



WORKING SUMMIT 2025 ACTION AGENDA: TRANSFORMING NEW JERSEY'S CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

REPORT RELEASE: JUNE 19TH (JUNETEENTH), 2025

Dedicated to the Legacy of Lydia Thornton



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I. THE WORKING SUMMIT 2025 PLANNING TEAM

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Latino Action Network Foundation

[Rebecca Mohr](#), MSW, LAN Foundation Policy Consultant

Salvation & Social Justice

Returning Citizens Support Group

New Jersey Department of Corrections

New Jersey Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson

American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey

Latino Action Network

New Jersey State Parole Board

New Jersey Office of the Attorney General

New Jersey Office of the Public Defender

New Jersey Youth Justice Commission

American Friends Service Committee (Prison Justice Watch)

United Black Agenda

UU Faith Action NJ

New Jersey Policy Perspective

Puerto Rican Action Board

[Samuel Quiles](#), LAN Foundation Fellow & Returning Citizen

[Dr. Johanna Foster](#), Monmouth University Sociology Program

[Richard Rivera](#), Police Reform Consultant

In-Custody Focus Group Participants (see next page)

Breakout Room Facilitators (see next page)

See appendix XXI.5 for links and resources!

II. SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR COLLABORATORS!

This entire report has been structurally prepared, formatted, and developed by Rebecca Mohr, MSW.

IN-CUSTODY FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| ★ Myrna Diaz | ★ Lucretia Stone | ★ Solwasi Nyahuma |
| ★ Dawn Jackson | ★ Maria Montalvo | ★ Heshmu Heru |
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| ★ Tina Lunney | ★ YJC State Youth Advisory Board | |

BREAKOUT ROOM FACILITATORS (BIOS IN APPENDIX)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| ★ Miseka Diggs | ★ Edwin Ortiz | ★ Dameon Stackhouse |
| ★ Christopher Etienne | ★ Russel Owen | ★ Jim Sullivan |
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| ★ Nicole Guyette | ★ Samuel Quiles | ★ Jennifer Love Williams |
| ★ Dontae Thomas | ★ Tiece Riddick | ★ Al-Tariq Witcher |
| ★ Ray Jackson | ★ Hassan Shakur | ★ Robert Salaam Ziegler |

RUTGER'S VIDEOGRAPHY TEAM

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| ★ Professor John Hulme | ★ Mo Foster |
| ★ Rene Auguste | ★ Kiera Josefsberg |
| ★ Rachel Mihatov | ★ Chris Gizzo |
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| ★ Ana Juricic | ★ Emmit Burton |
| ★ Olivia Golec | ★ Jack Hulme |
| ★ Yazan Mohammad | ★ Maddie Hulme |

III. THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS & DONORS!

Thank you to the Dodge Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Fund for New Jersey for their operations support of the Latino Action Network Foundation!

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CITIZEN ACTION



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FAIR SHARE
HOUSING CENTER

IV. JOIN & SUPPORT THE MOVEMENT!

All future donations will be divided between Returning Citizens Support Group (Newark, NJ) and Salvation & Social Justice's Trenton Community Street Team to support their vital work in this movement.

To date, we have raised just under \$5,000 to be split and sent to these two organizations!

Please continue to support this cause if you're able—the need for preventative efforts to criminal-legal involvement and re-entry support services are great.

Every dollar goes directly to supporting front-line community leadership, advocacy, and transformation.

Let's keep the momentum going!

Scan this QR Code or click on this link:

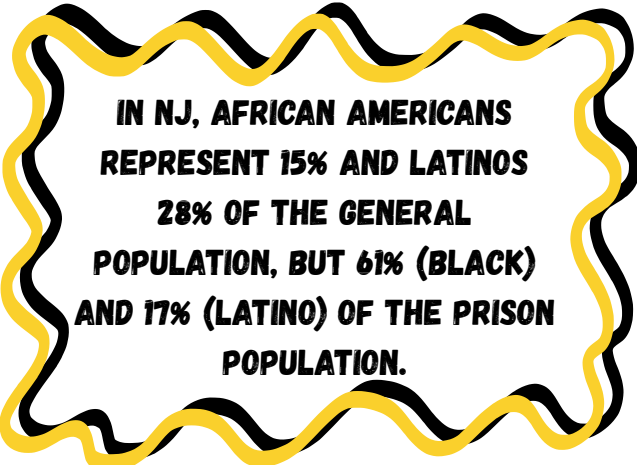
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V. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR CHRIS ETIENNE

New Jersey has a history marked by significant social justice challenges, including uprisings against injustices, lawsuits regarding discriminatory policing practices, and the hyper-incarceration of minority communities. The state's prison system exhibits the most significant racial inequality and disproportionality in the nation.¹ Although African Americans represent 15% and Latinos 28% of New Jersey's population, they make up 61% (Black) and 17% (Latino) of the prison population.^{2;3} These stark disparities in the criminal justice system stem from the over policing and incarceration of youth of color. According to a report by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, Black children are 24 times and Hispanic youth are 5 times more likely than white children to be sentenced to a juvenile correction facility, despite both groups committing offenses at the same rate.⁴ This overrepresentation is largely due to the increased policing of youth of color in urban neighborhoods over recent decades, and the differences in police behaviors in interactions with diverse populations.⁵ These statistics remain relatively the same for adult populations, and New Jersey themes of racial discrimination and disproportionality persist in parallel across the United States.^{6;7}



**IN NJ, AFRICAN AMERICANS
REPRESENT 15% AND LATINOS
28% OF THE GENERAL
POPULATION, BUT 61% (BLACK)
AND 17% (LATINO) OF THE PRISON
POPULATION.**

Instead of accepting this as the norm, community activists, formerly incarcerated leaders, and state departmental leaders have united again to transform the statewide policies and laws of the criminal-legal system. This partnership is the New Jersey Working Summit 2025.

Twenty years ago, in 2003, the first NJ Community & Corrections Working Summit, Impacting Communities of Color, brought together Black and Latino advocate leaders (specifically, the Hispanic Directors Association of NJ the NJ Black Issues Convention) to address and reduce the mass incarceration of people of color in New Jersey. Since the first Community and Corrections Working Summit, New Jersey has achieved many major criminal justice reforms, including police licensing laws, increased mental health resources, credible messenger community Street Teams, law enforcement use of force and use of deadly force directives, public portals to report police misconduct, no-cost Public Defender services, sentencing reforms, Cannabis legalization, bail reform, isolated confinement laws, voting rights, and so much more (see Appendix XXI.2 - "We Did It!!!" 2010 Legislative Successes and Appendix XXI.3 - "We Did It Again!!!" 2010-2025 Legislative Successes).

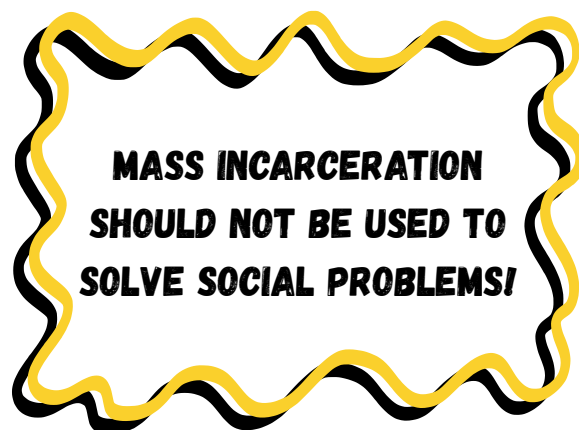
Current data indicates that this movement has been highly successful over the past two decades; these reforms have led to a significant reduction in crime rates, (despite media rhetoric). Statewide prison populations have been cut by two-thirds over the last two decades, and the number of operational carceral facilities continue to decrease. The urgency and

value of this movement and of broader criminal-legal system reconstruction are beyond measure; it represents an indispensable step toward fairness and lasting change. These changes have led to safer communities, further saving public funds. Annually and per person, it costs New Jersey more than \$600,000/youth and more than \$74,000/adult;^{8; 9} these estimate costs are base numbers, they do not reflect the costs related to chronic physical and mental illnesses, disabilities, addictions counseling, and/or language access needs – just to name a few. Saved taxpayer dollars (via reduced incarcerated populations) should be reinvested in those remaining in carceral spaces towards existing conditions and programs as well as towards communities for returning citizens to have a better chance at successful and sustainable post-incarceration re-entry. Infrastructure, education, housing, health services, and prevention programs are just a few other resource areas that are vital to one's adjustment back home. Fewer incarcerated people would also mean that families will prosper, strengthen bonds that are often lost in the disconnection of imprisonment, and can build generational wealth. At its core, this movement increases racial equity, helps increase fairness and true transformation of the criminal legal system. Together, these building blocks force a shift in priorities toward healing, recovery, and human dignity.

