N.J. Ends COAH, Advocates Prepare to Fight

By Donna Kimura

Affordable housing advocates are fighting back after New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie officially dissolved the controversial Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) earlier this month. Advocates have long been wary of the move, fearing the elimination of COAH will mean reduced local obligations.

"This is the governor's attempt to consolidate power and ignore the laws on the books,” says Kevin Walsh, associate director of the Fair Share Housing Center in Cherry Hill, N.J. "He continues to interfere with the state's economic recovery by allowing wealthy towns to adopt exclusionary zoning that keeps out all but the rich. We've already filed suit and expect the courts to reject his aggregation of power as unconstitutional within the next few weeks."

The 12-member board was responsible for implementing the state’s fair housing laws, including establishing and monitoring local affordable housing obligations. However, it was widely criticized for being overly bureaucratic.

Under the governor’s reorganization plan, COAH’s duties are consolidated with those of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA).

“The goal of this reorganization plan is to put an end to this hopelessly complex and outdated system—and provide affordable housing opportunities to our most deserving residents. The governor's plan addresses the needs of both the providers and beneficiaries of affordable housing in New Jersey by organizing all programs within a single regulatory body,” said DCA Commissioner Lori Grifa in a statement. "By consolidating the authority for housing within the Department of Community Affairs, we will not only reduce bureaucracy in the system, but foster greater predictability for all players in the affordable housing arena."