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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Police Layoffs, Service Cuts & Local Property Tax Increases in over 60% of Camden County Municipalities

Today, Mayors from across Camden County gathered to voice their objections to the potentially devastating effect the Governor's budget proposal will have on their communities and property taxes.

"These are truly difficult times for our Municipalities in Camden County. While we work diligently to share services, cut spending and provide adequate services to our public, the Governor's proposed State Aid cuts are forcing us to not only raise our local property taxes but lay off staff and eliminate services in key safety and infrastructure areas", said Mayor Phyllis Magazzu of Berlin Township and the President of the Camden County Mayors Association.

The Governor's budget, which proposes to eliminate CMPTRA funds (Consolidated Municipal Property Tax Relief Aid) for Municipalities with populations under 5,000 residents and cut it by 50% for Municipalities with populations over 5,000 but under 10,000 residents will have a severe negative impact on local property taxes and the ability to provide adequate safety and infrastructure services.

"While the Governor has chosen to solve its State created fiscal crisis on the backs of Municipalities (and their residents), we as Mayors are being forced to deal with the problems and consequences with few if any solutions offered by our leadership in Trenton. This is clearly a step backwards in the State's commitment to curb high property taxes in New Jersey", said Mayor Gary Passanante of the Borough of Somerdale and Chairman for the League of Municipalities Property Tax Reform Committee.

The Governor's has advocated that bigger is better and that New Jersey has far too many Municipalities to be efficient, resulting in the highest property taxes in the nation. His budget has singled out and discriminated against smaller Municipalities by depriving them of tax revenues originally collected locally from utility companies and other similar sources and now collected centrally by the State. However, there has been no specific research done by the Governor's administration that proves this theory. Ironically, the local levy portion of the average property tax bill is the smallest component, yet provides the critical funding for our public safety, trash, recycling, street & sewer maintenance, courts and much more. Furthermore, a comparison of the 2005 effective Municipal tax rates reveal that 92% of the 50 lowest effective Municipal tax rates were in Municipalities with populations below 10,000 residents.

So, without definitive proof, the Governor has decided that smaller Municipalities are best equipped to absorb the largest percentage cuts in Municipal aid. In order for our Municipal budgets to meet State mandated spending and tax levy caps while absorbing these new State funding cuts, difficult if not damaging steps are being taken by Mayors across the County:

Borough of Runnemede

The Camden County Mayors' Association has been representing the 37 municipalities of Camden County since 1930.

“We dissolved the Board of Health, with layoffs including the Board of Health Secretary, Fire Official Secretary, Two Police Officers and two persons retired without replacement. Our reduction in work force is 6 1/2 positions. Additionally, reductions in the Police Operating Expense (\$42,000), Fire Operating Expense (\$37, 550), part-time EMS (\$22,000), Engineering Operating Expense (\$15,000) were required. Our total reduction to the 2008 Budget is \$301,105.00. These cuts will definitely affect the level of service to our constituents” said Mayor Ginny Betteridge.

Borough of Stratford

“As far as Stratford is concerned we are looking at cutting at least \$265,000.00 out of our budget through reductions in trash services, the layoff of a Public Works employee, and 30% cuts in our Shade Tree Parks and Environmental department. We have also cut all capital improvement projects (roads, new vehicles, roof repairs). We are even considering some "out of the box" ideas such as turning off every other street light to save on our electric costs but that is presenting a serious safety concern” said newly elected Mayor John Gentless.

Borough of Gibbsboro

“Gibbsboro’s budget will be introduced on March 26. The local purpose tax rate will be 81.4 cents versus 63.8 cents in 2007, representing an increase of 27.6%. The amount to be raised by taxation is increasing by \$ 317,681. \$ 304,848 (96%) of the increase is directly attributable to Governor Corzine’s Budget: \$ 158,294 in CMPTRA and Home Land Security funding cuts, \$125,000 in lost extraordinary aid, \$ 10,434 cut from the Safe and Secure Neighborhoods program (a secondary budget cut), and \$ 11,120 increase in the reserve for uncollected taxes to offset the lost State property tax relief which now must be raised as property taxes!” said Mayor Edward Campbell, III.

Borough of Barrington

“Every item in our municipal budget is back on the proverbial block, given the state’s recently announced \$351,000 cut in aid. This cut amounts to nearly 8% of the borough’s \$4.5 million budget. Due to the submission of our budget to the State, we are scrambling to reduce the budget to minimize the impact on taxpayers. We hope to implement cost-saving measures include eliminating salaries through attrition or possible layoffs, reduction in services, elimination of programs and cuts in every budget category. We will try to maintain services we can and operate more efficiently with less. If the borough doesn’t find ways to cut the budget, we estimate the cut will boost the tax bill on the average home by \$250. The Borough currently shares services with neighboring towns and our school district, and will continue investigate all areas to see where we can share.” said Mayor John Rink

Borough of Laurel Springs

“We are a small Municipality operating with a skeleton staff. We have on-going shared service relationships with our bordering Municipalities and have very little room for additional spending cuts. We have eliminated the much-needed purchase of a new police vehicle but the loss in CMPTRA funds will mean a \$ 0.317 cent increase to the local purpose tax rate resulting in an overall tax increase in excess of \$0.50 cents!” said Mayor Jack Severson.

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