Additionally, this movement has catalyzed the development of reentry resources for returning citizens throughout New Jersey, which did not exist at all in 2003. In recent years, formerly incarcerated scholars and entrepreneurs have founded organizations such as the Returning Citizens Support Group, Trenton Community Street Team, Newark Community Street Teams, Transformative Justice Initiative, and Meet Him/Her at the Gate to name a few. These initiatives provide vital resources to individuals before, during and after

incarceration, they mentor youth and adults by assisting those grappling with returning to a society vastly different from the one they left. They assist with basic needs insecurities (food, housing, transportation, clothing, etc.). They do this through partnerships with local government offices and educational institutions, advocates who have experienced the repercussions of mass incarceration and the failings of the criminal legal system.

The formerly incarcerated community represents diverse populations of individuals who have been exposed or directly impacted by a myriad of social issues, including mental health differences, housing insecurity, income insecurity, and vast disparities in our education system. **These challenges are not novel; instead, they stem from systemic issues rooted in capitalistic greed and white supremacy.** To be a prison abolitionist is to acknowledge that our prison industrial complex disproportionately targets individuals who hail from these vulnerable communities. As advocates for completely dismantling this complex, we do not suggest that no one should face consequences for their actions. Rather, we believe incarceration should not be used to solve social problems. Opening up discussions to identify ongoing challenges in communities, addressing the shortcomings of social services, multi-culturally appropriate mental health resources, and investigating outcomes are more effective strategies for improving quality of life and creating safer neighborhoods for local residents.



We unequivocally reject the concept of prison reform; we believe that reforming our prison system means accepting a predatory system that still employs strategies reminiscent of chattel slavery. True abolition opposes gradualism because to support incremental change is to remain complacent in the miscarriage of justice. As advocates, we have a duty to spotlight injustices and organize with local community groups, for it requires a collective voice to shift the status quo. Transformation is a more accurate depiction of the end-goal; in this practical action agenda for New Jersey to consider, we aim to reimagine the system entirely, rejecting traditional standards of American incarceration.

On January 6th and 7th, 2025, the Working Summit 25 re-convened to continue building momentum in this movement by creating an action agenda of transformative recommendations. Such an action agenda is this report. Let this report serve as both a reflection and a roadmap. The progress is real — and the potential is far greater.

VI. HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR CHRIS ETIENNE

The State of New Jersey has a legacy of being "the slave state of the North," being the last northern state to abolish Antebellum slavery in 1866.¹⁰ Our state's reluctance to dissolve the institutions created to serve the interests of slavery and social dominance foreshadowed the current racial divide in local municipalities. Although de jure segregation is no longer enforced by our court systems, zoning laws, over-policing, and employment discrimination has allowed for de facto segregation to permeate across our communities.

The effects of these segregative policies are evident within our school systems. According to the Civil Rights Project, New Jersey's school systems rank sixth in highest segregation of Black students and seventh in highest segregation of Latinos in the United States.¹¹ The Education Law Center reports that "during the 2022-23 school year, nearly 248,000 Black and Latino students (38%) in New Jersey attended schools with student populations that were more than 90% Black and/or Hispanic, and 27% of white students attended schools with student populations that were more than 75% white."¹² (You can read more about Latino Action Networks class action lawsuit against the state of NJ for school segregation [here](#)). These disparities have exacerbated the school-to-prison pipeline, disproportionately impacting Black and Latino youth and funneling them into the carceral system with life-long impacts.

Certainly, the current situation of racial disparities cannot be fully understood without the historical context of race and ethnicity in America. The American Criminal-Legal System (CLS) was born from the 13th Amendment, which legally reads

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."¹³ This legislation ended traditional chattel slavery in late 1865, yet provided a loophole for racialized slavery to continue under the guise of criminal justice. Not coincidentally, the first prison boom in the nation followed this legislation, as "Slave Codes" laws were re-codified under "Black Codes" and slave patrolling groups were formally structured into police and law enforcement departments.¹⁴ Newly freed Black people were then criminalized for the conditions directly caused by their enslavement – being poor, unemployed and homeless – thus sending them back into a state of slavery under the guise of "justice".

Under the 13th Amendment, any person convicted of a crime can legally be treated as a slave. With this provision, there is a gross similarity between Antebellum slavery, where human beings were considered the property of other people, and convict leasing, where incarcerated people are considered *a ward of the state*. This caveat was realized through convict leasing programs, where incarcerated people were *leased* by states to private business for labor. Convict leasing programs officially ended in 1928, but were replaced by the current prison labor programs.

"A prison guard oversees incarcerated people as they return to the dorms from farm work detail at the Louisiana State Penitentiary... (Image: AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)"

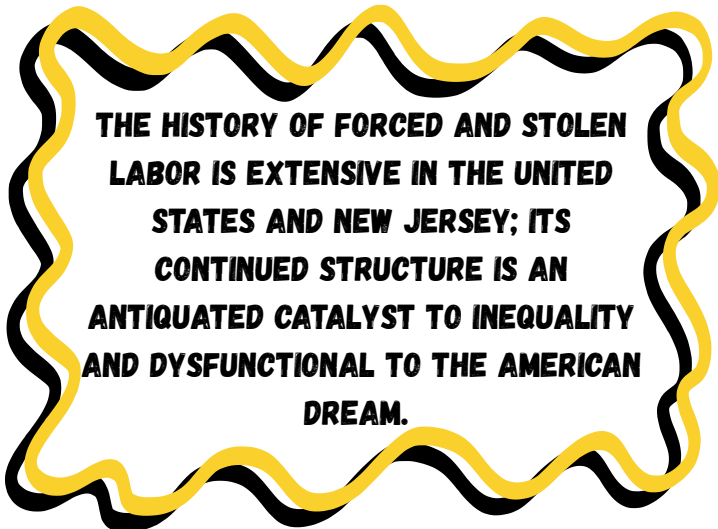


Photo and caption credits to the Innocence Project, Reference 14

Today, incarcerated people in most states are paid very little for their labor (often, less than \$1.00 per hour), and in a few states like Texas, Georgia, and Florida, incarcerated people's labor goes unpaid entirely.¹⁴ About 61% of incarcerated people (IP) in the United States are assigned work in a prison facility or a job with a private business while incarcerated.¹⁵ Incarcerated workers are excluded from federal laws that protect labor rights, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the National Labor Relations Act, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Therefore, IPs do not have the right to refuse a work assignment, be paid a fair wage or overtime pay, unionize, or rights to safe and fair working conditions.¹⁶ The history of forced and stolen labor is extensive in the United States and New Jersey; its continued structure is an antiquated catalyst to inequality and dysfunctional to the American dream.

In addition to the exploitative conditions that define the prison industrial complex – a billion dollar industry – living conditions of incarcerated individuals is also a humanitarian and public safety issue. Ava DuVernay's 13th documentary and Angela Davis' book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, both argue that the reality of being imprisoned is far from rehabilitative, but instead is actually trauma-inducing and triggering.^{17;18} The less than healthy and nutritious food, interpersonal violence between prisoners and correctional officers, and "absolute segregation, including sensory deprivation, is [not] restorative and healing."¹⁷ The film also describes prisons to be more similar to warehouses sheltering people like animals than they are correctional or rehabilitative.¹⁹ **Society cannot expect incarcerated individuals to one day re-enter society, as 95% of them do,²⁰ as productive members if the punishment does more harm than good** – but then again, that is not an accident but rather a testament to the purposeful design.

American society operates within a durable, pervasive, and deeply rooted racial caste system that has repeatedly been redefined, reinvented, and/or disguised, yet the oppression of communities of color has persisted. In the words of Angela Davis, "historically, when one looks at efforts to create reforms, they inevitably lead to more oppression,".¹⁸ The 13th Amendment may have ended of American slavery in the traditional sense, yet included a loophole where it legally continued through the justification of criminality. During the era of segregation, people of color were demonized for advocating for civil rights. During the notorious War on Drugs, people of color faced criminalization at disproportionately higher rates, experiencing harsher consequences for similar behaviors compared to white individuals (e.g., crack versus cocaine). For decades, mass incarceration has been exacerbated by legislation like **Mandatory Minimums** and **Tough-on-Crime** political rhetoric. Now, in an age of colorblindness, we are witnessing a rollback of critical civil rights legislative victories, along with a concerted effort against all initiatives aimed at promoting diversity, equality, and inclusion for communities that have historically been excluded from opportunities and resources.



**THE HISTORY OF FORCED AND STOLEN
LABOR IS EXTENSIVE IN THE UNITED
STATES AND NEW JERSEY; ITS
CONTINUED STRUCTURE IS AN
ANTIQUATED CATALYST TO INEQUALITY
AND DYSFUNCTIONAL TO THE AMERICAN
DREAM.**

In New Jersey for instance, we have seen a regression from progress recently, including a retreat from commitments to close prisons and end immigrant detention centers. According to Geo Group Inc., a pro-profit prison entity, in February 2025, they signed a 15-year fixed contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to provide support services for establishing a federal immigration processing center at the Delaney Hall Facility in Newark, New Jersey. Once again, we have seen our legislators prioritize profit over people. It will require a collaborative effort led by local leaders who are willing to critique and reform these harmful legislative policies to enact effective change.

