislature, last year, we also reauthorized the Transportation Trust Fund, which will ensure more infrastructure funding will flow into your communities long after we leave office.

So, altogether, from delivering record-high property tax relief to rebuilding the roads and railways that keep our communities connected, we have demonstrated what it means to stand together as one New Jersey.

And, as we have made historic progress in rebuilding our state’s economic foundation, we have also restored trust in our fiscal leadership.

For the first time in a generation, we have made the full payment into our State's pension system not once, not twice, but FIVE years in a row.

And by steering the ship of State in the direction of stability and prosperity, we have, in the process, rehabilitated New Jersey's image and credibility.

Just a couple months ago, for instance, Moody's upgraded New Jersey's credit rating to Aa3.

For those keeping track: That marks our NINTH credit rating upgrade in the past few years alone, after decades of downgrades.

And we have seen a similar trend of fiscal progress in many of your communities.

In the past few years alone, municipalities like Atlantic City, Camden, and Newark have all seen a steady drumbeat of credit rating upgrades, which will help lower costs for our families in the long-term and encourage more companies to grow their presence in the Garden State.

That means more jobs and more opportunities for our workers and students in the years to come.

And again: That is exactly what it means to leave our children a state that is better than we found it.

But, we're not done yet.

Because if you think we're going to hang up our cleats one second before the final whistle — you've got another thing coming.

In fact, there is one important goal that we have yet to accomplish.

And that goal is saving the New Jersey State Health Benefits Program (SHBP) for Local Government.

Right now, as things stand: The SHBP for Local Government is on the brink of collapse.

As health care costs have skyrocketed over the past few years, premiums have gone up by roughly 60%. And more and more employers are withdrawing from the program — which has created a "death spiral."

So, unless we take sweeping action — now — to shore up this program, there are tens of thousands of New Jerseyans whose access to health care will be in serious jeopardy. And next June's rate increases will be astronomical.

We cannot allow that to happen.

Because, let's remember: This program provides health care coverage to our state's valiant, and often under-appreciated, public servants.

Among their ranks are the sanitation workers who clean New Jersey's streets and communities every single day. The administrative clerks who work a desk in town hall. Or the county road crews who pave our highways and fill potholes on our streets.

These New Jerseyans — along with our state's taxpayers — are counting on us to prevent the SHBP for Local Government from collapsing.

So, today, I would like to offer my proposal for saving the program before I leave office. And that proposal is the following:

Our Administration is willing to provide a quarter billion dollars, in the short-term, to keep the SHBP for Local Government solvent in exchange for smart, structural reforms that will stabilize the program in the long-term.

Of course, achieving this goal will require hard decisions. But that is what good government is all about: making reasonable reforms to advance the public good.

In order to keep the SHBP for Local Government solvent, we need to simplify and modernize the plans available through the program and ensure that those plans can adapt to a fast-moving health care landscape — today and for years to come.

Now, I am hopeful we can get this done before January 20.

It won't be easy.

But we have taken on tough challenges before.

And we have overcome every single one of them. Together.

And we have done it by setting aside our political differences and finding common cause as fellow New Jerseyans.

We have done it by leading with civility, compassion, and common sense.

And we have done it as one New Jersey.

Because, thanks to the progress we have made — together — we have built a state that is stronger and fairer than ever before.

A state that is home to one of the most formidable economies in our entire region.

A state with one of the fastest-growing populations — and an innovation ecosystem that is second-to-none.

And a state that is proving, every day, that when one of our communities win — we all win.

Together, we have mounted an economic comeback for the ages. A comeback that is the envy of the nation.

And when leaders, in other states, ask me how we have achieved all this progress, my answer — as always — is simple:

**WE'RE FROM JERSEY BABY!!!**

And we are going to run through the tape, together. Just as we always have.

Thank you all for your leadership, and for your partnership. May God bless you and the people of New Jersey. And may God continue to bless the state of New Jersey and the United States of America.

## Governor Phil Murphy

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