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Sent: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 8:19 PM

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Subject: A4045 and S2930

Dear Members of the Legislature,

By way of introduction, I am the Mayor of Berkeley Heights Township. Over the last 30 years, I have “grown up in politics” in Democratic politics in Union County. So, I am no stranger to how the process of

government and politics works in this State.

I am also a proud Democrat who was overwhelmingly elected twice in what was described by the Star-Ledger in 2018 as the “most Republican town in Union County.” I’ve enjoyed this success for several reasons: 1) I run an open and transparent government 2) I believe in working with everyone who is interested in putting together an effective and fair policy agenda for our community and 3) I love working with people who care to really give a damn.

This email is co-signed by my bi-partisan Council. We are comprised of 3 Republicans; 3 Democrats plus me and I only vote in the event of a tie. With my present team, I am proud to report, I have never had to break a tie due to partisanship or lack of teamwork. Unfortunately, Berkeley Heights Is an outlier-- an anomaly in American right now. I hope one day we witness more bi-teamwork-ship and less partisanship.

We are truly saddened by the legislation that is likely to pass the Senate this week. Specifically, OPRA reform and the Affordable Housing bill.

Bill #1. As a bucolic municipality with a stellar school district and a growing diverse population who has worked hard to meet our JOR, we encourage new residents to relocate to Berkeley Heights, and have flourished because of the increase in population. Since signing our JOR, we have nearly completed all our redevelopment/affordable housing projects.

The legislation you are voting on this week will have a profound impact on our Town. I make this assertion in the context of the recent state tax incentives given to Bell Labs/Nokia incentivizing them to leave its 138+ acre site exposing the Township to liability. Exacerbated by the proposed ***flaccid immunity provision*** in this legislation. We are not a NIMBY community. In fact, Council, staff and our professional team have worked hard to do the right thing and build equitable housing only to be punished because of the Towns who have not built their share of affordable housing. I will spare you the details of the \$10 million dollars a year that we are spending to simply keep up with our aging sewer plant and the impact more development will have on our infrastructure.

Bill #2. Government must be open. Yes, sometimes it makes it harder. Yes, there are boutique industries abusing the law. But the consequences of closing government to residents can have longer term adverse effects. Gone are the days where we should feel like our residents, or our constituents, are the problem. We owe them our veracity and integrity. I also am struck that the same legislature that is imposing these rules, does not subject itself to Open Public Records Act.

We ask you to vote “no” on these bills. We will gladly stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you to create a committee of willing elected officials to craft fair bills on both topics. If you do vote “yes” on the affordable housing bill, AT A MINIMUM and out of respect for every mayor and council person essentially volunteering to serve their community, please revise the ***immunity clause in the bill*** and provide immunity for good towns doing the RIGHT thing up front beginning December, 2024.

Respectfully,

Mayor Angie Devanney- D
Council President John Foster-R
Council Vice President Susan Poage- D
Councilman Manuel Couto- R

3/13/24, 8:27 AM

Re: A4045 and S2930 - BHCW TEAM - Outlook

Councilwoman Margaret Illis- D
Councilman Paul Donnelly- R
Councilman Bill Machado- D

Angie D. Devanney

MAYOR

Berkeley Heights Township