Despite recent challenges and opposition to this movement of transformation, New Jersey has made great progress in decarceration in recent decades, as proven in the legislature (see Appendix XXI.2 - “We Did It!!!” 2010 Legislative Successes and Appendix XXI.3 - “We Did It Again!!!” 2010-2025 Legislative Successes. However, much of this movement is facing serious implementation challenges and issues of siloing that inhibit productivity and collaboration. **There are many cases where in the process of legislative negotiations, vital parts of a bill are gutted and left on the floor, leaving a need for future advocacy.** Thus, our collective work in this movement is far from over. The community leaders, advocates, and people with lived experience who lead this movement do so in an attempt to create a more perfect union free of injustice and exploitation.

VII. INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKING SUMMIT 25

WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR CHRIS ETIENNE AND CUQUI RIVERA

The 2025 Working Summit was hosted at Monmouth University on January 7th and 8th, 2025, with 154 people in attendance on day one and 115 people on day two. The purpose of this event was to address the continued gross overrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos in New Jersey's criminal-legal system through the development of a transformative, constructive, and statewide action agenda for Black and Brown advocates and change-makers to utilize over the next twenty years (see section XIX for the event agenda and Appendix XXI.1 for the program booklet). To achieve such, this community organizing and coalition building event included and consulted various community stakeholders, such as justice-impacted individuals (returning citizens and incarcerated voices) and their families, community organizations, state department leadership, faith-based and social justice advocates, and change-makers.

A priority objective of this event and its policy recommendations was to **center lived-experiences and to inform community-centered approaches**. It was a tremendous and historic achievement that all breakout rooms were entirely facilitated by returning citizens themselves as well as currently in-custody focus groups from East Jersey State Prison, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, and the Youth Justice Commission Incarcerated Youth Advisory Council, (the only one its kind in the United States)! The stories we share are no longer burdens that weigh us down or traumas that distress us; they are lessons from which we grow and events that offer us a deeper understanding of the shared hardships affecting minority groups here and abroad. We advocate for change because we have seen how poverty

and a lack of resources burden those around us. We love our communities enough to fight for transformation and change for the most vulnerable, because transformation is what love looks like in public, and advocacy is how empathy sounds when expressed outwardly.

The 2025 Working Summit started with an initial conversation with New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) Commissioner Victoria Kuhn in February of 2023. This was an introductory meeting about mutual interests between the NJDOC and the Latino Action Network Foundation. Commissioner Kuhn was given the 2003 Community & Corrections Working Summit report (see Appendix XXI.1) which truly formed the basis of the criminal-legal transformation movement in New Jersey for people of color. She noticed that it was literally 20 years old and suggested that we possibly do an anniversary event, 20 years later. We then decided to revive the Summit, and create an updated statewide action agenda for New Jersey to consider as it would advise the entire criminal legal system with practical, politically correct, and attainable ways to progress the issues of mass incarceration in the Garden State.

To get started, we gathered a planning team of state leaders and designees, returning citizens, justice-impacted people and incarcerated voices, known as the Criminal Justice Reform Committee in the early planning phase. This group met bi-weekly for about a year, until the formal Working Summit Planning Committee had been established. Our collective intention was to construct a public-facing transformative action agenda that would be prepared by the advocate partners, state

leaders, returning citizens, and incarcerated focus groups. State leaders understood and agreed that they would not have a say in the report narrative, and that it would be constructive, practical and doable. They could offer opinions, but the authoring and construction of the document would solely be the responsibility of advocate partners and returning citizens.

At each facility, we conducted 3 focus group sessions with incarcerated participants over the summer of 2024, at East Jersey State Prison ([recommendations](#)), Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women ([recommendations](#)) and the Youth Justice Commission's Incarcerated Youth Advisory Board ([recommendations](#)). To thank and reward the focus group participants for their exemplary work and contributions to the recommendations report, we conducted an Ubuntu Ancestral Circle meditation at each facility ([flyer sample here](#)). This was a humble gift to the participants for their exemplary work. Our meditational gift was a humble journey through their own ancestral roots to consider the greatness that lies in us all...

We applaud the “in-custody” focus groups who worked tirelessly through the summer of 2024 to submit their report recommendations for change towards this statewide vision for the New Jersey Criminal Legal system. The in custody workgroups and the UBUNTU Ancestral Circle meditations would not have been possible without the blessings of NJDOC Commissioner Victoria Kuhn and Executive Director of the Youth Justice Commission, Dr. Jennifer LeBaron, who allowed us to again include incarcerated voices as we did with the construction of the 2003 report. Focus group participant names are listed in Section II of this report, all of whom have signed name-publishing permissions. We would also like to give special thanks to Administrator Chetirkin of East Jersey State Prison for sharing the few

and only photos taken of incarcerated focus group members (see page 13).

Planning team members met with Monmouth University on 5 formal occasions; we were offered the entire campus for this two day event's venue, as students were absent and were enjoying 2025's winter break. We conducted 6 full partnership meetings with the full planning team up to the event itself. Cuqui conducted 16 breakout room facilitator training sessions with returning citizens and 4 additional training meetings with the full roster of returning citizen facilitators. Throughout the 2024 year, a total of 121 logistical planning meetings were conducted.

We presented and promoted the Working Summit 25 event in a Criminal Justice [breakout session](#) of the 2024 Latino Action Network (C4) Legislative Assembly. Cuqui Rivera presented on the live radio show “All Politics R Local” on three different occasions. We also asked planning team members to create promotional videos about the Working Summit, which were released in the months and weeks preceding the event (see Section XVII. Summit Promotion & Media).

We invited and presented the Working Summit to the NJDOC, Juvenile Justice Commission, NJ Office of the Public Defender, Latino Legislative Caucus, Black Legislative Caucus, United Black Agenda, Unitarian Universalists, Garden State Equality, Faith Leaders Against Racial Exclusion (Trenton), Victoria Foundation 100 years Anniversary Conference (panelist), and the Returning Citizens Support Group Thursday nights' weekly meetings. We were also graciously blessed with the media and videography services of an entire class under the leadership of Professor John Hulme and his team of videographers from Rutgers University, New Brunswick; their names have been listed in Section II of this report

In an effort to include the New Jersey municipal jails, we met with the leadership of Middlesex, Mercer, Essex, and Bergen county jails, but were not able to confirm incarcerated focus groups in any of them.

At the Working Summit 25 event, the partnership contracted artist Suliman Onque (see Appendix XXI.4) to create a canvas piece of live art at the 2025 Working Summit that visibly portrayed this historic event. This canvas was auctioned to the highest bidder at \$550 on Day 2. The proceeds were added to the fund to be split and donated to the Salvation & Social Justice's Trenton Street Team and Returning Citizen Support Group.

We celebrate and applaud ALL of the returning citizens who facilitated this event and the brave incarcerated voices who participated in advocating for change!

The partnership agreed to format the event around three main tracks of focus:

- Track One: Front-End Systems
- Track Two: Systems of Custody
- Track Three: Re-entry & Sustainable Community Integration

Within all three of these tracks, our intentions were to:

- Increase statewide public safety and reduce taxpayer financial burdens.
- Decrease negative BIPOC interactions with law enforcement judicial systems & correctional police officers.
- Develop recommendations to decrease the number of people of color entering prison and further reduce recidivism.
- Assess and upgrade existing policies, regulations, laws, directives, and practices that are not functioning to their best intention.
- Increase resources for returning citizens leaving carceral spaces.
- Develop recommendations to further progress implementation, accountability, and transparency.

The following report details the extensive recommendations submitted by the event's participants, returning citizens, the incarcerated focus groups, and Black and Brown advocates, all of which have been blessed and approved by a select group of returning citizens. This report was publicly released at a joint press conference of the planners and facilitators who made this effort possible, on Juneteenth (June 19th), 2025 at the Returning Citizens Support Group.



Pictured above: Most breakout room facilitators.



Pictured left: Suliman Onque and the auction winner!



Pictured above: East Jersey State Prison focus group. Left to right: Heshimu Heru, Keith Mercer, Mustafa Sandi, Al-Tariq Witcher, Solwazi Nyahuma, James Scott, David Russo; kneeling: Cuqui Rivera, Sammy Moore, and Jeffrey Wise.



Pictured above: the Dignitaries Panel. Left to right: Damon Venable, Dr. Jesselly De La Cruz, Racquel Romans-Henry, Myrna Diaz, Dameon Stackhouse, Suliman Onque (artist).

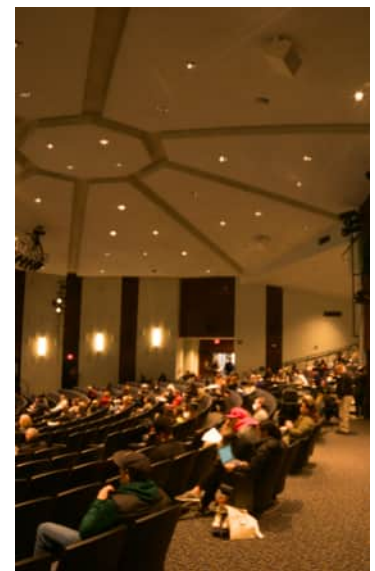


Pictured above: "Credible Messengers" breakout room, facilitated by Russel Owens & Dontae Thomas.



Pictured below: "Law Enforcement Transparency & Accountability" breakout room, facilitated by Dameon Stackhouse (left) and Damon Venable (right).

