

Closing Allenwood Barracks Another Slight To Monmouth County
By Senator Sean T. Kean

Over the past few years it seems that Monmouth County residents have borne the brunt of politically motivated policies emanating from Trenton.

One does not need to look far for evidence. First we saw Monmouth County towns denied homeland security money that was doled out based not on need but on partisan politics. Then Trenton enacted a school funding formula that Monmouth County residents hoped would end five years of flat funding that has led to skyrocketing property taxes; instead, most Monmouth County towns will only receive a meager 2% funding increase while a few Abbott and Abbott rim districts get approximately 60% of all the roughly \$8 billion state education dollars. This is even more troubling when considering the fact that last year, Monmouth County residents collectively paid nearly \$750 million in income taxes.

Then, just when we thought it could not get any worse for Monmouth, Governor Corzine announces a massive toll hike plan that will affect Monmouth County residents, many of whom commute to work on the Garden State Parkway, more than all but one New Jersey County.

Now Trenton wants to take away our only remaining State Police barracks servicing the communities of Monmouth County and the central region. In a misguided attempt to save a few dollars in a state budget that will likely exceed last year's total of \$33.5 billion, Trenton is poised to close the Allenwood State Police Barracks in Wall Township and transfer these operations and the Troopers stationed there to other parts of the state.

This is not the first time that our region has seen State Police resources shifted to other parts of the state. Unfortunately, this trend has been underway for years. In fact, during the past 20 years, Central Jersey has seen the closure of eight State Police barracks. The following barracks have been closed or moved to points further north or south of their former locations: Hopewell, Colts Neck, Edison, Flemington, Wilburtha, Fort Dix, Princeton and Hightstown. (Holmdel Barracks remains open in a limited capacity solely to service the Garden State Parkway).

Closing the Allenwood Barracks is more than just another slight to Monmouth County; it is a dangerous decision that will impact the safety of the entire region. It is worth noting that, just recently, a known member of the Surenos 13 street gang from Philadelphia was apprehended in Wall Township. In addition, our area has a number of sites, such as the Monmouth Executive Airport in Wall, which could be an inviting target for terrorists. One cannot help but wonder about the logic of reducing police presence in our area given the level of violent crime presently taking place in Asbury Park.

Equally troubling is the impact that this decision could have on Trooper safety. For instance, a Trooper who pulls over a vehicle on Route 35 in Neptune Township would depend on back-up responding from Hamilton Township in Mercer County or Sayreville in Middlesex County.

The State Police at the Allenwood Barracks facility capably perform a variety of functions including: general policing in Shrewsbury and Farmingdale, employing tactical units to specific

locations, and augmenting the work of local police. Losing this police presence will only make things more difficult for our local police and could potentially embolden criminals. In addition, closing these barracks will result in the loss of dozens of State Police officers who live in our neighborhoods and are invested in our communities. Perhaps most importantly, we will lose the psychological value and deterrent value of having a physical State Police presence in Monmouth County.

I recently met with the State Police to discuss my concerns about the impact of closing this facility and recommended that, if it is closed, they consider moving these operations to another location in Monmouth County, such as the 100 acre former site of the Arthur Brisbane Child Treatment Center in Wall.

In addition, I will be introducing legislation that would prevent the closure of any State Police Barracks sites until a study has been undertaken to determine the impact of such a closure. Unfortunately, all indications are that the State is moving forward with the closure of the Allenwood Barracks.

However, Governor Corzine has the ability to grant a reprieve. As the leader of the Executive Branch, he can and should direct the Attorney General and the Director of the Division of Law and Public Safety—both his employees—to take the necessary action to renew the lease at the Allenwood Barracks or, at a minimum, find an alternate location in Monmouth County.

Anything less would be doing a disservice to the people of our area who, for too long, have been forced to send more and more of their hard-earned money to Trenton only to be rewarded with higher tax bills and less services.