CHRISTIE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS STALE MCGREEVEY ERA POLICIES

Proposes Return to System Opposed by Advocates, Environmentalists, and Builders, and Found by the Court to be Unconstitutional

March 23, 2010 - The Christie Administration's housing task force report, quietly released today, suggests a return the "growth share" approach the McGreevey Administration originally introduced in 2004, which encourages sprawl and places homes far from jobs and transit. The McGreevey Administration's action spawned a three year litigation battle with builders, environmental groups, and housing advocates all opposing the policies, resulting in the Appellate Division invalidating the policy in 2007.

"Instead of new ideas, Christie's Housing Task Force proposes a return to failed policies of the past," said Adam Gordon, Staff Attorney with Fair Share Housing Center. "We need to focus new homes near jobs and transportation, which the Christie Task Force Report would fail to accomplish."

The Report was released 45 days early after it was announced Friday that the Governor's Task Force had concluded its work, allowing the Christie Administration to narrowly avert a court hearing that had been set for Monday on the legality of Executive Order 12. Committee Chair Marcia Karrow told the Star-Ledger on Saturday that the early release was necessary so that Committee members would have time to do their taxes and go on vacation.

"Gov. Christie's Task Force did not have to do a lot of work to rehash Gov. McGreevey's policies," Gordon said. "The Report is unfortunately bereft of any new or innovative ideas. It would encourage sprawl and drive both non-profit and for-profit builders from New Jersey's housing market."

The Report has several problematic recommendations that seem stuck in sprawl-era thinking instead of charting a new course for economic growth in New Jersey:

- **Promoting people living further from their work.** The report argues that the state's housing policy should reflect that New Jerseyans commute longer distances to their jobs than in the past, and should allow new homes to be further from jobs than currently allowed. Long commutes are a symptom of the shortage of homes — not a reason to put new homes even further from jobs. Longer commutes also have damaging environmental consequences.

- **Promoting the development of new shopping centers and office parks in the Highlands region**, but not homes. The report suggests that the Highlands — designated by the Legislature as an area for environmental preservation — is an appropriate location for new "ratables" but not new homes. Focusing new office and commercial development in the Highlands would represent a drastic reversal of state policy.

- **Allowing municipalities to build housing for graduate students instead of for working families.** The task force found that because "most graduate students would be income-qualified for affordable housing" graduate student housing "should be counted" as affordable housing. Housing for graduate students should not be provided instead of housing for working families.

- **Fully reinstating the failed policies of Regional Contribution Agreements**, banned in 2008 by the New Jersey Legislature. These agreements, as explained in a report released earlier this month by FSHC, failed to result in homes and instead left towns with tens of millions of dollars sitting in bank accounts unspent. RCAs also encourage racial and economic segregation and put homes farther from areas of job growth.

- **Giving a free pass to municipalities that had failed to comply in the past.** All past obligations would be waived — rewarding towns that flouted the law, and sending the wrong message to towns that planned well and built homes.

The full report can be found at the following website:
http://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/reports/pdf/20100323_COAH.pdf

Fair Share Housing Center, founded in 1975, is the only public interest organization devoted entirely to defending the housing rights of New Jersey's poor through implementing the Mount Laurel doctrine.