

PRESS RELEASE

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**ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS
HOLD THEIR 1ST NONPROFIT SYMPOSIUM**



Freeholder Cynthia D. Toro, Freeholder Britnee N. Timberlake, and Freeholder Leiby C. Jones (from left to right) were present at the Board's first Nonprofit Symposium PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders held its first Nonprofit Symposium event at the Sheila Y. Oliver Conference Room of the LeRoy F. Smith Public Safety Building on Thursday, June 2, 2016. The Nonprofit Symposium, is the initial effort of the newly formed Committee to Review Funding for Nonprofits established in 2015 at the leadership of Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake and is chaired by District 5 Freeholder Cynthia Toro of Bloomfield, New Jersey. This initiative was designed to speak to the funding needs of nonprofit agencies within Essex County.

Freeholder Toro opened the program by stating the purpose of the day's event was an opportunity to create a space where Government, the Nonprofit Community and the Private Sector and their Community Development Divisions can meet, network and brainstorm on ways to collaborate with one another. She stated, "Our hope is that through building closer ties and relationships with each other, we can find ways to better serve our constituents." She further explained the need and benefit of nonprofits as "a large and vital piece in the whole social services system." Nonprofits become the arm and extension to serve families and individuals, they are able to reach in areas where it can be difficult for government. She went on to explain, "As legislators, we are very much aware that Essex County has some of the highest numbers in the unemployment rate, in foreclosures, in drug addictions, in incarcerations, and we can go on and on in the number of issues found in Essex County" further substantiating the need for a myriad of social services to accommodate the aforementioned issues. A Social Worker by profession, Freeholder Toro knows firsthand the public demands and how bureaucracy can at times hinder resources and services on both ends; the service provider, as well as the client recipient.

A nonprofit leader by profession, President Timberlake addressed the audience of over 75 people representing more than 45 nonprofit agencies. "Nonprofits are on the ground in the community and make up some of the most important entities throughout our county and state, they serve as an extension of government reaching people in ways that the government cannot. It is important to inform the organizations serving about potential funding opportunities so they can continue in service to those in need.", she said. Freeholder At-Large Leby C. Jones also attended the event showing her legislative support to better advocate for citizens and work together to mutually achieve overall goals. Current members of the committee are: Freeholder Cynthia Toro, Chair, Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake, Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla and Freeholder Rufus I. Johnson.

The symposium consisted of presentations from Jessica Valle, Compliance Coordinator from the Essex County Office of Small Business Development and Affirmative Action and Tomas Porturas, Vice President and Senior Community Development Officer from Wells Fargo Bank. Ms. Valle systematically took participants through the Essex County Request for Proposal (RFP) process, highlighting how to navigate the purchasing portal via the Essex County Website. The information educated the agencies on how to register their agency with the County and how to identify available grants and awards. Likewise, Wells Fargo Bank discussed the REO Community & Urban Stabilization Program (CUSP) which seeks to stabilize communities and provide sustainable homeownership opportunities by collaborating with and donating properties to nonprofit organizations, local government entities, and land banks. Additionally, Deborah Smith, Community Affairs Manager Senior Vice President, Wells Fargo Bank who spoke about the Wells Fargo Foundation which is specifically designed to fund 501(c)(3) nonprofits.

The symposium also included introductions by the heads of various divisions within the Department of Citizen Services and the Department of Training and Development including: the Division of Senior Services, the Division of Family Assistance and Benefits, the Division of Community Action, the Division of Youth Services and the Division of Housing and Community Development. Each director provided overall descriptions of their division's services and remained to network and directly answered participant's questions.

Finally, the symposium ended with an interactive workshop brainstorming session where participants were able to discuss issues that hinder their success; and more importantly, share remedies to overcome those objectives. The day concluded with a recap from each group sharing their findings. The freeholders expressed their appreciation for the rich feedback and noted the gathered information will assist them in formulating sound legislation to substantiate advocacy efforts regarding the various topics.

Next steps; each participant will receive recap information from each of the presenters and a follow-up survey intended to guide the direction of future events. The committee's goal is to offer the Nonprofits Symposium on an annual basis. In summary, the symposium was designed to be informal, informative and fun and by all intents and purposes, those objectives were clearly met.

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