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PRESS RELEASE

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NEW REPORT SHOWS TOWNS SUING COAH HAVE LOWER HOUSING OBLIGATIONS

Advocates criticize wealthy mayors' "Chicken Little" approach to affordable housing and instead call for proactive action to help solve the housing crisis

Trenton, New Jersey- Today, affordable housing advocates from throughout the state announced the release of a new report entitled *Chicken Little: Wealthy New Jersey Towns Fight Affordable Housing*. The report, which was prepared by Fair Share Housing Center, reveals that many of New Jersey's wealthiest and least diverse municipalities are the primary ones resisting recently released affordable housing obligations.

The report analyzes the 34 towns that have challenged the Council on Affordable Housing's Third Round regulations as requiring too much affordable housing. Those towns' mayors, like Chicken Little, claim that the sky is falling when in fact nothing is wrong. The report assures the towns that the sky is not falling and calls for affordable housing to be provided for, among others, the public workers employed in the municipalities, a majority of whom would qualify for affordable housing. The report also notes that the exaggerated claims of the wealthy towns exclude lower-income families, including many people of color, from their towns.

"Our analysis shows that many of the towns that are objecting the loudest to the new regulations – and particularly those that have sued the state in an effort to reduce their housing obligations under COAH – are the some of the very wealthiest places in our nation. These towns are complaining about their obligations, but they actually have to build 20 percent less affordable housing than before. They have been assigned reduced obligations, but they are complaining the loudest," said Adam Gordon, Staff Attorney at Fair Share Housing Center and author of the report.

The findings of the *Chicken Little* report include:

- The 34 towns challenging the new COAH rules are 43 percent wealthier than the state as a whole and 21 percent less racially diverse.
- Affordable housing obligations have actually decreased by 20 percent in the 34 towns challenging the new COAH rules, three times the statewide decrease of 6 percent.
- New ways to comply with the COAH rules and new funding in the recently passed A-500 housing legislation make it easier for towns to meet their affordable housing obligations.
- The towns challenging the COAH rules are denying a majority of their own employees an opportunity to live in the towns they serve.

According to Mike McNeil, Chair of the New Jersey NAACP Statewide Housing Committee and a resident of Lakewood, the need for affordable housing in the state is dire. "It is time for towns to stop fighting affordable housing and to start working with local community groups to build that housing," McNeil said. "Everywhere throughout the state, we see huge demand for affordable housing that is not being met."

Phil Welch, a resident of Middletown who is a member of a Monmouth County coalition that advocates for, builds, and operates affordable housing, called on wealthier towns to do their fair share. “There’s a growing awareness among all residents that escalating housing prices are forcing critical workers out of our towns, including young teachers, police officers and municipal workers, not to mention our adult children, our parents and other retirees,” he said. “If we want America to continue to be known as a land of freedom and opportunity, we need to fight for affordable housing in our communities, not against it.”

Colandus “Kelly” Francis, President of the Camden County Branch of the NAACP, one of the plaintiffs in the original Mount Laurel litigation, noted that fight for affordable housing that began when the Mount Laurel litigation was filed in 1971 continues today. “Wealthy towns in the 1970s were motivated by the same things they are today. They want to keep lower-income families who are part of the workforce from living in their towns. Our state policies should let all people live close to jobs and in towns with good schools. We are fighting to make New Jersey a better place to live.”

The towns that have challenged the new COAH rules include Atlantic Highlands Borough, Bedminster Township, Berlin Borough, Bernards Township, Bernardsville Borough, Bethlehem Township, Brick Township, Bridgewater Township, Cinnaminson Township, Clinton Town, Clinton Township, Eatontown Borough, Egg Harbor Township, Freehold Township, Greenwich Township (Warren County), Hanover Township, Harrison Township (Gloucester County), Jackson Township, Medford Township, Millstone Township, Montgomery Township, Mount Laurel Township, Oldmans Township, Peapack and Gladstone Borough, Readington Township, Roseland Borough, Roxbury Township, Summit City, Toms River Township, Union Township (Hunterdon County), Wall Township, Warren Township, Watchung Borough, and Wharton Borough.

Fair Share Housing Center, founded in 1975, is New Jersey’s only public interest organization dedicated solely to the preservation and growth of the Mount Laurel doctrine.

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