

# New Jersey Catholic Conference

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## POSITION STATEMENT VOTE NO ON S1

The New Jersey Catholic Conference, which represents the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey on matters of public policy, appreciates the opportunity to comment on S1.

New Jersey's Catholic Bishops have long recognized that housing is a basic human right. New Jersey has one of the most expensive housing markets in the nation, and our Bishops teach that New Jersey's policies should account for that fact by requiring all municipalities to do their fair share of affordable housing. The Catholic Church's advocacy for policies that reduce poverty leads us to the conclusion that more affordable housing must be built where jobs are plentiful, not where jobs are disappearing. Any policy that promotes racial and economic segregation in affordable housing is a policy that runs counter to Catholic social teaching.

In light of those positions, the Catholic Conference is troubled by several aspects of S-1.

- S-1 would allow municipalities to exclude the poor. The unfortunate lesson in New Jersey is that many municipalities will exclude everyone but the rich if they are permitted to do so. Any housing reform in New Jersey must begin with this basic fact. Whether it is done through the Council on Affordable Housing or any other governmental entity, the municipal desire to exclude must be checked. Dismantling COAH, without any meaningful replacement that will ensure housing opportunities are provided, is bad policy.
- S-1 would undermine the requirement that very-low-income housing be provided. This is one of the important reforms in 2008 that the Catholic Conference supported. Very low-income housing is necessary to ensure that families living in the cities have the chance to move throughout and access the opportunities in the region, much like the issue regarding school choice that would allow parents the opportunity to send their children to a non-public school where their child can receive a better education. Families should have the ability to move to towns where there are opportunities for jobs and better education. We realize that today the economy is difficult for everyone, but this will change.
- S-1 would also bring back Regional Contribution Agreements (RCAs). Whether it's being called that or not, the process in this bill for a housing trust fund would, in effect, have the same impact. The experience with RCAs from 1985 to 2008 is that they invariably concentrated poverty and put affordable housing in places with few jobs. The short term benefits that RCAs bring are far outweighed by their long term consequences. RCAs are a failed, immoral policy that divided New Jersey; they should not be brought back.

The Catholic Conference is not opposed to changes to New Jersey's affordable housing policies, but the changes must actually help those who need affordable housing, and should have strict oversight that ensure all towns are providing their fair share of this housing.

New Jersey has led the nation in the production of housing for the working poor close to jobs and good schools. Many believe that that is a bad thing, but we support requiring affordable housing opportunities in all communities. If you want to improve that system and do a better job of building affordable housing, then we will support your efforts and will work with you. This proposal, in its present form, will roll back the clock 30 years – this we will oppose.

Catholic social teaching compels us to support affordable housing. We urge you, Senator Lesniak, and members of this committee to do so as well.

Thank you.