

**ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 3223**  
**(First Reprint)**

To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 3223 (First Reprint) with my recommendations for reconsideration.

This bill would require the Department of Community Affairs to publish erroneous property tax data on its website. On its face this bill purports to advance a goal that I fully support - increasing the amount of information available to New Jersey's citizens so that they better understand the workings of our government. But despite that laudable veneer, this bill would actually force the State to disseminate false and misleading statistics.

The bill would require the calculation of a "net average residential property tax bill" for each municipality by comparing the difference between the average property tax bill and the average homestead rebate credit payment. However, while the average residential property tax bill is based on the total number of taxpayers in the municipality, the average homestead credit payment is not. Many people do not qualify for the credit in a given year, and some who do qualify for the credit do not apply. By comparing two calculations that have such divergent denominators, the resulting "net average residential property tax bill" is nonsensical.

Rather than confusing the taxpayers, the State should provide relevant and sound information. The Fiscal Year 2016 budget that I recently signed includes more than \$16 billion in funding for property tax relief, including school aid, municipal aid, and over \$1 billion in direct property taxpayer relief programs. And more than \$700 million of the funding for direct property taxpayer relief programs is for other programs aside

from the homestead rebate credit. Information on these programs, including the Property Tax Deduction Act, the senior and disabled citizens' property tax freeze, the veterans' property tax deductions, and the senior and disabled citizens' property tax deductions, should be included in any property tax data disclosure. Moreover, additional information on each municipality's budget should be made available on the Division's website, thereby letting taxpayers more easily see how their hard-earned money is spent.

By including as much statistically accurate information as possible, the State can provide the sort of real transparency its citizens deserve.

Accordingly, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 3223 (First Reprint) and recommend that it be amended as follows:

- Page 2, Title, Line 1: After "concerning" insert "local government budget and"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 11: After "of" insert "local government budget and"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 11: After "data" insert "based on information provided by the Division of Taxation in the Department of the Treasury"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 14: After "The" insert "budget data summary shall include information as may be collected electronically on municipal budgets, including information about compensation of elected officials, staffing levels, debt, structural budget challenges, and credit ratings. The"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 23: Delete "the amount of the average homestead" and insert "as well as additional data regarding property tax relief programs, including the Homestead Benefit Program, the Property Tax Deduction Act, P.L.1996, c.60 (C.54A:3A-15 et al.), the Senior Freeze Program, property tax deductions for veterans, and property tax deductions for seniors and disabled citizens."

Page 2, Section 1, Lines 24-28: Delete in their entirety

Page 2, Section 1, Line 35: Delete "county" and insert "local"

Respectfully,

[seal]

/s/ Chris Christie

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Thomas P. Scrivo

Chief Counsel to the Governor