

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Delivers Remarks at the 109th Conference of the New Jersey League of Municipalities

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Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon, everyone. It is wonderful to be back in Atlantic City for this year's conference.

To the League's President, Mayor Bill Chegwidden, thank you very much for that generous introduction and for your leadership over the past year.

As President, you have done a tremendous job in bringing together leaders from all corners of our state. In fact, I understand that this year's conference is the League's largest conference since 2018!

So, Bill I want to congratulate you, as well as my friend – and the League's Executive Director – Mike Cerra, and your entire team on generating a ton of buzz in the world of municipal government.

And I also want to congratulate all of the award winners at this year's conference, each one of whom will be recognized in just a few moments.

But, while I have the podium I do want to mention two award winners who are – sadly – not with us today: Congressman Bill Pascrell and Congressman Donald Payne, Jr, two New Jersey legends who passed away earlier this year.

Both Bill and Don dedicated their entire lives to supporting our state's families not just in North Jersey, which they represented in Congress, but in every one of our 564 municipalities.

And in my view, the most meaningful way we can honor their legacies is by continuing to work together – at the federal, state, and local level – to ensure that New Jersey remains the best place, anywhere in America, to raise a family.

This is very same mission that has inspired everything our Administration has accomplished since 2018.

And it is the very same mission that will guide us forward, as we approach our final year of partnership.

And, as municipal leaders, you know better than anyone that though the towns and cities you represent are very distinct in terms of size and scenery, our families who live within them expect the same thing from their elected leaders.

Our families expect – and deserve – leaders who are committed to maintaining our best-in-the-nation public education system. Leaders who will reach across the aisle to improve public safety or support the creation of new economic opportunities.

And more than anything, the people of New Jersey expect us to work together to continue making life more affordable for more families. To me, that is the clearest takeaway from this month's election.

Because after years of global disruptions – from inflation to two full-on wars – our families are still being battered by high costs.

Of course, this is not news to any of us.

But it is a reminder that we cannot slow down for a second when it comes to delivering real economic progress to the people of New Jersey.

And that is exactly why, as our Administration runs through the tape over the next 13 months we are going to continue to support all of you – as municipal leaders – in serving the needs of our families.

First and foremost, that means providing whatever economic relief we can to our hardworking neighbors.

And in pursuit of that goal, just last month our Administration sent out our latest round of ANCHOR payments to more than 1.5 million New Jerseyans.

For each eligible recipient, that means up to \$1,750 in direct, economic relief. And with this latest round of ANCHOR payments, our Administration has officially delivered record-high property tax relief three years in a row.

But as always, there is more we must do.

And in order to further support your efforts to bring down costs at a local level, our Administration is working alongside Commissioner Jacquelyn Suárez and her colleagues at the Department of Community Affairs to provide grants that will help cover the cost of everything from housing to emergency response services.

Just a few weeks ago, for instance, the DCA announced that the Affordable Housing Trust Fund has officially awarded more than \$100 million to support new, affordable housing projects, in communities up and down our state.

This is an especially important investment, as we know that the cost of housing – not just in New Jersey, but across the nation – has skyrocketed in recent years. And with this funding, we are going to work to ensure that every New Jerseyan can find a safe, affordable place to call home.

And in that same spirit, earlier this month, the DCA also announced \$6 million – in new grants – to expand shared services, and lower costs, in municipalities all across the Garden State.

And with this latest round of funding, our Administration will have now invested more than \$20 million toward promoting shared service agreements.

This is an investment that has made a world of difference, in communities far and wide, from Bergen County to Cape May County. Because, in each one of these communities, we have seen how shared service agreements can help lower costs for our residents while also improving the delivery of services, like stormwater maintenance and street sweeping.

Moreover, with our most recent budget, our Administration also provided another record-high investment into New Jersey's public education system. And in so doing, we became the first Administration to ever fully fund New Jersey's school funding formula.

And this is not only an investment into supporting our state's children, it is one that is directly tied to affordability as well.

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

And now, looking to the future, our Administration is going to help working families save even more money by expanding access to free pre-K programs all across our state.

With our most recent budget, we added more than 1,000 new seats to our state's preschools – at no additional cost to parents. And building upon this progress will remain a top priority in the new year.

Now, many of the investments I have just mentioned – from property tax relief to public education funding – are focused on lowering costs for our families in the near term.

