

# NEW JERSEY ADVOCACY NETWORK TO END HOMELESSNESS

May 25, 2009

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CONSUMER

SCOTT FAIRMAN

Governor Jon S. Corzine  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Gov. Corzine:

We thank you for your commitment to working towards increasing housing choices for New Jersey's residents. We were proud to see you sign A.500, the most significant housing reform legislation passed in any state in twenty years. We applauded when you said that the bill would aid "tens of thousands of New Jersey residents who want, deserve, and are entitled by law to a meaningful choice in where they can live." You particularly recognized the leadership of Majority Leader Bonnie Watson Coleman and housing advocates in pushing for "a critical aspect of this law, one I think we should all be proud of . . . a requirement that 13 percent of affordable housing units must be accessible to very low-income residents, those earning 30 percent below the regional median income." You said "we all need to live up to our affordable housing obligation as a state, even if it means driving a hard bargain with developers or zoning differently."

We urge you to make sure that municipalities have to comply with this new law. The Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) is beginning the substantive certification process, and must make the very low income housing for families part of that certification for this law to be meaningful. We urge you to make certain that the substantive certification process requires 50% of the housing for very low income residents are provided to families.

As you know, very-low-income residents, i.e., New Jersey families earning less than \$25,000 a year, face especially tough struggles during these difficult economic times. Inexplicably, COAH is poised to provide substantive certification to municipalities whose plan contains no very low income family housing whatsoever. This is despite the agency's previous guidance to the towns.

In October 2008, COAH released a guidance letter on A-500, for municipalities to use in their fair share plans submitted by the December 31, 2008 deadline. That letter pointed to existing regulations requiring that half of all low- and moderate-income homes in fair share plans be available to families, and said that these regulations would apply equally for very-low-income people.

Many towns played by the rules, and came up with innovative and economical ways, such as changing zoning, to create opportunities for very-low-income families.

Others purposely ignored very-low-income families, even as they followed the other parts of your guidance on A-500. Now, the Council on Affordable Housing is about to reward the towns that did not play by the rules by approving plans with absolutely no homes for very-low-income families.

We urge you and your Administration to continue to stand with very low income families and fully enforce A.500. In order to comply with that comprehensive legislation, towns can easily change their zoning to allow very-low-income families to live in their towns — producing both new homes and economic development opportunities.

Very-low-income families in New Jersey should have the “meaningful choice in where they can live” that you mentioned on that hot summer day in Mount Laurel. We agree with COAH’s prior statements that the law requires it. Now, in the midst of an economic crisis that hits very-low-income families particularly hard, is not the right time to ignore the law and turn our backs on those families.

We ask you to reconsider COAH’s decision to allow towns that do not play by the rules, and exclude very-low-income families, to receive certification by COAH. Instead, those towns should be required to come up with plans that include very-low-income families – which can be done by changing zoning requirements or using innovative funding mechanisms that do not add any additional cost to towns’ compliance.

Thank you for your commitment to making New Jersey work for all of our state’s families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Brown", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Richard W. Brown, Chair

C: Commissioner Joseph V. Doria, Jr., Department of Community Affairs