

“Social justice should be the underlying goal of all humanity.”

-Alan V. Lowenstein, Institute Founder



NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE  
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

February 25, 2021

Dear Governor Murphy, Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Coughlin:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge you to immediately pass and sign legislation (A4663| S2924) establishing a two-year Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program in four communities (Camden, Newark, Trenton and Paterson) directly impacted by high rates of youth incarceration. This bill requires an \$8.4 million investment that moves funds from incarceration towards restorative justice – an approach that focuses on building healthy relationships and resolving conflicts in communities to decrease youth involvement in the youth justice system. In this bill, we propose a cost-effective plan to reduce racial disparities and recidivism rates and implement less punitive and more restorative interventions.

The current release of incarcerated youth under the Public Health Emergency Credits bill makes passage of this bill urgent.

### **Public Health Emergency Credits Bill**

The COVID-19 pandemic, the call for racial equality and the severe economic crisis have rocked communities of color. Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, Black and Brown communities have been contracting and dying from the coronavirus at a faster rate than the general population. What's more, due to acute racial disparities in the criminal justice system, incarcerated people of color have been contracting and dying of the virus in prisons at horrifying rates. As of January 18, 2021, 75 youth under state custody and 173 staff members have tested positive for COVID-19. Incarcerated adults are also dying in state prisons. While some sources say there have been 52 total COVID-19 related deaths in New Jersey, we believe there are approximately 80 COVID-19 related deaths in our state prisons.

Certainly, through your efforts, New Jersey has taken some big steps to address the health crisis in state prisons. By passing and signing the Public Health Emergency Credits bill (A4235|S2519), the state is accelerating the release of incarcerated adults and youth, moving many residents from harm's way. On November 4, 2020, the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) released 50 youth – and 40 youth prior to that date. Thank you for supporting that bill.

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**do social justice.**

Now, it is critical that we provide the community-based services for released youth that will allow them to succeed.

### **Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program**

To support the early release of young people following the passage of the Public Health Emergency Credits Bill, the Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program bill (A4663|S2924) was introduced. The bill will fund enhanced reentry wraparound services and four restorative justice hubs through a two-year pilot in four directly impacted communities (Camden, Newark, Trenton and Paterson). We are advocating for the legislature to allocate \$8.4 million – approximately twenty percent of the youth prison budget – for the creation of the pilot program outlined in the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice publication Youth Justice Toolkit: A Community-Led Restorative Justice Approach.

Many of the young people returning to their communities have suffered from adverse childhood experiences prior to their confinement and are in need of healing and special care. Implementing services outlined in this program will better connect youth to trauma-informed services that are culturally and environmentally competent and will keep them in their communities and out of the youth justice system. Please help us secure funding and resources so that children of color can thrive and excel in New Jersey.

### **High Cost of Incarceration for Antiquated System**

In 2020, as the state battled COVID-19, New Jersey taxpayers were projected to spend \$300,000 to incarcerate each child. Rather than cutting this unnecessary funding for incarceration and diverting it to needed front-end youth resources, the state instead cut the budget for community-based youth programs and services by \$200,000. And this underinvestment in building up kids is nothing new. Between 1998 and 2018, state funding for county-based community youth programs and services increased by only 49.5 percent. By contrast, during that same time period, the amount New Jersey spent each year to incarcerate a young person increased by 370.4 percent. Even more troubling, this increase occurred during a period where the state's incarcerated youth population decreased by seventy percent – from 729 to 215 young people. And these numbers are even lower today: as of December 4, 2020, there are 100 youth incarcerated in New Jersey's three youth prisons. With a capacity of 511 youth, this means our state's youth prisons are 80 percent empty.

Rather than continuing to waste money on empty youth prisons, New Jersey must seize this opportunity for meaningful youth justice transformation by closing its youth prisons and reinvesting funds into community-based resources and services. To begin this journey, you must commit to passing and signing this powerful legislation.

### **Conclusion:**

Passage of the Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program bill (A4663|S2924) is urgent due to the current and ongoing release of incarcerated youth. These young people need support now.

This legislation will both address this urgent need and set New Jersey up to be a national leader in transforming the youth justice system to one that is equitable, constructive and compassionate.

We look forward to your support in this matter. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Respectfully,

AAU Education Fellows  
Abbott Leadership Institute  
Advocates for Children of NJ  
Africana World Studies Department - WPU  
All of Us or None-Northern NJ  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Friends and Service Committee Prison Watch  
American Reentry Initiative  
AOUON-Northern NJ  
Atlantic City NAACP  
Avenues Consulting, LLC  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action South Jersey  
Beyond Day Zero  
Black Church Center for Justice and Equality  
Brothers for Awareness  
Camden County East NAACP  
Campaign to :End the New Jim Crow - Greater Trenton Chapter  
Cape May County NAACP  
Chosen Generation Community Corp (TIER1 Recovery)  
Circle of Care  
Consultant in Trainings for Lincoln Technical Institute  
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.  
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. - Paterson Alumni Chapter  
Die Jim Crow.  
Education Management & Curriculum Consultants Group LLC  
EraseTheRedline Inc.  
Essence Fitness Studio  
Essex County College Adjunct Faculty Federation, Local 2222  
F.O.R.T.E. House  
Faces Of Fallen Fathers  
Faith in New Jersey  
First United Tabernacle International Ministries  
Force the Issue NJ  
GC NAACP  
Greater Newark Health Care Coalition  
Greater Red Bank Area NAACP  
Imagine Newark  
Joshua's Generation

Juvenile & Adult Re-Entry Connections (JARC)  
KIPP Parent Advocate Groups  
L.I.F.E. PROGRAMS  
Latino Action Network  
Lift as We Climb  
LISC  
Lutherans Engaging in Advocacy Ministry NJ  
MASJID WAARITH UD DEEN  
Mental Health Association in Passaic County  
Meta Theatre Company  
Morris County Human Relations Commission  
NAACP Newark  
NAACP Camden County  
NAACP Bergen County  
NAACP Oranges/Maplewood  
NAACP Metuchen Edison Piscataway Branch  
NAACP Morris County Branch 2092B  
NeighborCorps Re-Entry Services  
Newark Alliance  
Newark Community Solutions  
Newark Community Street Team  
Newark Opportunity Youth Network  
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice  
NJ Innovation Institute  
NJ Restorative Justice Network  
Not In Our Town Princeton  
Oasis  
Opportunity Youth Network  
Parent Impact  
Paterson Education Fund  
Phillips and Brickers Institute  
Platinum Minds  
Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville  
Project Ready  
Prophetic Assembly on Policing  
Returning Citizens Support Group  
Salvation & Social Justice  
Second Chance Quest (SCQ)  
Sisters for Awareness Black Leadership & Equality  
Smith & Jones Financial Solutions  
Social Development Research Program, Rutgers University  
South Ward Children's Alliance  
South Ward Promise Neighborhood Community Council  
Temple Ner Tamid  
The Asbury Park Transformative Justice Project  
The Campaign to End the New Jim Crow

The Mark Montclair  
The Meta Theatre Company  
The New Jersey Parents Caucus  
The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville  
Transformative Justice Initiative  
Unitarian Church in Cherry Hill  
Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair  
Unitarian Universalist Faith Action New Jersey  
United Community Corporation  
United Way  
Victoria Foundation  
Weequahic Family Success Center  
West Ward/UVSO  
William Paterson University Faculty Senate  
WWNG, Inc  
Youth Advocate Programs, Inc  
YWCA Princeton