

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: Governor Murphy & Lt. Governor Way to Speak at Historic Jacob's Chapel to Honor Civil Rights Leaders

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MOUNT LAUREL – This morning, Gov. Murphy and Lieutenant Gov. Way will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the NJ Supreme Court's Mount Laurel ruling at the historic Jacob's Chapel A.M.E. Church in Mount Laurel. They will be joined by civil rights leaders, including Reverend Terrell W. Person of Jacob's Chapel, former Southern Burlington NAACP President Crystal Charley, Ethel Halley (daughter of Ethel Lawrence, known as "the Rosa Parks of affordable housing"), and Fair Share Housing Center's Executive Director, Adam Gordon.

In the landmark Mount Laurel decision on March 24, 1975, the New Jersey Supreme Court declared exclusionary zoning unconstitutional and found an affirmative obligation on every town in New Jersey to provide their "fair share" of the region's affordable housing. The Mount Laurel decision upended decades of exclusionary zoning that drove residential segregation and is often compared to the historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

New Jersey's groundbreaking affordable housing model, the [Mount Laurel Doctrine](#) (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/bezn2m/nrddit/n7hfnbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LMhVV1pw12iYKA9wZj8uJ7eleTZEfHZr6cAftKcHbYjJ80ex1M9WJd30kGjP) has grown into the strongest framework in the nation to require affordable homes in historically exclusionary communities. First established through organizing and legal action by local NAACP branches and residents in South Jersey, it has led to the creation of over 75,000 affordable homes – including over 25,000 new affordable homes since 2015 alone – and over 130,000 middle-class homes. Today, more than 400,000 New Jerseyans live in homes created through the Mount Laurel Doctrine.

At a time when housing costs have risen to the top of the national agenda, the five decades of New Jersey's approach – which has integrated community-based leadership and organizing, innovative financing mechanisms, and strong enforcement tools – provides [important lessons](#) (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/bezn2m/nrddit/3zifnbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LMhVV1pw12iYKA9wZj8uJ7eleTZEfHZr6cAftKcHbYjJ80ex1M9WJd30kGjP) the rest of the country.

"The Mount Laurel Doctrine has been transformative when it comes to ensuring fair and equal access to affordable housing, all across New Jersey," **said Governor Murphy**. "Over the past seven-plus years, our Administration has taken historic strides in realizing the promise of the Mount Laurel Doctrine by advancing long overdue legislative reforms and investing record sums into making housing more accessible and more affordable. Through the Department of Community Affairs, we have invested \$250 million to support the construction of nearly 1,600 new, affordable housing units across our state. Of course, none of this progress would have been possible without the tireless dedication of generations of advocates and community leaders. I am grateful to organizations like the Fair Share Housing Center for their partnership and their commitment to ensuring that every New Jerseyan can find a safe, affordable place to call home."

"In New Jersey, we value everyone's basic right to safe, affordable housing," **said Lt. Governor Way**. "As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Mount Laurel Doctrine at the historic Jacob's Chapel AME Church, the sacrifices made to secure equal housing rights are foremost in our minds and inspire our renewed commitment to advancing this work. Through historic investments and resources, our administration hopes to create a State of Opportunity where New Jerseyans of all backgrounds can thrive."

"New Jersey's Mount Laurel Doctrine is a testament to decades of persistent advocacy, which has helped our state become a national leader in affordable housing production," **said Jacquelyn A. Suárez, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs**. "DCA is proud to be a major partner in this vital effort, contributing expertise, data analysis, and significant funding assistance that allow more New Jersey municipalities to develop the housing needed to create thriving communities for all."

Today's event also marks one year since Gov. Murphy strengthened the Mount Laurel Doctrine by [signing landmark legislation](#) (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/bezn2m/nrddit/jsjfnbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LMhVV1pw12iYKA9wZj8uJ7eleTZEfHZr6cAftKcHbYjJ80ex1M9WJd30kGjP) sponsored by Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, State Assemblymembers Yvonne Lopez, Benjie Wimberly, and Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Senate President Nicholas Scutari, Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz, and State Senator Troy Singleton.

This new law streamlined the affordable housing development process and codified the methodology used to determine each municipality's obligations over the next decade. The updated framework makes municipal compliance more transparent and less costly, while creating new options for towns to decide how they want to fulfill their fair share obligation.

As a result, [more towns than ever are now cooperating with the State's affordable housing policy](#) (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/bezn2m/nrddit/zkfnbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LMhVV1pw12iYKA9wZj8uJ7eleTZEfHZr6cAftKcHbYjJ80ex1M9WJd30kGjP) at any time in the Mount Laurel Doctrine's 50-year history.

In New Jersey, the constitutional obligation for each municipality to allow its fair share of affordable homes is recalculated every 10 years in cycles known as Rounds, with the Fourth Round about to start on June 30 of this year. Each municipality's obligations are calculated by looking at factors in various regions of the state – such as job growth, existing affordability, and the growth of low- and moderate-income households – which determines an individualized requirement for affordable housing.

New Jersey's law gives towns a wide variety of tools to create affordable housing in the way they prefer. [Municipalities can choose from a range of options](#) (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/bezn2m/nrddit/fdlfnbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LMhVV1pw12iYKA9wZj8uJ7eleTZEfHZr6cAftKcHbYjJ80ex1M9WJd30kGjP) – such as 100% affordable housing, mixed income housing, supportive housing for seniors or people with disabilities, or repurposing abandoned malls or offices. The recently-enacted law and associated bills give towns additional tools like new bonuses, financing options, and credits to meet their affordable housing responsibilities.

Municipalities in New Jersey are not required to directly fund affordable housing projects through local taxpayer dollars. Instead, these developments are often supported through a combination of state programs, subsidies, and developer contributions. Mixed-income developments, which are a common approach, leverage private investment to meet affordable housing obligations without placing additional strain on municipal budgets.

"When we embrace affordable housing, we are investing in the future of our communities – creating stronger local economies and vibrant neighborhoods, while addressing social and economic problems at their root," **said Adam Gordon, executive director of Fair Share Housing Center, which was founded in 1975 by the community leaders, NAACP branches, and attorneys who brought the original Mount Laurel case**. "We are honored to celebrate this progress, while recognizing how much work still needs to be done in the midst of a housing affordability crisis. We are recommitting to the work ahead in New Jersey, with the hope that our experiences can also help other states struggling with high housing costs."

"New Jersey, through the Mount Laurel Doctrine, is the only state to quantify each municipality's fair share housing obligations for low and moderate income families, the elderly and disabled; and, within this context establishes a negotiation process, with judicial oversight, between housing advocates/developers and municipalities, with the goal of achieving fair share housing plans," **said Peter O'Connor, co-counsel in Mount Laurel I**. "With plans in place, the major issue today is state and federal financial development support to implement the plans."

"It was my mother's love of God, family, neighbors, children and community that compelled her to fight for what was right," said **Ethel Halley, daughter of Ethel Lawrence**. "There were times she was discouraged, but she trusted in God and her young attorneys and never lost hope."

Governor Phil Murphy

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