

NASSAU COUNTY VILLAGE OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION
MAYOR DANIEL SEROTA
TESTIMONY REGARDING 2023-2024 EXECUTIVE BUDGET
Before
Joint Legislative Budget Committee:
Local Government Officials / General Government

Good morning (afternoon) Chairpersons Krueger and Weinstein and Assemblyman Ra and Senator O'Mara, and other honorable members of the Legislature, thank you for giving the Nassau County Village Officials Association (NCVOA) an opportunity to participate in today's hearing.

I am Daniel Serota, Mayor of the Village of Brookville, and the former President of NCVOA. The NCVOA is comprised of 64 incorporated villages that are the home of about 475,000 people. The size of our villages varies greatly, with some having populations of less than 1,500 residents and others, like the villages of Hempstead and Freeport, with tens-of-thousands of residents, that would be considered fairly large cities if they were designated as such under the applicable statute. Some of our villages have their own police departments. Two have their own power plants. In other words, there is no one size to describe Nassau's villages.

Today's hearing involves local government, and in the opinion of many leaders of the NCVOA, who have been deeply involved in local government for many years, there is no greater threat to the continuation of local government, as the state has fostered it and protected it for nearly 100 years, than Governor Hochul's housing proposals spelled out in Parts F and G of Article VII bills S.4006 and A.3006.

Today I am here to make two specific requests. First, I ask that given the widespread historic and unprecedented scope and effect that the Governor's housing proposals would have on local governments throughout the State, that this matter be excluded from the budget considerations, discussions, and negotiations. This proposal would affect the status of tens-of-thousands of existing homes. It requires the mandatory re-zoning of tens of thousands of acres on Long Island alone without

State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) standards and procedures, by Governor's fiat, and it affects the quality of life and character of hundreds of communities. Given how this housing proposal has been included in the Budget without in-depth statewide community studies, no comprehensive public hearing program, no publicized input from all affected groups, including the NCVOA, and no known or publicized economic impact study, this housing proposal should not be lumped in and be part of legitimate and important recurring budget issues that involve funding education, health care, public protection, transportation and the normal operations of state government. Please exclude this from the Budget. The housing issue is very important, it deserves a thorough discussion, public hearings and input throughout the state and a reconfiguration that eliminates the one-size fits all approach.

My second request is that as a stand-alone issue, this proposal be given the type of study, discussion, and review that something this vast, radical, and widespread deserves, and, in fact, requires.

Make no mistake about it, the Governor's proposal is radical change. Change in how the state deals with and honors the powers and responsibilities of local governments.

The American novelist Ellen Anderson Glasgow wrote "All change is not growth, and all movement is not forward...". The "one-size fits all" transit-oriented housing proposal regarding the mandatory re-zoning for up to 50 units/per acre in the areas surrounding MTA stations is really unrealistic. Some villages with rail stations are totally "built out" single family home communities with small populations and literally no commercial area. Simply put, there are not many "empty parking lots and abandoned warehouses" to build upon that the Governor mentioned in her State-of-the-State message. Where is or was there

even a study of these areas that the Governor states must be rezoned? Where did the ½ mile radius come from? Why not ¼ of a mile? Why not 35 units per acre, instead of 50? Why not 4% growth instead of 3%? Why not 2%? I have made my point. Where are the studies on how her proposal affects schools, police and fire services, public water supply, etc. Where did this overreaching proposal come from?

As Professor Richard Murdocco from Stony Brook recently wrote in *Newsday*, “This type of top-down policymaking not only fosters public distrust in government but cuts out local elected representatives who understand the ins and outs of their communities. Such bludgeoning land-use mandates erode decades of state-backed policy precedents that have protected the region’s sole-source aquifer and open spaces and nurtured economic growth. Such feats were accomplished not by staunch state opposition to localities, but via measured partnership with Long Island’s villages, towns, and counties.” Of course, the professor’s comments concentrated on the Governor’s plan with respect to Long Island.

And, Professor Murdocco’s observations about the State’s long-standing and historic treatment regarding the importance of local government and the vital role of local officials are not new. The NCVOA and its officials have a proud history of service.

In a letter dated June 19, 1942, Governor Thomas Dewey wrote to the NCVOA saying, “Your Association makes an invaluable contribution to good government in the State of New York. It is too easily forgotten that no government is no better than its roots in every locality. The officials closest to the ideas and needs of the people are the officials of the villages, towns, and counties. They are the foundation of

free government. Without the knowledge and the work that they are able to provide, a free republic would not be able to exist.”

The Governor’s housing plan needs a lot more study, in-depth analysis and legal scrutiny than was obviously given to it by her staff. The proposal can only be characterized as arbitrary, ill-informed, and unsupportable by facts.

The NCVOA realizes that affordable housing and transit-oriented housing are important and must be addressed and seriously undertaken. Some of our villages have already done very admirable work in this area, such as Mineola, Westbury, and Farmingdale.

However, our state’s long tradition of respecting home rule local control, and the development of suburban neighborhoods where people want to raise children and be supportive of quality education for those children, should not be abandoned and dismissed. Big Brother should not be our housing czar.

As Professor Murdocco also wrote, “Attempting to legislatively bludgeon local government into compliance is not the answer. Instead, the state should think constructively how to best work with localities on the common goal of making our region economically and environmentally vibrant.”

The NCVOA stands ready to work with you and the Governor on a workable housing program that also protects a long tradition of strong and effective village government.

At NCVOA we agree with the late Adlai Stevenson, former Democratic Candidate for President, who once said, "I think government should be as small in scope and as local as possible."

Thank you for your consideration.