

SENATE BILL LETS WEALTHY TOWNS OFF THE HOOK WHILE DEMANDING MORE OF RACIALLY, ECONOMICALLY DIVERSE TOWNS

Princeton Borough and Princeton Township Get a Pass while Legislation Demands More from Ewing

June 7, 2010 - Trenton, New Jersey- Legislation that cleared a Senate committee last week and is scheduled for a vote of the full Senate this Thursday says that many growing, newer municipalities have provided sufficient affordable housing while many older suburban municipalities have not. Senate Bill S-1 exempts Princeton Borough and Princetown Township but requires Ewing to provide more affordable housing and permits developers to sue Ewing if their development proposals are rejected.

Under S-1, municipalities can be forced to rezone property for high-density housing simply because one-third of the housing in the municipality does not consist of apartments or townhouses. Based on this standard, New Jersey's wealthier communities can be deemed "inclusionary" and excluded from rezoning requirements even if the houses in those municipalities are not affordable. A municipality could be exempt from additional housing obligations based exclusively on having townhouses that sell for a half-million dollars or more.

"New Jersey's housing policies have always distinguished between municipalities that should have substantial obligations and those that should have little or no obligations," Fair Share Housing Center Associate Director Kevin Walsh said. "S-1 asks the towns that have already done the most to do even more while giving a pass to those that have excluded starter homes, have expensive housing markets, and have the most job growth. We've seen these strange results throughout the state and in Mercer County. It makes no sense."

S-1 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. The text of the bill did not become available to the public until more than a day after the vote. Also, the nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services has stated that the bill is likely unconstitutional.

The full list of municipalities deemed "exclusionary" and "inclusionary" is available at Fair Share Housing Center's web site, www.fairsharehousing.org.

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 affordable housing to low- and moderate-income people. ###