

# State of New Jersey

Sponsor: Leah Mora

An Act relating to Affordable and Transitional Housing for Homeless People by Repurposing Abandoned Buildings in New Jersey

Be it enacted by the Youth Model Legislature of the State of New Jersey that abandoned buildings shall be repurposed into affordable housing for individuals experiencing homelessness.

## Section I Defines:

- “Homeless Individual” is defined as any person who does not have a stable place to live, including people in shelters or temporary housing.
- “Transitional Housing” is defined as short-term housing where residents get help to move into a permanent home.
- “Affordable Housing” is defined as housing that costs less than market rate so that low-income and homeless people can afford it.
- “Abandoned or Neglected Building” is defined as any building that:
  - Has been empty and not used for at least 12 months (even if someone tries to use it just a little, if that use is not real and full use, it is still abandoned).
  - Is not being fixed, updated, or maintained.
  - Has serious tax problems or known safety and structural issues.
  - Is not being used in any way that really helps public safety or welfare.
- “Eminent Domain” is defined as the government can take private property for public use. In this case, the owner must be paid fairly by an independent check and must have no more than 90 days to appeal the decision.
- “Chronic Homelessness” is defined as a person who has been homeless continuously for at least one year or has been homeless many times in the past three years, as confirmed by a social service agency.
- “Service Provider” is defined as a trusted group or organization that offers help with health, jobs, education, or legal aid.
- “DCA” is defined as the Department of Community Affairs
- “Active use” is defined as a building used in a serious and regular way. Temporary, token, or small repairs that do not bring the building back to full use will not stop it from being called abandoned.

## Section II: PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION, ACQUISITION, AND CONVERSION

1. Finding the Buildings.
  - a. The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) will make a complete list of all abandoned or neglected buildings that can be fixed and turned into homes.
  - b. Cities must send their lists to the DCA within 180 days after this law is passed.
  - c. The DCA will hold public meetings and work with local groups and city officials to choose the best buildings based on safety, repair costs, and community needs.
2. Giving Owners a Fair Chance.
  - a. The DCA will send written notices to the owners of buildings on the list. The notice will clearly say that the building is considered abandoned if it is not used properly and that it must be fixed in a proper and complete way within 90 days.
  - b. Owners cannot make small, temporary fixes or "token repairs" just to avoid being labeled abandoned. The fixes must show the building is fully and properly used.
  - c. Owners can try to sell the building to the state or a city entity during these 90 days.
3. Taking the Building by Law.
  - a. If the owner does not fix the building or sell it within 90 days, the state will start the process to take the building through eminent domain.
  - b. The owner has 90 days to appeal the decision. During this appeal period, the owner must show strong, clear evidence that the building is being used fully and in a normal, lawful way.
  - c. No loophole or technical fix will be accepted as proof of full use.
4. Renovating the Building.
  - a. Once a building is taken, it must be fixed up to meet all state safety, health, and accessibility rules.
  - b. Every building must have at least 10,000 square feet of usable space unless there is a very good reason to use a smaller space (such as being in a location with lots of local services).
  - c. The DCA will check each building for safety, proper structure, and environmental concerns.
  - d. Renovations must be finished within 12 months, and contractors must follow strict deadlines with penalties for delays.

### SECTION III: HOUSING FACILITIES AND SUPPORT SERVICES

1. Creating the Homes
  - a. Every fixed-up building must be turned into affordable and transitional housing for homeless individuals and families.
  - b. The housing must be safe, private, and easy to access.
2. Helping the Residents.
  - a. Each housing facility must offer or help residents get a full range of services, including:
    - i. Mental health care and substance abuse treatment.
    - ii. Job training and help to get a job.
    - iii. Education and vocational training.
    - iv. Legal aid, including help to get proper identification.

- v. Training in money management and everyday skills.
  - b. All service providers must be approved by the state and checked every six months to make sure they work well.
  - c. Each resident will have a case manager to help them move from temporary housing to a permanent home.
3. Who Gets a Home and for How Long.
- a. Priority goes to people who are chronically homeless, as verified by a trusted social service agency.
  - b. A person can stay in transitional housing for up to 24 months.
  - c. After 24 months, residents can get up to 12 more months of help with rent and case management as they move into permanent affordable housing.

#### SECTION IV: MANAGEMENT, TENANT RIGHTS, AND OVERSIGHT

1. Daily Management of the Facility.
- a. The DCA will choose a qualified facility administrator to run each housing center.
  - b. The administrator must keep the building in good condition by ensuring proper heating, air conditioning, running water, and pest control.
2. Protecting the Rights of Residents.
- a. Each resident will receive a written lease that clearly explains their rights and duties.
  - b. No one can be evicted without a fair process that includes a formal hearing and legal help.
  - c. Residents must get at least 30 days' notice before an eviction, and efforts must be made to find them other housing.
  - d. There will be a clear process for residents to file complaints or disputes. An independent ombudsman and a hotline will be set up for this purpose.
3. Community Oversight.
- a. A Community Advisory Board will be formed with local government officials, service providers, residents, and community groups.
  - b. This board will check that the facility runs well, suggest improvements, and hold regular meetings to review the program.
4. Reporting and Auditing.
- a. The DCA must send a report every quarter to the state legislature. These reports will include:
    - i. Progress on projects, including timelines and any delays.
    - ii. A full account of how money is spent.
    - iii. Any steps taken to fix problems.
5. An independent financial committee will audit the funds every year. The results must be public on the DCA website.

#### SECTION V: FUNDING AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

1. Funding Sources.
- a. The main funding will come from Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).

- b. Additional funds will come from the New Jersey Affordable Housing Trust Fund, as well as federal, state, and private grants.
2. Financial Rules and Accountability.
  - a. The DCA must provide a full yearly report to the legislature on how funds are spent.
  - b. At least 70% of all funds must be used directly for housing services, support programs, and building maintenance.
  - c. A backup financial plan will be in place to secure extra funds if needed.

#### SECTION VI: AMENDMENT AND REVISION PROCEDURES

1. Every two years, the Oversight Committee will review this Act and its progress.
2. Any changes to the law must be made public and approved by a two-thirds majority in the Legislature.
3. No change may weaken the rules for oversight, accountability, or tenant rights.

#### SECTION VII: IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

1. Cities must start the inventory and planning process within 90 days of this Act's passage.
2. All plans for converting buildings, including site selection and agreements, must be sent to the DCA within 180 days.
3. Property acquisition must be completed within 3 months of site approval.
4. Renovations must be finished within 12 months, and residents must move in within 6 months after renovations are done.

#### SECTION VIII: SEVERABILITY

1. If any part of this Act is found to be invalid by a court, the rest of the law will continue to work. The invalid part will be replaced by a part that best matches the intent of this Act.

#### SECTION 11. CONCLUSION

1. This Act shows New Jersey's strong commitment to ending homelessness. By turning abandoned buildings into safe, affordable homes and by providing strong support services and strict rules that cannot be bypassed, this law will help the most vulnerable people in our communities. No loopholes or technical tricks can be used to avoid the law's intent.

Effective Date: This Act goes into effect on June 1, 2025. All deadlines and rules must be followed exactly.

Financial Statement: