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Lesniak has the wrong idea

To the Editor:

Your recent editorial "Twilight for COAH" correctly identified that the Council on Affordable Housing is broken, and yet, we must provide affordable housing. I work for Homeless Solutions, a nonprofit organization that develops affordable housing in the Morris County area. I have experienced many of COAH's shortcomings, and I am in agreement with the goal of simplifying the process to reduce state, local and project expenses.

A bill by state Sen. Raymond Lesniak, D-Union, would abolish COAH. While there are some good aspects of the bill, it also threatens to take New Jersey backwards. It would allow towns to set their affordable housing obligation, which history indicates is akin to letting the fox watch the hen house. It would permit wealthier towns to pay urban centers to assume their housing obligation, a recently-abolished practice that helped make New Jersey one of the most segregated states in the country. It also panders to developers with requirements for and about large inclusionary projects.

The United Way of Morris County has issued a study of a composite person named ALICE — residents who are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed. ALICE makes up 23 percent of the county-households earning between \$20,000 and \$60,000. These are our family members, our friends and neighbors, or people whose work we depend on every day. These are the people for whom affordable housing remains elusive.

I implore elected officials to aspire to policy and legislation reflecting a basic premise that a community is stronger when its residents and workforce have opportunities for decent housing they can afford.

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