



**New Jersey Catholic Conference
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June 3, 2010

A Letter from the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey on Affordable Housing

Dear Senators and Members of the General Assembly:

We, the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey, urge the Members of the New Jersey Legislature to maintain New Jersey's commitment to affordable housing.

As you know, New Jersey has one of the most expensive housing markets in the nation. New Jersey also is one of the most racially and economically segregated states in the nation. This segregation has divided our state, denied lower-income families access to educational and employment opportunities, and resulted in islands of wealth and enclaves of poverty throughout much of the state.

With concern for the dignity of every human person, we recognize the fundamental importance of fair housing policies as a matter of justice. For this reason, we have supported efforts to combat discrimination in housing against racial and ethnic minorities, people with special needs, and families with children.

We believe that the exclusion of the poor and lower-income households through a local government's zoning policies is no less pernicious than more blatant discrimination that offends our consciences and that our laws prohibit.

Throughout the state, there is considerable discussion about reforms to the Fair Housing Act. In discussing changes to that law, well intended policymakers have proposed everything from modest reforms to shutting down and not replacing the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH).

We think that some of these proposed changes have the potential to leave municipalities with unchecked power to exclude all but wealthy residents from within municipal borders.

**Representing the Archdiocese of Newark, Diocese of Camden, Diocese of Metuchen,
Diocese of Paterson, Diocese of Trenton, Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic and
Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese**

We support efforts to improve New Jersey's housing laws, but we oppose efforts to eliminate COAH without simultaneously providing an effective replacement for that agency. We are convinced that state oversight is necessary to ensure that municipalities do not pursue exclusionary zoning policies that could perpetuate the divisions in our state.

Providing numerical obligations to municipalities, rather than permitting municipalities alone to choose how much affordable housing they will build, would provide a necessary check on local zoning powers and would ensure that regional goals for affordable housing have a chance to be achieved.

Finally, we oppose the return of regional contribution agreements. Wealthier municipalities should not be permitted to pay poor municipalities to grow poorer. Rather, all municipalities should bear their fair share of affordable housing.

We urge the Legislature to recognize the importance of affordable housing to our state and to maintain housing policies that are fair and just for all. Lower-income families are especially in need of affordable housing and their needs should be given special attention.

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Archbishop, Archdiocese of Newark

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV
Auxiliary Bishop Essex County

Most Reverend John M. Smith
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Most Reverend John W. Flesey
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