

NEWS RELEASE

County of Warren, New Jersey



Warren County Calls on Governor to Release CARES Act Funding

(BELVIDERE, NJ - July 28, 2020) – Warren County’s elected local, county and state officials gathered on the steps of the Court House in Belvidere today to call on Gov. Phil Murphy to release discretionary funds from the CARES Act that will help Warren deal with unforeseen expenses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Today we are demanding that Governor Murphy immediately release the monies from the federal CARES Act,” said Freeholder James R. Kern III, who convened the gathering and introduced the speakers.

“This legislation passed both houses of Congress over four months ago with overwhelming bipartisan support. While Warren County was precluded from direct funding, New Jersey’s entire congressional delegation wrote the Governor a letter on April 10th asking that he release the discretionary aid that was contained,” Kern added.

Joining Kern were his board colleagues, Freeholder Director

Richard D. Gardner and Freeholder Jason J. Sarnoski; and state Sen. Michael Doherty and Assemblyman Erik Peterson; as well as Belvidere Mayor Joseph Kennedy and Councilman Joseph Roth; Hardwick Mayor Kevin Duffy; Knowlton Mayor Adele Starrs; Liberty Mayor John Inscho; Phillipsburg Mayor Todd M. Tersigni; Pohatcong Mayor David Slack and Councilwoman Ingrid Gray; Washington Borough Mayor David Higgins; and White Township Mayor Jeff Herb. Assemblyman John DiMaio sent a statement, as did Frelinghuysen Mayor Christopher Stracco and Deputy Mayor Keith Ramos, and Mansfield Mayor Joseph Watters. Louis Crescitelli, aide to state Sen. Steven Oroho, Assemblyman Parker Space and Assemblyman Hal Wirths, also read a statement on their behalf.

Speaker after speaker decried the lack of funding, noting Warren County has done what the Governor asked by setting up a COVID-19 testing center and by forgoing a regional approach to reopening the economy to comply with the Governor’s statewide approach.



Freeholder James R. Kern III at the podium, flanked by local, county and state elected officials.



Freeholder Director Richard D. Gardner

hook. Over the past few days the Governor has begged for more money, claiming Congress is being partisan in their approach. I call foul. Why should New Jersey receive more money when according to reports, over 90 percent has not been allocated? How can he ask for more money for our state when Warren County and our municipalities have yet to receive a direct penny of direct aid? I am proud to stand here today with leaders across our County and demand that this money be released. Don't cry foul, Governor, when you are committing the same penalty," Kern said.

"During the pandemic, the Governor has opposed a regional approach and treated the entire state with one set of rules. Unfortunately, he has not distributed money in the same fashion," Kern said.

The freeholder continued, "While we did offer an approach to a regional reopening plan, we obliged with his overall vision. Warren County took the lead early on in the crisis, opened up a testing site to assist with his aggressive COVID-19 testing plan. Right now our local taxpayers are the



Freeholder Jason J. Sarnoski



Freeholder James R. Kern III

"Governor, it's not your money. It's federal dollars. Send it our way. It's just basic respect," Gardner said. "I don't want to say it smells like politics, but ladies and gentlemen, it sure does smell like politics. There's no reason for it."

Noting the County has done what the Governor asked, Gardner added, "The arrogance from Trenton – intolerable! They should not be asking for our state tax dollars to go down there when they can't even respond to us."

“I have a message for the governor: Governor, stop playing favorites with the financial futures of your constituents,” Sarnoski said. The federal funds were set aside so counties can get the aid and relief they need, he added, and other counties have received well beyond what they’ve spent. But Warren County got nothing in two rounds of pandemic funding, Sarnoski noted.

“Our business are suffering, our residents are suffering, our taxpayers are suffering. We have the ability to provide the relief, which you are holding on to and you refuse to give us. It is very simple. We’re not asking for more than we are owed, we asking for what we need to continue to fight this pandemic. Please, Governor Murphy, release it,” Sarnoski said.

Doherty thanked freeholders for organizing the event, and said, “We’re suffering out here, Governor Murphy, and we have small businesses that are being killed.” New Jersey received more than \$2 billion, but instead of distributing the money as intended by Congress, “Governor Murphy is squirreling away this money... This is just wrong,” Doherty said.

