

Gov. Murphy signs growth zone bill for Atlantic City airport

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For Atlantic County, the third time is the charm.

After nearly two years and two vetoes from the Governor's Office, the bill to establish state tax incentives for the county's aviation district within a one-mile radius of the Atlantic City International Airport was signed into law Wednesday.

The bill, sponsored by Chris Brown and Jeff Van Drew in the state Senate and John Armato and Vince Mazzeo in the Assembly, is a major win for the county's efforts to establish an aviation industry and diversify the economy.

The incentives fall under the Grow New Jersey Program, which is set to expire in July 2019. The county plans to move quickly to bring in businesses.

"We couldn't be more excited about the advantage these incentives provide," Lauren H. Moore Jr., executive director of the Atlantic County Economic Alliance, said in a statement. "This enables us to aggressively market and attract companies across all aviation sectors."

On Wednesday, the county said the ACEA immediately began marketing the aviation district with the enhanced tax incentives to prospective businesses looking to relocate to the area.

The district includes the airport, the William J. Hughes FAA Technical Center and the National Aviation Research and Technology Park.

The first building of the NARTP is expected to be completed within the next few weeks. No tenants outside the FAA have been announced by the county. However, Moore said Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and the New Jersey Institute of Technology are interested in the NARTP and plans for an Atlantic County Aviation and Technical Academy, which will also be located in the district.

Murphy's signing of the bill caps a two-year process that started with state Sen. Jim Whelan introducing the bill nearly two years ago before his death.

The bill then became a big political prop in the 2017 general election for the two Assembly seats and the state Senate seat in Atlantic County, with candidates from both parties identifying it as integral for the county's efforts to move forward with its aviation industry.

The bill passed the state Legislature in late 2017, but former Gov. Chris Christie vetoed it in January of this year on his way out of office.

The bill was passed again when Murphy took office, but the new governor conditionally vetoed it because he wanted specific changes to it.

Those changes included the expiration date in July 2019, adding a provision that includes a retention or creation requirement of a certain amount of jobs for every company that benefits from the tax incentives and remedying a zoning issue in the Pinelands.

Lawmakers changed the bill and reposted it. It was passed late last month for the third time.

“Building a stronger and fairer New Jersey economy starts with the communities that were hit hardest by the economic downturn of 2008. Atlantic City can serve as a beacon of growth for Atlantic County and the State as a whole,” Murphy said in a statement. “I thank the Legislature for its concurrence with the recommendations I made last month, and look forward to continuing to work together to bring results to the residents of Atlantic County.”