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Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Announces Statewide, Bipartisan Coalition of "Mayors for Liquor License Reform"

04/13/2023

Coalition Urges Swift Consideration of Comprehensive Reforms to Support Small Businesses, Downtowns, and Economic Development throughout New Jersey

ATLANTIC CITY – Speaking at the New Jersey Conference of Mayors 58th Annual Spring Conference in Atlantic City today, Governor Phil Murphy announced the formation of a bipartisan coalition of mayors from across New Jersey who support the Murphy Administration's comprehensive plan to reform and modernize New Jersey's antiquated, Prohibition-era liquor license laws.

The coalition – "Mayors for Liquor License Reform" – includes 90 charter members who represent urban, suburban, and rural towns across a vast swath of New Jersey, all of which would benefit from the economic development generated by modernizing the State's liquor license laws to make them more affordable, equitable, and accessible.

"These mayors come from counties across the state. They represent more than one million residents of historic small towns, growing townships, and mid-sized cities," said Governor Murphy. "But most important, they represent hundreds of small restaurants whose owners are being left out – and whose investments in their establishments are being left at-risk – because they do not have access to the liquor license that can allow them to better compete and stay in business. They understand the patent unfairness of our current liquor law regime and the significant local economic benefits that our proposed reforms would bring."

From quaint Woodbine in southern Cape May County, to historic Clinton in northwest Hunterdon County, to the shore region of Bay Head, and the booming northern urban center of Newark, the growing list of mayors echoed Governor Murphy's sentiment that liquor license reform will not only "create greater equity across the board, it will also serve as a major catalyst to spur economic development and strengthen and revitalize downtowns throughout New Jersey."

In lending their support and advocating for reform, all 90 charter members of the mayors' coalition signed an open letter

(https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/nn2pdj/nrdit/vp57d3_-!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbAlIb9F_b4K9KhB7exXqWNufyBWnwWFCeCg6b5_vz4rMnkNDGP73hdfmWfCS7bEfa7aPK noting, "Given the exorbitant costs for a license, coupled with the lack of availability and the existing population cap for municipalities, the present system favors the economically advantaged while hampering mom-and-pop businesses and town with smaller populations."

During the Governor's speech today, he shared a video

(https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/nn2pdj/nrdit/bi67d3_-!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbAlIb9F_b4K9KhB7exXqWNufyBWnwWFCeCg6b5_vz4rMnkNDGP73hdfmWfCS7bEfa7aPK featuring various members of the coalition and local business owners who testified to the importance of liquor license reform and the transformative impact it would have on their communities.

Governor Murphy first announced his goal of reforming New Jersey's liquor license laws during his State of the State address in January, citing the exorbitant costs – sometime as high as seven figures – and the lack of availability created by outdated population caps, all of which hinder small, diverse, and mom-and-pop establishments from flourishing. The Governor then unveiled a comprehensive proposal (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/nn2pdj/nrdit/ra77d3_-!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbAlIb9F_b4K9KhB7exXqWNufyBWnwWFCeCg6b5_vz4rMnkNDGP73hdfmWfCS7bEfa7aPK in February, that has since been introduced in the Legislature by Senator Gordon Johnson and Assemblyman Raj Mukherji, which would:

- Gradually phase out the existing population cap on licenses over five years until it is permanently eliminated;
- Maintain local control;
- Establish progressive prices and associated fees based upon business size and a cap on the annual renewal fee not to exceed \$2,500;
- Repatriate inactive licenses to boost availability;
- Eliminate the secondary market that currently makes licenses unaffordable for small business owners;
- Permanently ease the restrictions that have hampered breweries; and
- Provide a mechanism to support existing license holders.

Since then, numerous chefs, restaurant owners, brewery owners, and now mayors have voiced their support for reforms to create a more equitable playing field with the potential to generate massive economic opportunities for small businesses and communities statewide.

The Murphy Administration continues to engage stakeholders and advocate for equitable reforms and looks forward to working with lawmakers to finalize a comprehensive plan that will eliminate the existing roadblocks and unlock New Jersey's economic development potential.

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