



SUSSEX COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS
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PRESS RELEASE

County of Sussex

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Sussex County Freeholders Accept \$1.8 Million in CARES Funding

(Newton, NJ) Close to six months after the Sussex County Board of Chosen Freeholders learned the County was not slated to receive any federal aid through the Coronavirus Relief Fund and CARES Act, the Freeholders convened for a special meeting on Thursday morning to unanimously accept over \$1.8 million in CARES funding allocated by the State of New Jersey.

Although it is still unclear why there had been a lack of response from the state since April to the outspokenness of the Freeholders on the topic, as well as multiple letters sent on behalf of the Board, the Freeholders were relieved funding for the County has finally been offered. The County had spent over \$690,000 from its own budget for COVID-19 testing and personal protective equipment, without any reimbursement to date. During the meeting, Freeholder Director Sylvia Petillo outlined that the first offer of funding was presented to the County in a Memorandum of Agreement on Aug. 9, in the sum of \$969,969, which she said, encompassed Office of Emergency Management obligations related to reporting and testing. Petillo said a second MOA on Aug. 17, replaced the initial one, which included a population

adjustment grant of \$839,032, for a total in excess of \$1.8 million, which would cover past and future expenditures to fight the pandemic.

Petillo said it was unclear until recently if Sussex County would ever receive any funding, with the Freeholders fighting one battle after another, which Petillo described her reaction as “grateful and pleasantly surprised,” once the second MOA came through.

“This funding will greatly improve our ability to test our residents,” Petillo stated.

She said a testing plan for the county is forthcoming. The funds received will permit the County to participate in a countywide testing task force, to provide storage space for PPE, to allow the County to create its own testing for submission to New Jersey’s Department of Health for approval, to provide access to the County to test its residents and those who work in the County, to provide test options that include mobile and walk-up types of testing and to reimburse the County for eligible COVID-19 expenses through June 30, 2021.

Sussex County Freeholder Joshua Hertzberg also credited the voters for making their voices heard about the lack of funding. Hertzberg questioned if the delay in receiving funding was calculated or due to incompetence, with the first MOA barely covering the costs, which was why the second MOA was created.

“We’ve heard concerns from some residents regarding the stipulations attached to the money we are receiving,” Hertzberg said. “Under no circumstances will we do anything that compromises the rights or privacy of our residents. Our taxpayers deserve that relief, but not at the cost of their freedoms. Please don’t let any politician tell you they got the money for you. We are getting that money because Trenton knows that you know the truth, and you’ll make that known in November.”

“I want to be clear that this agreement is an important step forward for us, but by no means does it reflect a conclusion,” said Freeholder Anthony Fasano. “It reflects a checkmark next to one need on our long list of many that we have here in Sussex County.”

Some of those other areas include funding for the schools and County businesses impacted by the pandemic, with other counties having adequate funding to create grants to help businesses in their county.

Freeholder Herbert Yardley, who sent letters to Governor Phil Murphy, Senator Stephen Sweeney (D-3rd Dist.) and Vice President Mike Pence about the lack of funding, was disappointed that there was no response received to any of his correspondence; and the length of time it took for the MOA to be extended to the County.

“That to me is disappointing, but I believe it’s (the MOA) the first step in making Sussex County whole; and is a first step in providing funding that we will need till the end of the year,” said Yardley.

“Nearly six months have passed without receipt of direct CARES funding to the County to aid us in the fight against COVID-19,” said Freeholder Deputy Director Dawn Fantasia. “Our calls, our letters fell on deaf ears, and it took months of consistent pushback on our federal representatives and Governor Murphy by the Freeholders, by our District 24 representatives, and by the residents in order to publicly shame them into righting this wrong. And finally, Sussex County will now be able to offer additional testing services to our most vulnerable residents, including the elderly, who this administration seems committed to marginalizing. However, the Murphy Administration has attached a bevy of additional ‘strings’ beyond federal guidelines as conditions of reimbursement funding. Make no mistake: this board remains

committed to preserving both the health and the privacy of our residents, and that will not change.”

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