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PROPOSED LEGISLATION TARGETS GLOUCESTER, CUMBERLAND, AND SALEM COUNTIES FOR INCREASED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Bill Reduces Obligations in North Jersey and Focuses Obligations on South Jersey

June 7, 2010 - South Jersey - A housing bill that passed out of the Senate Economic Growth committee last Thursday relieves numerous North Jersey towns of obligations while requiring three-quarters of all municipalities in Gloucester, Cumberland and Salem Counties to provide additional housing, according to a new analysis of the bill. The information is only available now because the text of the legislation was not available to the public or at the legislative hearing and was not available online until today.

17 of 24 Gloucester County towns, 12 of 15 Salem County towns, and 10 of 14 Cumberland County towns are deemed "exclusionary" by the latest version of the legislation and would have to rezone their land for denser housing development or face lawsuits. In contrast, the legislation exempts every single town in Hudson County, and more than half of the towns in Passaic and Union Counties, from such requirements.

"Now that this legislation is finally available to the public four days after it was voted on, the real intent becomes clear," Fair Share Housing Center Associate Director Kevin Walsh said. "This is a political game to exempt North Jersey municipalities from affordable housing obligations while requiring South Jersey municipalities to carry a disproportionately heavy load. The senator who introduced and amended this legislation, Raymond Lesniak, and all of the committee members who approved the bill are all from North Jersey. They are making South Jersey do more than its fair share, while others get away with doing nothing."

Walsh pointed to a flawed section of the bill, S-1, that judges whether a municipality is affordable based on the number of townhouses and condominiums in the municipality — not the facts on the ground. "A condominium in Hoboken, Princeton, or Summit is a whole lot more expensive than a house in Deptford, Pennsville, or Commercial Township," Walsh said. "So why would Hoboken, Princeton, and Summit be called 'inclusionary,' and Deptford, Pennsville, and Commercial Township 'exclusionary?'"

Walsh also noted similarly strange results in Burlington and Camden Counties — with municipalities such as Willingboro, Pennsauken, and Gloucester City deemed "exclusionary" while Evesham and Voorhees are "inclusionary."

S-1 may come up for a vote on the floor of the State Senate as early as this Thursday. Walsh called on Senate President Steven Sweeney and other South Jersey legislators to hold the bill off the floor until it can be revised in an open, public process to be fair to municipalities throughout the state. "Municipalities and advocates from South Jersey should have a say in this process and shouldn't be run over by senators who are working to exempt their towns from affordable housing obligations," Walsh said.

S-1 had passed the Senate Economic Growth Committee on Thursday despite the text of the legislation not being available to the public. The committee chair, Sen. Raymond Lesniak (D-Union), who is also the main sponsor of the bill, refused to allow any public testimony from dozens of people who had traveled from all over the state to Trenton to attend the hearing.

Fair Share Housing Center, founded in 1975, is based in Cherry Hill. It is the only public interest organization devoted entirely to defending the housing rights of New Jersey's poor through implementing the Mount Laurel doctrine, which requires that each municipality provide its fair share of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people. ###