Pictured below: 2025 Working Summit main auditorium.





Pictured above, left to right: ... Joel Nunez,... Jennifer Selletti, Al-Tariq Witcher, Alicia Hubbard.



Pictured above, left to right: Chino Ortiz, Cuqui Rivera, Administrator Chetirkin, Director John Powell.



Pictured left: The LANF team working the registration table. Left to right: Rebecca Mohr, Saray Ramos, Bianca Nunez, Victor Polanco, Sofia Rosa, Gina Andrade.



Pictured above: panelists from the 2024 LAN Legislative Assembly, promoting the 2025 Working Summit. Left to right: NJDOC Commissioner Victoria Kuhn, Nafessah Goldsmith, Jennifer Selletti, Damon Venable, Racquel Romans-Henry, Sammy Quiles, Steven Campos, Cuqui Rivera.



Pictured above: 2024 LAN Legislative Assembly attendees. Left to right: Christian Esteves, Edwin Ortiz, Nicole Guyette, Ras Baraka, Cuqui Rivera, Jose Ayala, Selina De La Valle, Al-Tariq Witcher, Myrna Diaz.



Pictured above: Cuqui Rivera delivering the Welcome Speech.



Pictured above: in-custody participants of the original 2003 Working Summit!!! Left to right: Hector "Torty" Sanabria, Sean Washington, Jesus "New York" Sanabria.

VIII. WELCOME SPEECH BY CUQUI RIVERA



Anna “Cuqui” Rivera, Working Summit Planning Chair, LANF Outreach Director, is a nationally recognized Latina advocate and Criminal Justice Reform leader in NJ for over 35 years. She is the Outreach Director for the Latino Action Network Foundation, a founding member of the Latino Action Network (LAN), the NJ Prison Justice Watch, Core Team, to name a few. She has extensive expertise in non-profits, Youth, Criminal Justice and Police Reforms, Community Building and Race Relations.

Dear New Jersey,

Thank you for joining us for the 2025 Working Summit! It is an incredible honor and blessing to again lead this historic criminal justice reform event in New Jersey. Our goal these next two days is to develop an action agenda for transformation that New Jersey can and should bring to life over the next 20 years.

Twenty years ago in 2003, the first NJ Community & Corrections Working Summit brought together Black and Latino advocate leaders (specifically, the Hispanic Directors Association of NJ & the NJ Black Issues Convention) to set the stage for this very movement to directly address and reduce the mass incarceration of people of color in New Jersey (see Appendix XXI.1 for the 2003 report). Since then, New Jersey has achieved many major criminal justice reforms, including Police Licensing, Mental Health Community Street Teams, Use of Force Directives, no-cost Public Defender services, Sentencing Reforms, Cannabis legalization, Bail Reform, Isolated Confinement laws, Voting Rights, and so much more (see Appendix XXI.2 and XXI.3).

We come together today, in the wake of 2 decades plus, of a movement that has achieved sooo very much... Yet still has sooo far to go.

So we come together again, in what we have intentionally revived and rebuilt, as an unfamiliar and triggering space. When we did this before, created this similarly uncomfortable and triggering space, it seeded this very movement. We are the army. Breathe that in for a moment. We can, and many times do, fail at what we don't want. So, let's just take a chance, right here, right now, at being uncomfortable. Let us continue to build this thing one compassionate, loving, conscious brick at a time... Together.

This is a space where we listen, to listen, not just hear; not to listen, because “I heard you but”... or to listen because “I can't wait to respond and correct the statement.” Just for today let's try listening to listen. Let's try to build together, the way we did before.

All of us will always have a part to play here... Each one of us...
We are because I Am... I am because we are...

Blessings Forward Family.

IX. JANUARY 7TH KEYNOTE SPEECH



Jerome Harris is an organizer, strategist and racial justice advocate with over fifty year of service in New Jersey. He is co-founder and Chairman Emeritus of the New Jersey Black Issues Convention, was the founding Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Salvation and Social Justice Inc. and is currently a Trustee and chairs the Strategic Directions Committee of the NJ Institute for Social Justice. His career also includes service as NJ Assistant State Treasurer, Essex County Administrator, City Manager in Plainfield, Business Administrator in Trenton and Director of the Urban and Public Policy Institute at Rowan University.

Good Morning! I am because we are; We are because I am.

I'd like to open by greeting each of you in the words of James Weldon Johnson who penned this poem 125 years ago, often referred to now as the "Negro National Anthem". He indicated we should: "Lift every voice and sing, 'Til earth and heaven ring, Ring with the harmonies of Liberty; Let our rejoicing rise, High as the listening skies, Let it resound loud as the rolling sea. Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us, Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us; Facing the rising sun of this new day begun, Let us march on 'til victory is won."

I am honored to have been invited to make these remarks, and I want to congratulate each of you for being present in time. This moment which we hope will be significant in the movement intended to transform the New Jersey carceral system and build a stronger community for all of us. It is an honor to be invited to make this speech by Cuqui. We should all acknowledge our hard work, which has already been done by the president, but we can't do that too often. She is bringing us back together after 23 years. She is truly a friend and a force of nature. Those of you who have been around her know that wherever there is a challenge she is present, wherever there is work to be done she is prepared, and when the work remains to be done she is persistent and pushing us forward. Truly, she is a valued asset to all of us, and again I thank her for this privilege.

I've had an opportunity to work as an active leader in efforts to promote Black and Brown collective work and responsibility. In the Swahili language, that word is Ujima. What that means is we work to build and maintain our community together, and to make our community's problems our problems, and to solve them together. This is what this Summit is about, as Cuqui has indicated. I reflect on the almost half a century of work in this area, going back to the 1980s, working with the Congressional Black Caucus on the first New Jersey minority re-districting project, convening several subsequent conversations around New Jersey issues, Black and Brown issues, under the banner of the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute. Certainly, the 2003 Community & Corrections Working Summit was a highlight and propelled us into significant work in a group founded by, sustained by, and championed by Cuqui Rivera, the Integrated Justice Alliance.

In 2007, we worked on the Advisory Commission on Police Standards, which addressed the question of state police interaction with our community. Subsequently, coming out of the recommendations (and attached in this report) there is information about the legislation championed by Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, who was then the New Jersey Assembly Majority Leader, which remains the bedrock of progress that we've made.

This Summit is in the activist spirit of multi-racial, anti-racial convening that some of us remember. For example, the Newark Black and Puerto Rican Convention that resulted in the election of Kenneth Allen Gibson as the first African-descended mayor of the city of Newark. That was held in 1969. Also in 1969, the original Rainbow Coalition, involving the Black Panther Party, the Young Patriots Organization, and the Young Lords. These activist-spirited, multi-racial, and anti-racist convenings undergird what it is we're doing here today.

I want to salute the leadership of the Latino Action Network, the Returning Citizens Support Group, and Salvation & Social Justice, who actually represent the new core of this moment. I know that none of these organizations existed in 2003 when we first convened, and that is an example or affirmation that we are making progress. I also want to commend the elected officials and state officials who thought it valuable to commit themselves to participate in what truly could be an uncomfortable conversation. Unlikely partners coming together at the same table is something that is at the heart of this work, if we are to make progress.

Very often and looking at the registration list, I did not recognize many names. So I am presuming that a number of you are from what I call "the Hip-Hop Generation" while I come from "the Mo-Town Generation". There is this tension that exists; often we hear that folks from the Mo-Town Generation do not understand or stand in the way of the Hip-Hop Generation taking over and taking control. Well I am going to make an obvious statement, a point in time motion, what we are doing is not passing on the torch. But I'm hoping that our comments, our work and our experiences allow my light to ignite your torch so that you move forward and take this to new heights and new levels.

There are a couple of things that I want to share with you that I think are important lessons and are relevant to this moment that we are in right now.

Elections have consequences; New Jersey is one of two states that will be electing new governors into the legislature. We have the history of the 1989 election, a group of us got together, focused on the question of minority health disparities, and got both gubernatorial candidates before the election was undertaken to commit to establishing the Office of Minority Health. I suggest to you that this gathering today has that opportunity again, to help frame the agenda for debate, and I encourage us to make certain we talk to candidates of both parties, at all levels, to make certain that our voices are amplified.

Secondly, relationships precede the work. This is an idea that comes from the lessons of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the young activist group that existed in the 1960's, created in large part under the guidance of a woman named Ella Baker. The notion is that before we work, we first must have a set of relationships with each other. If we have bad relationships, we can expect there to be tension and dysfunction. Spending time getting to know who you are, who each other are, where we come from, what our life experiences have been is so important. So, remember relationships precede the work.

Another point I'd like to share with you is, a movement without knowledge of its history is like a tree without roots. That is a statement that is frequently attributed to Marcus Garvey, a returning citizen who made a major difference in understanding the relationship of people of color to this nation and this world. I think it is also important as you develop this action agenda, to also think about identifying our objectives and measures of how we know we're doing. One of the shortcomings, while we have had a lot of legislation passed, some of the questions are how much have we really done, how well have we done it, and who is better off? I think it is important we ask ourselves these questions as we do this work.

