



MAYOR CHRIS BOLLWAGE

CITY OF ELIZABETH PRESS RELEASE



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CITY OF ELIZABETH AND THE COUNTY OF UNION WILL MOVE FORWARD WITH LAWSUITS AGAINST NYC

ELIZABETH, NJ— January 13, 2020 — Mayor J. Christian Bollwage announced this afternoon that the City of Elizabeth and the County of Union will each file a lawsuit against New York City over a controversial program that sent homeless families to live in New Jersey. More than 50 families are known to have been relocated from New York City to seven municipalities in Union County under the city's "Special One Time Assistance Program" or SOTA, with the City of Elizabeth alone having a total of forty-eight (48) units occupied by those relocated.

"The City of Elizabeth has made continuous efforts to work with New York City in finding a resolution, however after numerous failed attempts, the City has decided to file a lawsuit in state court," said Mayor J. Christian Bollwage. "NYC is trying to relieve their homeless problem by dumping it on municipalities across New Jersey – once they are out of their state, there is no follow up with these participants – they are on their own."

The program provides one year of rent to relocated families but does not provide any other forms of assistance to families relocated outside of the city. The SOTA program began in 2017 and Union County was added to the program as an out-of-city relocation destination, without notice, in August 2019.

Last Wednesday, Union County officials met with Mayors and other representatives from the seven impacted municipalities by conference call to discuss their next steps. After a Friday morning conference call with New York City, it was evident nothing was going to change, and each filed their own lawsuits.

Mayors in New Jersey need to take the lead on this issue because it is directing impacting our communities. If Newark or Jersey City agree to a deal with New York City and other New Jersey municipalities are not part of that agreement, then New York City will continue transferring their financial responsibilities to provide support services to other cities like ours. In addition, the State of New Jersey has taken no official action on these issues.

The County of Union has filed a complaint in Union County Superior Court, in an effort to prevent New York City from placing SOTA recipients in Union County and requiring New York to provide information on SOTA recipients who are placed in Union County.

"The Freeholder Board has undertaken this legal action because New York City has refused to provide any contact information about homeless families relocated from its jurisdiction to Union County," said Freeholder Chairman Alexander Mirabella. "New York City has sent families to Union County without provision for essential services including food, health care, employment, child care and education, and without consideration for the impact on them and other homeless families in our community. We will continue to pursue all options at our disposal until New York City agrees to a collaborative, accountable policy that treats all homeless families with compassion, dignity, and genuine concern for their welfare."

Relocation can shift the costs of homelessness to other cities or states if these individuals in the program cannot be entirely self-sufficient after that first year or find the proper services to assist them when their temporary program ends. SOTA not only adds extra weight to the City's extant homeless population, but it contributes to the Elizabeth Public School system, which is already over capacity.

To view a copy of the lawsuit, please visit www.elizabethnj.org.