

Subject Line:

New Report Details How New Jersey Can Be A National Model for Dismantling Exclusionary Zoning

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New Report Details Recent Success of New Jersey's Groundbreaking Fair Housing Model

NJ's Mt. Laurel Doctrine Has Led to Creation of Over 21,000 Affordable Homes in Historically Exclusionary Communities Since 2015

How Can Policymakers & Advocates Across U.S. Dismantle Exclusionary Zoning?

Today, the Fair Share Housing Center is releasing a new, first-of-its-kind report, *Dismantling Exclusionary Zoning: New Jersey's Blueprint for Overcoming Segregation*.

Featuring personal narratives and extensive new data, the report documents the success of the Mt. Laurel Doctrine, New Jersey's groundbreaking affordable housing model, which is known as the strongest framework in the nation to require affordable homes in historically exclusionary communities. This framework was first established through organizing and legal action by local NAACP branches and residents in South Jersey almost 50 years ago. It has led to the creation of nearly 70,000 new homes since enforcement was reinvigorated in 2015 — including over 21,000 deed-restricted affordable homes.

At a press conference this morning, legislators and advocates discussed how New Jersey's model can be a national blueprint for beginning to address the nationwide housing crisis.

[Watch today's press conference:](#) (Remarks start at the 5:08 mark).

"The housing crisis is playing out in the daily lives of millions of hard-working families across the country, with devastating consequences," said **U.S. Senator Cory Booker**. "Over the course of New Jersey's history, fair housing policies have been integral in making our state more inclusive. New Jersey's Mt. Laurel Doctrine is a useful model that other states can learn from as they address this nationwide crisis."

“If you believe in addressing social problems systematically, a healthy housing ecosystem is a core solution to addressing inequities in wealth accumulation, educational attainment, health outcomes, and our justice system,” said **Connecticut House Majority Leader Jason Rojas**. “At a time when housing is more expensive than ever, we need strong action to break down these barriers and build on what New Jersey has learned about how to do that.”

For other states looking to build on the success of New Jersey’s model, the report recommends five key components:

1. A baseline legal requirement that municipalities must provide their fair share of affordable housing.
2. A methodology to calculate housing obligations that prioritizes creating affordable homes in historically exclusionary communities, along transportation corridors, and near employment opportunities.
3. A requirement that homes have long-term affordability for the people and families that are most likely to be excluded, paired with flexible production mechanisms that also increase overall housing supply.
4. Strong legal frameworks of enforcement with real consequences for municipalities that shirk their obligations.
5. Advocacy institutions that use enforcement frameworks to ensure that municipalities comply with their obligations.

In the landmark 1975 *Mount Laurel* decision, the New Jersey Supreme Court declared exclusionary zoning unconstitutional and found an affirmative obligation on every town in New Jersey to provide their fair share of the region’s affordable housing. The *Mount Laurel* decision upended decades of exclusionary zoning that drove residential segregation and is often compared to the historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The new report enumerates the impact of a pivotal 2015 New Jersey Supreme Court decision reinvigorating the Mount Laurel Doctrine, following several years of obstruction by Gov. Chris Christie. The 2015 ruling so far has led to the creation of over 21,000 affordable homes in historically exclusionary communities throughout New Jersey, a rate nearly double past production under the Mt. Laurel framework.

“Exclusionary zoning has deprived many states of the housing investment that New Jersey is benefiting from — as well as the affordability, jobs, and community amenities that come with that housing,” said **Adam Gordon**, Executive Director of New Jersey’s

Fair Share Housing Center. “Since 2015, New Jersey has taken bigger steps than ever before to create affordable homes — but there's still much more work to do, given the housing crisis facing so many families today.”

As New Jersey prepares for the Fourth Round of Mount Laurel obligations in 2025 — when each municipality will have to develop an updated plan for how to provide additional affordable homes — advocates emphasized that the doctrine's success is predicated on the support of grassroots advocacy organizations, as well as strong enforcement.

“Since 2015, housing advocates, in conjunction with policymakers, have more than doubled affordable housing production,” said **State Senator Troy Singleton**, who serves as Majority Whip in the NJ Senate. “More work needs to be done, but there's a commitment from many of us in Trenton to do everything that we can to make sure that everyone has a great place to live, work and play in New Jersey.”

“We've made some strides in building affordable housing units since 2015 — however, we know that the demand for safe, affordable and healthy housing is great today,” said **Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter**, Chair of NJ's Legislative Black Caucus. “We need a partnership to ensure that we create policy so that all communities have their share of fair housing.”

“Redlining, racial steering and other practices have created segregated communities in New Jersey, leading us to be one of the most diverse yet most segregated states in the country. We know integrated communities are healthy communities, and to rectify those harms we need concerted efforts to ensure that all municipalities provide safe and affordable housing rather than skirting their responsibility to do so,” said **Taiisa Kelly**, CEO of Monarch Housing Associates and Member of the United Black Agenda. “The Mount Laurel Doctrine must be safeguarded to ensure housing opportunities are available to every resident in New Jersey in the communities of their choice. This is all the more critical as we seek to address the affordable housing shortage and wealth gap within the state.”

“Housing is at the core of all of our lives — the roof we live under defines us,” said **Frank Argote-Freyre**, Board Chair of the Latino Action Network Foundation and Fair Share Housing Center. “We have something special here in New Jersey — and as a result we've been able to build thousands of units of affordable housing, despite tremendous opposition in certain communities.”

“Centuries of structural racism have formed our landscapes, literally and figuratively,” said **Crystal D. Charley**, Vice President of NAACP’s NJ State Conference, Senior Organizer at Salvation and Social Justice, and Fair Share Housing Center board member. She’s also the former President of the Southern Burlington NAACP, which brought the original Mt. Laurel lawsuit before the NJ Supreme Court. “Housing discrimination touches all areas of our lives. We have no other alternative but to be involved and continue to fight for equity.”

The report was supported by funding from the Wells Fargo Foundation. “Improving access to safe, decent affordable homes as part of an overall strategy to increase housing supply is critical to the Wells Fargo Foundation’s work,” said **Amy Anderson**, Senior Vice President and Social Impact Lead for Housing Access and Affordability at the Wells Fargo Foundation. “At a time when housing costs are a critical concern nationally, New Jersey provides an important model for other states.”

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Read the report: [Dismantling Exclusionary Zoning: New Jersey’s Blueprint for Overcoming Segregation](#)

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[FAIR SHARE HOUSING CENTER](#) is a nonprofit advocacy organization that uses legal, policy, and community-building strategies to dismantle decades of racial and economic discrimination in New Jersey and nationally that excludes people from the opportunity to live in safe, healthy, and affordable housing.