I am really confident that this gathering will accomplish much because of the extraordinary group of facilitators who will be leading the constructive conversation as we try to build an action agenda grounded in education, reform, and empowerment. These facilitators are returning citizens who honor the legacy of iconic individuals such as Rosa Parks, Bayard Rustin, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Angela Davis. As a result of the facilitation work of our facilitators, I'm hoping that we leave here with commitments to growing in awareness and understanding of the work that must be done; engaging communities and individuals with lived experiences as we do that work; committed to transforming systems that have caused long-term damage to our communities of color. Indeed, working toward the transformation of those systems so that there is repair. And finally, we should be committed to strengthening our communities of color, which in the end, if they are wiser, stronger, and better, then New Jersey is wiser, stronger, and better.

Cuqui talks about the importance of the conversation and the behaviors that we are being asked to engage in; it might be difficult. I want to point out a couple of things that might be important. First, I ask you to be an active listener and ask questions that seek clarity, not to expose differences.

Second, prioritize reaching agreements rather than winning arguments; too often we feel that if our voices are not heard and we are not victorious in winning the point, we have not done our job. Our job today is to attempt to agree on moving the agenda forward.

Third, attempt to avoid being triggered about what you hear, what you feel. We are emotional people, we are connected. It may be difficult, and so Cuqui and the organizers have provided space for you to "detox" if you will, please feel free to take advantage of that.

I think I will conclude here with a couple of thoughts. First, there is an unfinished agenda. I am really impressed with the recommendations and work that have already been done; much of what it is, and you'll have the opportunity to discuss and exchange around today have already come from the hard work that preceding the organizing committee getting communications and conversations going. But there are a couple of things that I think are still on the table as unfinished items and tools in our toolkit that I want you to pay attention to. One is the Office of the State Comptroller. Kevin Walsh is charged with reviewing, assessing, and determining whether or not laws and programs are meeting their statutory obligations. With that in mind, I think we should be asking the question as to whether or not legislation around, for example, The Opportunity to Compete Act or the so-called "Ban the Box", is that working? Is the Department of Labor doing what it should be doing, or should that be stepped up? On the notion of the restoration of probation, voting rights to probationaries and parolees; is that really moving forward? Is the Department of State in the state of New Jersey providing sufficient resources for organizations who can from the ground-up can do that work? And the whole package of bills that Cuqui has provided you which are a result of the bills passed by Bonnie Watson Coleman in 2010, have they in fact been implemented? These are all questions that we need answers to. Kevin Walsh needs to have someone raise those questions with him. I believe that it does not have to be confrontational; state agencies that are responsible for the implementation of these laws can work hand-in-hand, and in fact, get congressional expertise and support to make certain that the money we are spending is having an impact.

I also want you to think largely about giving support to the model that is the Integrated Justice Alliance; it is that vehicle that was created after the 2003 Summit that has kept the beat alive and maintained the momentum in our memory. It has been a space in which we have been able to continue constructive conversations. But it is not funded, it is not supported, it is a collective impact entity that is dependent on volunteer activity. Perhaps we should reach out to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Victoria Foundation, the Fund for New Jersey, or another similar to suggest that they support the Integrated Justice Alliance or a mechanism like that to make certain that the work goes forward.

I'm thinking that we are now at the point with the success we have had, the energy that has been put in, the preparation, and the outstanding facilitation we have, that we can now look forward to marching on to victory as one.

In the words of McFadden and Whitehead, I would say there "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now".

Thank you.

X. JANUARY 8TH KEYNOTE SPEECH



Dr. Joël Núñez is a New Jersey state licensed clinical psychologist. He owns and operates Prov 205, a multi-purpose agency providing: 1) comprehensive professional, student, and parental development services to local and national school districts, colleges, and universities as well as workforce and service delivery solutions to private and public sector agencies; 2) forensic psychological evaluations in immigration, juvenile waiver, adult resentencing and other criminal matters along with expert witness testimony throughout the state and region; and 3) a psychological group practice in Bayonne specializing in the treatment of individuals, couples, and families facing various challenges in living.

It's my privilege and my pleasure to be with you this morning. I'm energized; I am encouraged to be in this space with so many of you. Those of us who are engaged in the tireless pursuit of justice reform and see it as our vocation, not a job, not something that we do, something that we are because we are called to it. It is encouraging and energizing because as we do this work, typically we do it from our own silos. We do it in isolation, we have our heads buried down in the day to day – so, to have the opportunity to be in this space together truly is encouraging. Whether we're operating from primary or secondary prevention, I know that there are educators present in this place and mental health professionals. Those of us who are engaged in the task of disrupting and dismantling the dreaded school to prison pipeline, which I would argue as a clinical psychologist actually is the cradle to school to prison pipeline.

Those of us who are engaged tirelessly in the work of primary and secondary intervention – the diversion programs, the probation programs – all of the programs designed to get our young people off of the trajectory that will land them in contact with the justice system and return them to a normative trajectory where they can be a blessing to the communities that they come from. Whether we are engaged on the back end of the sector, the spectrum of reform and justice work with reentry and reintegration, and those of our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters who are engaged in the Returning Citizen Support Group, for example. We are all engaged in this work, and this is the reason that for me it is a blessing, energizing and encouraging to be with you.

I want to suggest to you from the outset that there is a combustible that has enabled us as a community to make all of the reforms that have occurred in the state of New Jersey over the past 20 years or more since the first Working Summit, which positioned us as a model for so many other states... What's going to allow us to transform from where we are now to where we'd like to be and envision being – where the criminal legal and the juvenile legal system is transformed into a juvenile justice system and a criminal justice system, because just because is legal doesn't make it just – I'd like to propose that combustible is going to be one of collective responsibility and individual accountability.

Collective responsibility because we represent these different sectors of justice work. As we represent these different sectors, those sectors have different objectives, different means of being able to reach the goals and aspirations that they have. Yet the easiest and most unprofitable thing that we can do is to operate as representatives of those different entities and organizations and agencies as though we somehow have a monopoly on truth and solutions, – and we don't.

The most easy and the most unprofitable thing that we can do as individuals is to proceed at working summits, at we sit at tables shoulder to shoulder with other folks representing other perspectives and frameworks, is to proceed as though we have a monopoly on solutions and answers to these complex pressing problems, and as though we are exempt from the shortcomings, failures, and blindsides that inadvertently lead us as representatives of entities and also as individuals to enhancing and maintaining inequities in our system. That is the danger of siloes.

The book that I value most says that before we attend to the spec in our neighbor's eye, we should first become aware of and deal with the plank in our own.

So this framework of collective responsibility and individual accountability, I argue from the outset, is that necessary combustible, that in amalgamation is going to allow us to get from where we are today to where we'd like to be in another 20 years.

I will never forget the day not long ago, not far from here, where I was able to see that type of call, the beckoning, the yearning for collective responsibility and individual accountability played out. We're all aware of the African adage, the proverb that guides so many of us in our work that says that it takes a village to raise a child.

Sometimes it's so overused, it becomes hackneyed, it becomes trite, but it is no less true today as it had ever been. We are the village. And it is our responsibility to ensure that the inequities that still exist in the system that leave some communities overburdened with the impact of the justice system to be transformed. We are that village. At the same time, I argue that we ought to attend to the counterpoint to that adage; another African proverb that is oftentimes unrecognized, but is just as potent and creates for each of us as individuals and all of us with our collective responsibility, it gives us an admonition. That is that when we fail, oftentimes because we begin to engage in finger pointing and "I've got the solution and you should listen to me and you all have done wrong or haven't done what you should"... When we fail to act collectively and with that sense of individual accountability the other African adage comes to be, and that is the child who is not embraced by the village will one day burn it down in order to feel its warmth.

So many of the individuals that I have had the pleasure and privilege of meeting on that side of the wall and have come home and are now flourishing on this side of the wall as advocates and as activists. Often they tell me, whether they could articulate it as young people or not, it was

precisely because they failed to feel the embrace of different systems beginning in their home. Then in schools where these young men or older men will tell me “I was passed from grade to grade despite the fact that the educators knew that I didn't understand.”

They will tell me one way or another implicitly or explicitly that they began to rebel and rail against those systems that were intended to support them, protect them, keep them on a normative developmental trajectory; and when they deviated, bring them back onto a normative developmental trajectory. Not feeling the embrace and the support of those systems together, with their very own choices and volition which should never be diminished, they began to burn down those systems – and all of us feel the burden and the tragic consequences associated with those choices.

So this collective responsibility that we bear and this individual accountability is on display every day.

I felt it and was able to see it not long ago in a courtroom that I was invited to. I was invited to conduct a forensic psychological evaluation for a young man who had unfortunately committed a heinous set of acts. He was tried as an adult and sentenced. I was invited then by the private attorney, who retained my services, to present before the court and aid the court in its determination about the length of sentence and the place of sentence for this young man who had burned down the village that he did not feel embraced from.

As I went to the stand and I presented as I typically do, I tried to in some way present a holistic picture of who this young man was. As Brian Stevenson, the famed civil right attorney puts it, *we are all more than the worst thing that we have done*.

