

New Jersey Homelessness County Housing Trust Fund Bill Advances

Homeless and housing advocates in New Jersey have developed legislation that would allow counties to establish homeless trust funds. The legislation would permit counties to impose a surcharge of \$3 on each document recorded within a county and deposit those revenues into a County Homelessness Housing Trust Fund. Five percent of the funds may be used for administrative costs each year.

The New Jersey Advocacy Network to End Homelessness has obtained more than 150 endorsements favoring the legislation. The Assembly has passed the bill as has the initial Senate committee. It will be before the full Senate late in February. At the Senate Committee hearing, several counties sent representatives to testify in favor of the bill.

The bill defines County Homelessness Housing Trust Funds as a county homeless housing grant program through which competitive grants are awarded by the governing body for housing homeless individuals and families, preventing homelessness, and other efforts directly related to permanently housing homeless persons.

The bill also allows for the creation of county homelessness trust fund committees created to advise the local government on the creation of a local homeless housing plan and to participate in the program.

The Committees are to include representatives from the county,

from each of the three municipalities in the county with the largest homeless populations, organizations responsible for plans to end homelessness, at least three homeless or formerly homeless persons, and three representatives of private or nonprofit organizations assisting the homeless or providing low-income housing. The Committees must also assess priorities for funding, review applications, and prepare an annual report and measurement of the progress of the trust fund.

Funds may be used for:

- Acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of housing projects, or units within housing projects, that supply permanent affordable housing for homeless persons or families, including those at risk of homelessness;
- Rental assistance vouchers, including tenant and project based subsidies, for permanent affordable housing for homeless persons or families, including those at risk of homelessness;
- Supportive services as may be required by homeless individuals or families in order to obtain or maintain, or both, permanent affordable housing; and
- Prevention services for at risk homeless individuals or families so that they can obtain and maintain permanent affordable housing.

Eligible recipients may include homeless service providers, nonprofit and for-profit affordable housing developers,

housing authorities, and units of government. Recipients will be selected through an application process.

Any funds not expended after four years are to be transferred to the New Jersey Interagency Council on Homelessness which is to then contract with a community-based organization in that county to expend the funds.



Members of the New Jersey Advocacy Network to End Homelessness enjoy hearing about proposals to address homelessness.

Grants awarded through the county programs must support projects that measurably reduce homelessness, demonstrate government cost savings over time, employ evidence-based models, can be replicated by other counties, include outcome measurements, and are consistent with the local homeless housing plan. Projects serving homeless households must do so for a period of at least 30 years or longer. Counties may collaborate with other counties to provide joint funding for eligible projects.

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