



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.

Essex County Executive

August 13, 2019

Honorable Jonathan Lace
Councilman
Township of Caldwell
1 Provost Square
Caldwell, NJ 07006

Dear Councilman Lace:

I would like to thank you for your kind words about the partnership between Essex County and Caldwell to install a crosswalk on Central Avenue. The results demonstrate the cooperation and openness that the County regularly exhibits with our municipal partners to enhance public safety and address local concerns.

I am, however, dismayed at the tone of the second half of your letter when you write about the proposed Turtle Back Zoo amphitheater and suggest that the expenditure for an educational enhancement is an unnecessary burden on the taxpayers of Caldwell. Let's get the facts straight: Over the last eight years, the average county tax increase has been 1.5 percent, which is well below the 2.0 percent property tax cap imposed by the State, and our 2019 budget was introduced with just a 0.5 percent increase.

I am proud of our financial record, especially the fact that we inherited a government that was one step above junk bonds and transformed it into a Aaa rated county! That's the highest rating and it's the first time it was achieved by Essex. If Caldwell has a difficult time balancing its budget and is proposing a 4.8 percent tax increase, take responsibility for the decisions you make. Don't cloak your shortcomings by casting dispersions at Essex County. It is more productive for our constituents if we work as a team; I am available to share with you the process and strategies we followed to place Essex County on solid financial ground.

A hallmark of my administration has been pursuing projects that enhance our residents' quality of life, promote economic development and improve property values. A vast majority of the improvements we have made at the Zoo, throughout our Parks System and to our infrastructure has been funded with grants, contributions and donations. For the amphitheater, we received a special appropriation from Gov. Phil Murphy and Senate President Stephen Sweeney. This appropriation has no impact on property taxes and, if it becomes no longer available to us, we will find an alternative funding solution.

Putting Essex County First

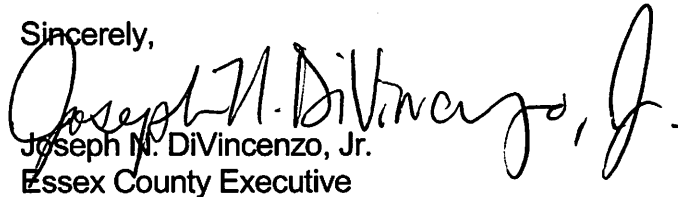
ESSEX COUNTY IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

My job as County Executive is to advocate for our County and find grants and other alternatives to lessen the burden on our taxpayers. I have a successful track record in doing that. If we did not ask the State for funding, some other county or municipality would have the benefit of this money instead of Essex.

Let me finish by saying this: If you really wanted to have a meaningful discussion, why not contact me directly? I have always made myself and my directors available to each of our municipalities. Instead, you posted a letter to your Facebook page, which I do not follow, did not tag me in your post and did not fax or email the letter, which we did not receive until Monday, August 12th. It was evident you wanted to grandstand to the public and provide them with access to the letter even before it was received at my office.

My slogan has always been "*Putting Essex County First.*" It is something in which I take great pride and will continue to do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph M. DiVincenzo, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'J'.

Joseph M. DiVincenzo, Jr.
Essex County Executive

cc: Mayor John Kelley
Caldwell Council members

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