So these psychological evaluations that I attempt to craft are intended to present a holistic ecological context within which the behavior that takes place occurs; so that the court can understand that this is a human being, and whatever it was they have done – in this case he killed – he is more than simply a killer. He came from a place and factors urged him in one direction or another leading him to make choices that he is now responsible for but others are as well.

So this attorney who brought me forth, he conducted the direct examination afterwards. The prosecutor did a very vigorous (this is quite often the case) cross-examination. There was redirect. The judge asked a few clarifying questions and I was asked to step off the stand. Typically, that ends my participation in a case. I am ushered out of the courtroom and I may discover later on the case outcome from the attorneys involved. In this case, the private attorney who called upon me requested that I stay in the courtroom. He said, “Dr. Nunez, there is something that I need you to see.”

I said, “okay” and sat in the gallery. After the prosecution indicated what the state was requesting in terms of a sentence and the defense got the opportunity to do the same, the attorney said to the court, “Your Honor, at this time in my presentation, as I have been before

you in the past, you know that before sentencing I typically present a coterie of individuals who are able to speak to the character of this young person so that you can know and perhaps in clemency or leniency deal mercifully with this individual at the hour of sentence. As I look out upon the gallery today, Your Honor, there are plenty of people here who can speak intimately to the life of this young person. There are people representing his family. They're here and they're willing and able to testify, but you will not be hearing from any of them today. As I look out upon this gallery, I see people representing the faith community that he was a part of from the time that he was a small boy, that faith community is willing and able to testify today, but you will not be hearing from them. There are people here from the educational centers, the elementary school, the high school that he attended or that he was enrolled at, and they are willing and able to testify, your honor, but you will not be hearing from them today. There are folks from the social service agencies that begin to intervene in his life after he was going astray. They are willing, they are able to testify today, but you will not be hearing from them today. The only voice, your honor, that will speak for this young man, other than me, is Dr. Nunez who spoke before."

The attorney continued, and he said: "Your honor, if this were a court of justice, those people that I mentioned who are in the gallery who have intimate knowledge of this young man would be sitting at defense table now to be sentenced with him. But this isn't a court of justice, your honor. This is a court of law, and so that young man will sit alone and will be sentenced. Because as I look out in the gallery, I see the grandmother who became his primary guardian after the death of his father, who knew that the father was sexually abusing this young man, who knew it because in their native country the father had been constricted, taken by force, and forced to be part of a rebel army. When she finally was able to get him back from that rebel army, the young man, the father of the defendant, confessed in tears, "Mommy, I did terrible things. I witnessed rapes and murders, and I was made to participate in rapes and murders. When I would come back at night into the rebel army camps, I was raped again and again by those men who said they were my family." The mother said in reply, "Hush, child. You know that is shameful in our nation for a man to have been sexually abused by another man. We will tell no one of this, and we're going to move to America and we'll start over, and the past will be the past." When that young man came to the United States and began to succumb to the ills of substance abuse, some way trying to cope with all of the discordant memories that he had, and when he began to engage in physical abuse of his own children, and then sexual abuse of his own children, she did nothing. That's why she will not be speaking today, your honor."

The attorney continued, and he said: "The brother who himself was sexually abused as well, several years older than this young man, even when the father succumbed to a drug overdose, could have taken his younger brother by the arm and said, "I'll be your father figure. We'll move in a different direction." Even before the father's death, when the young man was being taken to a local park to be sexually trafficked by the father in order to feed the father's drug habit, the older brother knew this and did nothing. Then when the younger brother, after the death of the father, goes back to the scene of the crime, goes back to the very park where he was trafficked and falls into the clutches of an older criminal gang who decide to make friends with

him, only to use and exploit him, and in the process, make him yet again a child soldier, making this vicious cycle return again and again. The brother knew and did nothing, and that's why he will not be testifying. If this was a law, a court of justice, he'd be sitting right alongside his brother, and the friends who knew it, they'd be sitting alongside the brother, and the schools that fade him, they would be sitting around the brother. He implicated everybody. He implicated attorneys and himself. He implicated other mental health professionals, psychologists such as myself, who would go and meet with this young man and say, "He's nothing more than an animal. Nothing can be done. I may not be able to write a report in his favor. If I did, it would not be advantageous, because I don't believe that he is anything more than the worst thing that he's done. I believe that he is permanently incorrigible, that he is irreparably corrupt. They should be sitting at defense table with this young man."

The combustible that will take us from where we are today to where we'd like to be 20 years from now begins and must be bathed in our collective sense of responsibility and our individual accountability, recognizing that we are the village that it takes to raise these children. When we fail to act, powered by the humility, powered by the sense of decency and dignity that every human being is entitled to – we are creating and fostering a group of young people who will burn the village down for failing to have felt its embrace.

What is it that hinders us, that makes it so very difficult for us as human beings, for us as professionals, for us as advocates, for us as activists to be able to engage in that type of work, to be able to examine the plank in our eye before we point out the speck in someone else's? I want to suggest to you that it isn't malice. It isn't indifference. It isn't apathy. It's just human nature. All of us as human beings have to deal with a way of understanding and making sense of a world in which we are bombarded at every moment with billions of pieces of sensory data. What does our brain do in response to that type of cacophony of experience? What it does is create cognitive thin slices, patterns that enable us to navigate the world without becoming overcome by it.

If you've never been in this room before, and you've never sat in the seat that you're sitting in today, I ask you, when you sat down, did you approach it carefully, inspect it? Did you test its weight to be able to ensure that it would be able to support you without flipping you over? Of course you didn't, otherwise there'd be nobody sitting next to you because that's weird. What you did instead is what you have done when you've entered countless rooms, theaters, and auditoriums; your brain assumed that because you've never been flipped upside down when sitting in a chair, that you could trust this chair. Your brain took a thin slice, and as a result of pattern recognition determined beforehand, it would be safe. We do that thousands of times every single day. It is a life-saving, elegant, efficient process. The problem is that when that system runs amok, we begin to establish patterns where patterns don't exist, and this results in what we know in psychology to be cognitive biases. I want to remind you that once again, this is what enables that process and why the book I value most thousands of years ago before the science was available to help us understand that this is what we do, indicated the proclivity, the inclination, and the tendency that we have as human beings to look outward and project all of our failings and shortcomings and not see that our stuff stinks too.

The first of the cognitive biases that I want to present that is responsible for making it difficult for us to engage in the work of collective responsibility and individual accountability so that we sit at a Working Summit table, we begin to look outward explicitly or implicitly and suggest, "I have the answers and your sector doesn't quite as much," is because of what we call the fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error suggests that when I or someone appreciably similar to me fails, comes up short, errs, I attribute that failing and that shortcoming to circumstance.

I say the odds weren't in their favor. If I have to testify, I would say, "Your honor, he or she, they're a bastion of their community, they're a pillar." What they did was just an act of passion. It doesn't represent who they are. That's what we do when someone fails who we have determined, a priori, is appreciably similar to us. But when someone that we determine is appreciably dissimilar from us, fails, comes up short, errs in the same way, we do not attribute their failings to circumstance. We attribute their failings to character. We say that there is something intrinsically about them that renders them so incapable of toeing the line, of adhering to a certain work ethic, of a certain way of being. That happens when we sit together as representatives of different sectors and segments of the justice spectrum, but it happens every day when we evaluate the conduct and the outcomes of our mothers and fathers, of our brothers and sisters, of our sons and daughters who come into contact with the justice system.

The second cognitive bias that we often have to deal with is confirmation bias. Confirmation bias suggests when I am enthralled to an idea, to a conclusion, my mind in an effort to thin slice and be elegant and to be efficient will begin to do the following. Number one, dismiss evidence that doesn't align with what I believe; and so I just don't see it and I've got blind spots that prevent me from seeing it. Number two, the confirmation bias; once I am enthralled to an idea, a conclusion, whether it's right or wrong is irrelevant, my brain will begin to cherry pick evidence that aligns with what I already believe. In the absence of evidence that aligns with what I believe, when I am enthralled to an idea through the confirmation bias, my brain will simply fabricate evidence. Think about the repercussions and implications of that. We don't do it because we're malicious. There aren't five men in a smoke-filled room carving up Europe anymore. It's not a matter of what people are doing in order to keep a certain segment of the population down. It now is a matter of what cognitively we are capable of doing, and if we don't take the time to recognize the plank in our own eyes, we will fall guilty of doing the same thing again and again.

So that 20 years from now, as we look back and think about the justice reforms we were able to do, we would have to in a moment of humility say so much more could have been done had I been willing to do the first difficult introspective work. I've had the privilege of meeting so many brothers and sisters who have come home from behind the wall and formed kinship bonds with them. One of the elements of their lives that always strikes me again and again is their capacity and their willingness to do the deep work of introspection continually. I don't know people like them outside of folks who have come home from behind the wall. I spend more time with them or want to be in their presence than I do with other men my age who all

they want to talk about is if Dallas won the game or who's going to win next week. I don't get a check if my team wins. I would rather be in the presence of men and of women who recognize their own failings but who have built the cognitive infrastructure within them that allows them to say here's where I've screwed up and I'm going to permit you to hold me accountable to that. I need to be in the presence of such people because it reminds me the aspiration that I have to be that type of person.

