

## New Jersey awards over \$6M in tax credits for film projects

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TRENTON — New Jersey called “Action!” on a new film tax credit program Tuesday, approving its first awards totaling \$6.2 million for four projects, including a film starring Chazz Palminteri.

Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said in a statement that the Economic Development Authority approved the awards Tuesday. The approvals are the first since July, when Murphy signed the law that succeeded a 2015 film tax credit program that his predecessor, Republican Chris Christie, let expire.

“Our diverse population and geography have long kept us on the short lists of studios and location scouts,” Murphy said in a statement. “The addition of this tax credit, as well as our continued defense of progressive values, put New Jersey on the cusp of becoming one of the premier locations in the nation.”

The four projects include “Besa,” featuring Palminteri; a tragic romance called “The Atlantic City Story,” starring Jessica Hecht; a thriller called “Emergence,” set in Kearny, Hudson County, and “Gimme Liberty,” a prequel to the 2014 film “Gimme Shelter” that tells the story of Kathy DiFiore, a New Jersey woman who founded an organization to help homeless women and pregnant teens.

“Gimme Liberty” got \$3.2 million in awards; “Emergence” won \$2.4 million; “Besa” is getting about \$470,000; and “The Atlantic City Story” was awarded \$77,000.

Under the law, films and TV shows can qualify for an award that’s equal to 30% of qualified expenses.

Eligibility hinges on one of two criteria: at least 60% of the total budget must be spent through qualified New Jersey vendors, or the project must have more than \$1 million in qualified expenses in the state.

Legislative estimates say the tax credit program could cost up to \$425 million over five years with an uncertain economic benefit to the state, whose budget is perennially strapped.

But Murphy has dismissed such criticism, saying that the projects will mean million in jobs and goods and services in the state.

Tuesday’s announcement comes as Murphy is feuding with powerful political powerbroker George Norcross over the state’s expiring business tax credits.

Norcross and companies linked to him are suing Murphy over a task force the first-term governor appointed to investigate how business tax incentives were doled out.

The task force has made an unspecified criminal referral.

Norcross has denied any wrongdoing and criticized Murphy’s task force as overtly political.

Christie, who left office in 2018, let the previous tax credit program expire in 2015 and vetoed legislative attempts to renew it.

He famously criticized the MTV series “Jersey Shore,” opposing \$420,000 in credits for the show and saying it perpetuated misconceptions about the state.