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2nd-largest police union decides not to endorse candidate in N.J. governor's race

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One of New Jersey's largest police unions has declined to endorse a candidate for governor, signaling a hesitation about both Gov. Phil Murphy's record and GOP nominee Jack Ciattarelli's law-and-order campaign.

The Fraternal Order of Police, the state's second-largest police union representing thousands of officers, including Newark's, announced the decision Tuesday through spokeswoman Jeannine LaRue.

The FOP's neutrality comes less than two months before voters cast ballots and despite Ciattarelli's efforts to portray the governor as anti-cop. Murphy last month received support from at least two other police unions.

Tuesday's decision is a break from four years ago, when the FOP and the New Jersey State Policemen's Benevolent Association, the largest in the state, endorsed Murphy when he ran the first time for governor.

That change was significant, Ciattarelli and his running mate Diane Allen said in a joint statement sent by a spokeswoman.

Murphy was a "far-Left" politician who'd tied "law enforcement officers' hands behind their backs," the pair said. "As Governor and Lieutenant Governor, we will always listen to and stand with our law enforcement officials and their families."

Ciattarelli, a former state Assemblyman, has previously warned that Murphy's progressive policies are creating "lawlessness, a spike in crime, and unruly crowds fueled by drinking and recreational pot."

Murphy spokesman Jerrel Harvey declined to respond to the FOP but said the governor "has taken decisive action to boost public confidence in policing and build trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve."

Murphy's administration has sometimes drawn the ire of police unions, and the two sides clashed in court over a plan to publicly identify officers found guilty of serious misconduct. But union leaders have supported other changes, including an overhaul of the rules restricting when cops can use physical force.

Recent polls show Murphy with a large lead ahead of the Nov. 2 election, and the Port Authority Police Benevolent Association and the State Troopers Fraternal Association, which represents State Police rank-and-file, endorsed Murphy in August.

Although the governor has received law enforcement support in the past, the previous four years have led some groups to endorse more conservative candidates.

Both the state FOP and the New Jersey PBA endorsed Donald Trump's re-election campaign.

In an Aug. 11 interview, PBA president Pat Colligan said he wasn't sure when they might weigh in on New Jersey's gubernatorial race.

"We don't have a hard timeline this time," he said. "We're weighing the options."