The next cognitive bias is a belief and a just world and a meritocracy. This is a good thing. I proceed in the world and you proceed in the world as though good things happen to good people. The flip side of that is that we proceed in the world when we see negative outcomes we tend to implicitly inadvertently presume "well bad things happen to bad people." You see how that lays at the root of our perceptions and conclusions about who enters the justice system, about who is disproportionately impacted by the justice system, and we could believe that whether we are of the same skin tone or the same socioeconomic conditions of those who suffer or not. It is a human inclination, it is a human tendency, and finally implicit biases.

We've all been socialized in the same place called the United States of America. I am the child of Dominican immigrants. I am thankful that my parents came from the country that they did and chose to have their four children here so that we could be educated here and have opportunities here. I come from a family of very, very humble origins and I am quite certain that if I had been born and raised in the Dominican Republic, I'd be Joel Nunez, but I wouldn't be before you today as Dr. Joel Nunez. That is because in so many of our countries, there isn't a class system that features class mobility. Instead, there is a caste system where the intersection between socioeconomic condition and the color of our skin oftentimes dictates how far you are able to go. So I am thankful to be in this place called the United States, but I also recognize the other side of the coin that the socialization that all of us have been subjected to here in the United States that has hundreds of years of history and hundreds of years of justification for that history, makes it hard for us to recognize the ways in which we come to conclusions about people who have been blessed with a certain level of melanin in their skin, and what the possibilities and limits for them are.

So as we embark on this next 20 years of justice work in the state of New Jersey that thus far have led us to be a model for the nation, I suggest that it is collective responsibility and individual accountability that's going to move us from here to there. When we engage in that work, we will find advocates and allies from unexpected places because it's a human thing to be willing to do that type of work.

So I remember not too long ago, not too far from here, I was in another courtroom. I was invited to conduct a psychological forensic evaluation for another young person, who had been alleged to have committed a heinous set of crimes. The private attorney who retained me invited me to come and to give the same type of ecological context, a set of testing from which I could derive certain conclusions and make recommendations to the court, aiding the court in making its determination about this young man. I won't go into the detail, but the type of

behavior that the attorney who had retained me was displaying in court was so disturbing that at one point, the young man that he was defending wrapped on the table in front of him in order to wake him.

The questions that I was receiving on direct examination were curious ones because they were very superficial. They had more of an interest in the test that I gave and why. As opposed to how those tests could help to shed light on who this young man was and the levels of adverse childhood experiences that he had experienced and the types of toxic levels of stress that derail and degrade the functioning of the brain that suggested exactly why he was floundering in school and exactly why his decision making and his level of self-control was so diminished and exactly why he was so very susceptible to external influence and pressure and coercion. There was no interest in these things from the attorney who had retained me to defend in his act of defending this young man. It was curious, strange.

So the direct examination was concluded. It was the prosecutor's turn, and you would assume that the prosecutor would say, "I have no questions for this man because the other attorney, he did everything that needed to be done or not." Curiously, the prosecutor stood up and began to ask me questions that were not closed-ended questions, that were not leading questions designed to simply give the response of yes or no as a cross-examination is wanted to do. He asked me open-ended questions about, "Dr. Nunez, does it surprise you that despite all of the challenges and his cognitive and intellectual capability that you suggest come directly as a result of these adverse childhood experiences, does it surprise you that this young man never received an IEP at school?"

I looked at him incredulously and said, is this some sort of a trap? I said, "Yes." So he said, "Please, Dr. Nunez, go on. Tell us more." I was dumbstruck. That's not his role. With trepidation, I began to say, "Well, it does surprise me, but it doesn't surprise me. It doesn't surprise me because our urban schools are sometimes so overwhelmed with the amount of kids who present in the very same way that their resources are limited..." I paused to see if he was going to cut me off, but he didn't. He said, "Go on, Dr. Nunez." So I did, and I spoke at depth about these adverse childhood experiences. I talked at depth about the intergenerational transmission of trauma and that trauma not dealt with, not detected in one generation means trauma transferred to the subsequent generation. I began to implicate communities and systems and talk about everything that I had found – and he let me go.

At the end of that very curious and strange interchange, the prosecutor said, I don't have any more questions. Incidentally, I should tell you that as I was giving some of my responses, that private attorney who had retained my services in aid and defense of this young man objected on several occasions.

Thankfully, the judge overruled those objections and said, “I will hear from Dr. Nunez.” As all of this was done and concluded, and we were going to recess, I'm walking out of the courtroom. I'm looking at the prosecutor, and he walks up to me and he says, “I'm a prosecutor, and I have a job to do. I represent the stakeholders of victims and their families. I represent the community. I've got to stand up for them, but I'm also a human being. Our law dictates that every person has the right to a vigorous defense, has a right to a fair and equitable presentation of who it is that they are. That young man was not receiving that today.”

Collective responsibility and individual accountability. When we engage in that, whether we be activists, advocates, attorneys, defense, prosecution, whether we represent the Department of Corrections, whatever sector of the justice or legal system we represent – humanity and dignity can be found there even as we do our work, if we are willing to begin with that laborious, intensive self-examination.

I want to leave you with the following. There's a Native American proverb that speaks to me a great deal and in some ways is a guiding principle for my life. I hope it can speak to you in some way as you endeavor and labor to continue to do the justice work whatever sector of the system you find yourself in. It reads as follows: “When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Endeavor to live your life in such a way that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice.”

May God help us and guide us in this work of justice, our commitment to it, regardless of the cost, regardless of the circumstances, guided by principles of humility, humanity, and great dignity, regardless of what folks have done.

I thank you today for your time. God bless you, and your efforts.

Thank you.

XI. DIGNITARIES PANEL COMMENTARY



Dr. Jesselly De La Cruz; LCSW, Executive Director of the Latino Action Network Foundation, holds a BA in Political Science from Rider University, an MSW and DSW from Rutgers University, and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Family Therapy. Driven by her immigrant background, she specializes in mental health crisis work, family therapy, and care for underserved populations, including sexual assault survivors and court-mandated youth. A former President of the Latino Mental Health Association of NJ, she is passionate about empowering Latino communities, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth, and families in need.

When I really think of why this work is important, it is not that Black and Brown people are more likely or at more risk of committing crime, but that the lived experience of being Black and Brown has been criminalized by the justice system. American history has and continues to have a different set of laws and rules of assessing what's right and wrong for Black and Brown people – the way we walk, talk, dress, love, and move – as opposed to the rest of the country.

The 2025 Working Summit, that we organized with Salvation and Social Justice and the Returning Citizens Support Group, is about the justice-impacted person and their environment before, during, and after incarceration. Our planning and work to bring this event together has been centered on racial justice and healing trauma through relationships. At every step of our discussions, we have included those most harmed by mass incarceration so that they can regain their voice and together we can build the power to not only shape change, but also to recover from the systems that impact our lives.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention first began looking at the impact of trauma on justice-impacted youth in 1974. And, 50 years later, the CDC's and the National Institute for Health's research continues to highlight how child abuse and adverse childhood experiences can increase a person's risk for becoming trapped in the criminal justice system. We believe it is our mission to break that cycle of traumatic impact at any point in time, at any point in the lifespan that we can – whether it be childhood before age 6 or in adulthood to end of life.

Peter Levine, one of the first people to really understand and discuss the way our bodies respond to trauma, said it best: "Trauma can be life altering but it does not have to be a life sentence." We believe that we all play a role in helping others heal from the worst moments of their life. As a human rights organization, this belief is what will continue to drive the work at the Latino Action Network Foundation.



Racquel Romans-Henry currently serves as the Policy Director of Salvation and Social Justice (SSJ). Racquel is an advocate and policy expert who works with individuals, organizations, and communities to amplify the voices of those who have historically been relegated to the margins of society, ensuring their voices and lived experiences inform policy changes in New Jersey. At SSJ, she has worked on campaigns that address the state's most critical social justice issues, including police accountability efforts, health equity, and the decriminalization of cannabis. Racquel earned her Master's Degree in Public Policy and International Relations from William Paterson University.

Good morning to everyone on the panel and everyone in the room.

It's not easy to put something like this together. It requires a great deal of strategy, precision, toil, patience, frustration at times, but above all else, it requires a great deal of love. I believe it was the late, great Kwame Ture that said we have to have an undying love for our people.

Cuqui, Dr. Jesselly, my comrades at LAN and all on the planning committee, you have demonstrated that you possess what can only be described as an undying love for our people, and this tremendous summit is evidence of that love. So I want to again, personally, thank you. On behalf of Reverend Boyer, our team at SSJ, and the Trenton Restorative Street Team, but also from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for continuing to show us and demonstrate that love is an action word.

For those who may not be familiar with our organization and the work that we do at SSJ, we are a Black-led, nonpartisan, faith-rooted social justice organization. We leverage the reach and the power of the Black faith institution in our community and throughout the state to advance policy that would ultimately dismantle structurally racist institutions in our state; taking our people from the lament that is the outcry of the harms that are being caused by these systems to liberation. This is only possible through organizing, mobilizing, and actualizing our agency in this fight.