Peterson pointed out that the freeholders “were way ahead in responding to this pandemic than most counties. Their response for the people here in Warren County is something to be admired and commended. “The



State Sen. Michael Doherty

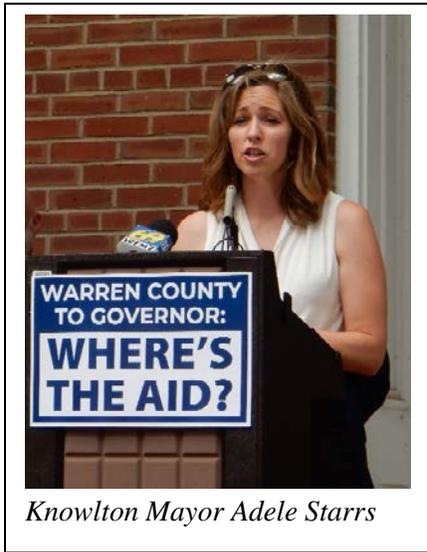


Assemblyman Erik Peterson, with Sen. Michael Doherty, Freeholders Jason J. Sarnoski and James R. Kern III, and Belvidere Mayor Joseph Kennedy.

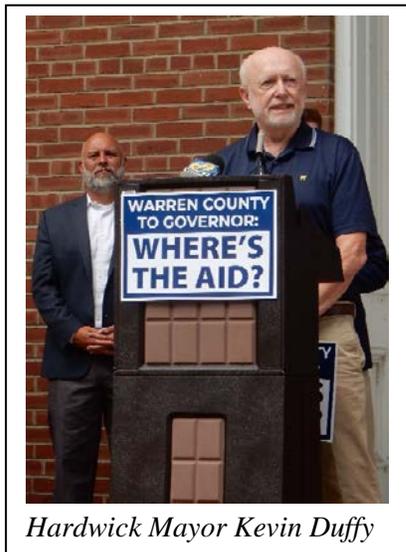
governor shouldn’t leave them hanging on the aid that Congress passed.”

“We can no longer stand silent as our pleas for help are ignored while the money counties so desperately need has already been delivered by the federal government and is sitting idly in a state account,” Crescitelli said, speaking on behalf of Oroho, Space and Wirths. “Warren County, along with Sussex, Morris and nine other counties that didn’t qualify for direct federal aid through the

CARES Act were promised some of the \$250 million in reimbursement of coronavirus-related expenses. Months have gone by, and not a penny of that money has been received. In the meantime, the more than \$2 billion in federal relief remains unspent,” he added.



Knowlton Mayor Adele Starrs



Hardwick Mayor Kevin Duffy

In his statement, DiMaio wrote, “I am extremely disturbed by the continued denial to Warren County and the entire region for a fair and equitable distribution of the discretionary aid contained in the federal CARES Act. In regards to this most recent aid program, I have asked the administration for answers including why only 64

municipalities were eligible and how did they qualify, and not others. In our District only one town was deemed eligible. Why? This program touted by the Governor as something great, comes up way short! We want answers and won't be satisfied until we get them!”

Starrs, the Knowlton mayor, reeled off a list of New Jersey counties and millions of dollars of aid they have received, but “Warren County got nothing.” The county already spent about \$1 million to open and run a COVID-19 testing site, and looking at the pandemic, she said, we are “probably in for a long ride. Warren County needs that money, it deserves that money. Governor Murphy, it is the right thing to do.”

“We received not one thin dime. He needs to step it up and look at not just his favorite counties,” said Tersigni, the Phillipsburg



Phillipsburg Mayor Todd Tersigni



Washington Borough Mayor David Higgins

mayor. Higgins, the Washington Borough mayor, said Murphy had “no problem” receiving a large donation of hand sanitizer from the BASF manufacturing facility located in the borough, but “Now it's time to give back. You took that hand sanitizer and you used it throughout the entire state. We need that money released now. Do the right thing, Governor.”

“Governor, please do your job, release the funds, so we are treated equally with the other counties in the State of New Jersey,” Duffy, the Hardwick mayor, said.