But of course, if we want New Jersey to remain the best state to raise a family, then we also need to invest in the long-term economic prosperity of our state, as well as our communities.

We need to embrace a proactive and forward-looking approach when it comes to strengthening our economy.

And that is exactly why one of the highest priorities – for our Administration – has been, and will always be, maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Under our watch, for the first time in a generation, we have made the full payment into our State's pension system – not just once, but four years in a row.

And in the past few years alone, we have also secured seven credit rating upgrades.

Most recently, back in August, Moody's actually improved New Jersey's credit outlook, which sent a clear message to the entire world: New Jersey's economy is strong, and will remain strong, as long as we continue leading responsibly.

And to that point, we will soon have a new opportunity to strengthen New Jersey's economic competitiveness by updating our State Plan for the first time in nearly 25 years.

That is right: the last time New Jersey overhauled our State Plan was in 2001. It goes without saying, the world has changed since then.

So, before the end of this year the State Planning Commission will release a draft of a new State Plan that will focus on preserving and protecting our natural resources while also encouraging development and redevelopment where it is sorely needed.

And, as we work together to convert this draft into a final State Plan, the process — at every turn — will be collaborative.

Because, as always: we need to work together to build a stronger, more prosperous, and more sustainable future for New Jersey.

And, speaking of the future of New Jersey, I want to close, this afternoon, by sharing a few thoughts on a concept that is central not only to our state's economy, but really, our identity: Innovation.

The fact is: the strength of our state has always been rooted in the talent and ingenuity of our people.

And for that very same reason, our Administration has been laser-focused on positioning New Jersey to lead the way in the cutting-edge industries of tomorrow, from the life sciences, to clean energy, to generative Artificial Intelligence.

And our state's growing leadership in these emerging industries has a direct impact on all of your communities. Because we have the potential to create a new generation of job opportunities, for our students and workers while also re-shaping the way the public interacts with their local government.

What exactly do I mean by that?

Well, look no further than this year's Conference — which, thanks to the leadership of Mayor Chegwidden and Commissioner Suarez, features the League's first-ever career fair.

Now, Mike tells me that a goal for this year's career fair is encouraging young New Jerseyans to pursue a career in government, which is crucially important, considering the growing shortage of public sector workers.

And this is a shortage that presents a major challenge when it comes to serving the needs of our neighbors — both conveniently and affordably.

So, with this challenge in mind, our Administration is developing a new approach for improving the delivery of public services to the people of New Jersey.

Under the guidance of New Jersey's first-ever Chief AI Strategist, Beth Noveck, we are leading the nation in harnessing generative AI to help municipal leaders address the needs of our families.

Already, we have provided AI training to nearly 10,000 public sector professionals who are learning how to use AI-powered platforms to reduce wait times for residents, analyze large amounts of data instantaneously, and communicate with the public more effectively.

And with these new, state-of-the-art tools our state's public sector workers are learning how to provide the best possible service to the people of New Jersey — more easily and more efficiently.

And as part of this ongoing effort, this afternoon, I am thrilled to report that we are launching a new website, in partnership with InnovateUS and the League of Municipalities that offers personalized, AI training to any public sector worker — entirely free of charge.

I encourage you all to check it out at innovate-us.org/NJ. Again, that is innovate-us.org/NJ. And please be sure to share it with all of your colleagues!

We are launching this website – and making this resource available to everyone at no additional cost – because we want to build an innovation economy that is accessible to every New Jerseyan.

We believe that all of our state's students and workers have a role to play in the industries of tomorrow, whether they are serving their neighbors, as a public sector worker, or they are hoping to launch a start-up of their own that can change the world for the better.

Our Administration has always believed that we not only have an opportunity to plant New Jersey's flag in the emerging realms of innovation, like AI – but a responsibility to do so, as well.

Because together we can lead the world in demonstrating how these new tools can help create new opportunities for our families – instead of displacing them.

We can work together to renew and strengthen trust in local government, instead of fueling a crisis of distrust and cynicism.

And more than anything, we can seize our state's growing leadership in the industries of tomorrow to build a stronger and fairer economy for every New Jerseyan.

So, during our final year of partnership, I am eager to continue working with each one of you to lower costs, create new opportunities in every community, and help every New Jerseyan find their place in the economy of tomorrow.

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

Governor Phil Murphy

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