Central to the how and the why we do what we do, are the voices of the directly impacted. Perhaps the thing that we're most proud of at SSJ is that all of our work, campaigns, and initiatives are informed by the voices of directly impacted. That's where we start, and SSJ merely serves as a vehicle for the people to get their recommendations and their priorities to the table; making sure that they are seated at decision-making tables.

That's really what's so beautiful about what we've been able to accomplish here at the Working Summit, that we're moving in that same spirit. Unlike a lot of spaces, the goal here is not to co-opt, extract, or exploit the voices of those who have been directly impacted, and then chop, screw, remix, and repackage as our own.

The goal here is to get the people who bear the marks – the physical, mental, and emotional scars of these systems – in the same room with some of the people who work within those institutions. And have an opportunity to contribute so that we can heal, learn, and try to move the needle forward in making things better. By better, we're not talking about black squares on your Facebook profile, kind of better. We're talking about something long lasting, something substantive.

20 years ago, I believe it was done in a room similar to this. And while progress never moves as fast as we'd like it to, I believe we've done a great deal since then. So whether it be the decriminalization of cannabis, and making sure that 70% of the sales tax is invested back into the communities who have been harmed by a racist war on drugs; the restoration of voting rights for 83,000 of our brothers and sisters who were once behind the wall; or securing over \$8 million to go towards restorative justice hubs that protect our babies from the school to prison pipeline.

We also have historic legislation that establishes community led crisis response teams as an alternative to police in our communities; and legislation that brought home over 8,000 people at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when our people were dying at alarming rates behind the wall. That's mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, that were able to come home – and guess what? They didn't recidivate, they didn't return. The recidivism rate is less than 1%.

So despite all of those successes – and we should feel good about them – there's still a great deal more to do. I trust that if you're here today with all of us, if you left your home and braved this coldest day of the year, then you're prepared to do that work... Prepared to do the work that's necessary to get incarcerated seniors home, who have served their time and paid their debt to society, who pose no risk to public safety. To do the work in supporting our community-led crisis response teams, making sure that they get the sound investments necessary to do this really invaluable and noble work; which they do at great cost to themselves personally, while yielding very little financial compensation. Making sure that they have the funds, resources, and support to continue to do the work.

If you're here today, I'm honored to be in your company and to continue to do the work alongside you.



Myrna Diaz is a returning citizen and NJ-STEP Summa Cum Laude Graduate, where she focused on justice studies and working toward being a voice for incarcerated persons. After serving 18 years, she was one of the first women to be granted clemency on December 18th, 2024 by Governor Phil Murphy, under his new Clemency Project Initiative. Today, Myrna works as an Attorney Assistant in the Appellate Division of the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender.

Good afternoon, everyone.

I stand before you today with a heart full of gratitude and humility. I want to sincerely thank each of you, and especially, The Latino Action Network Foundation, for the opportunity to be here – not just in this room, but in this role, in this life that has been renewed.

Receiving clemency is more than just a second chance – it is a profound act of faith. It says, "We believe in your capacity to grow, to change, and to contribute." For that act of grace, I am eternally grateful. I do not take it lightly. It has changed the course of my life.

Equally, being given employment after such a chapter is not something I take for granted. It is a door that many never see opened. I am grateful not only for the job itself at LAN, but for the trust, the dignity, and the purpose that comes with it. Every day, I come to work with the determination to honor that trust – to prove that mercy was not misplaced, and that investment in me will bring good returns.

To my colleagues and leadership: thank you for your kindness, patience, and encouragement. You've reminded me what it feels like to be seen not for a past mistake, but for present potential.

To others who may be walking a similar road: never give up hope. Grace is real. Redemption is possible. And people – good people – are out there willing to offer a second chance.

Thank you for believing in me, for seeing me, and for welcoming me.

I now would like to expand on my experience within the legal system. I spent eighteen years trying to obtain relief from the Appellate Courts. The process was daunting and overwhelming. My court transcripts bared witness to my attorney being arrested during indictment and an organization practicing without a license at the County Jail that took on my case.

I stand here today because of Governor Murphy's Clemency Initiative. I am a nine-eleven survivor and a domestic violence survivor.

Based on my experience, I put forth the following recommendations:

1. Access to education while incarcerated is vital toward the success of returning citizens. NJ-STEP was instrumental in helping me develop my skills in critical thinking and communication. Without them I would not have been granted the opportunity to be employed by LANF! We must continue to maintain the opportunity for higher education to all who are incarcerated.

2. While at Edna I worked as an ILA (inmate legal advisor - *but the NJDOC rename this program to incarcerated, not inmate*). While there I discovered three areas that most of the women were effected by: sexual assault, drugs and domestic violence. Many had no mother figure at home for guidance. My question to many was, “when do we begin to help young girls so they do not fall victims to the judicial system and allow their trauma to be the catalyst for prison?” I believe community programs play a vital role in shaping the future of young girls by providing safe spaces for learning, growth, and empowerment. These programs offer mentorship, skill-building opportunities, and exposure to positive role models, which are essential in building self-confidence and resilience. By addressing challenges such as inequality, limited access to resources, and societal pressure, community initiatives help young girls discover their potential and pursue their goals. Moreover, these programs foster a sense of belonging and community, encouraging young girls to support one another. There is a great need for communities to begin helping our young women. Collaborations between the school system and our community needs to be implemented.

3. As a returning citizen, opportunities for employment and housing are vital for success. More funding needs to be granted to programs like The Returning Citizens Support Group in Newark, who have made an impact on my integration back into Society. More funding needs to be granted to organizations like The Latino Action Network, who are hiring returning citizens like me and placing them on the path toward financial independence. We really need to understand what our returning citizens need and begin to help these organizations that are truly making a difference.

Before I end, I ask that we do not forget our non-English speaking populations those on the inside as well as those on the outside, who are vulnerable and need our help.

I am extremely honored to be a part of the Working Summit, extremely grateful to our Governor Murphy for this opportunity he has given me, and extremely thankful to The Latino Action Network Foundation for giving me a chance and for having me here today at this monumental event the 2025 Working Summit. Thank you!



Dameon Stackhouse; MSW, LSW, CPRS, is a Justice Fellow with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and a board member of the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, where he advocates for equitable access to education and opportunities for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. He also serves as the Community Police Alliance Supervisor for Somerset County, supporting individuals in crisis through collaborative efforts with law enforcement and community partners.

Good morning.

Sammy Quiles said it yesterday: “there are so many individuals inside that are so loving and caring, and more compassionate than you could ever imagine.” It's something that you really can't put into words.

There were brothers that forged a brotherhood and we promised each other we would do everything that we said on the inside.

I was one of the first individuals to come home and was told, what I do will determine whether or not others get a second chance. And that's a heavy burden. Because I knew that if I didn't do the things that needed to be done, Mr. Johnson wouldn't have an opportunity to come home like he did yesterday. That the programs wouldn't continue to expand into the other facilities because we're always piloting.

I became a licensed social worker and my clinical hours are being determined by the board, which is also some issues that we're dealing with. Because of my criminal background, I'm going through extra hurdles to do what's needed in our communities; to provide that therapy to individuals that have been previously incarcerated and are on the streets about to make a bad decision because they don't have someone to communicate to that they can relate to.

So I'm honored to be in this space to have this conversation. If it wasn't for that white page that was written by the brothers on the inside in the law library, which was taken to Bonnie Watson-Coleman and made into a bill and then passed into legislation (see Appendix XXI.2 “We Did It!” 2010 Legislative Successes) – we wouldn't have this opportunity to have this conversation and be the voice to change the next 20 years to make sure that our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren don't continue to go through this cycle.

This generational cycle that they started from the beginning when they brought us over here to this country.

I'm just honored to be here, and to have a say in what happens in the law.



Damon “Sharuka” Venable is the Community Affairs & Policy Specialist with the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender (NJOPD). He was tried as an adult and convicted to a sentence of life imprisonment for a crime he committed when he was 16. Damon was released on parole after serving over three and a half decades in prison. While inside, he graduated from the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. After his release, he joined the NJOPD as a paralegal and is now serving in a number of roles in that office, including as a liaison for interagency collaborative initiatives.

The following is a transcription of the moderator’s reponse to panel members’ statements.

If you look at [Appendices XXI.2 and XXI.3], it lists so many accomplishments that have taken place over the past 20 years. But victory is lost in celebration. And so we are here to acknowledge what we've done – we have made progress. But we can't get lost in celebrating them, because there's still so much going on, there's still so many people dying here in the state of New Jersey, in prisons, in the communities – dying because of neglect. And if you are in this room, you have taken the mantle to try to help people basically un-die and live.

Something struck me very deeply just now, hearing not just all the panel members, but when Myrna spoke... for me, it just demonstrates the harshness and the cruelty of mass incarceration to keep individuals inside to *die*.

Myrna did 18 years but was sentenced to 40 years. Ladies and gentlemen, they sentenced her to *die*. This eloquent, articulate, smart woman that wants to contribute and will contribute to society and to our movement.

They wanted her to die.

This is why we're here – it is about saving lives.

I'll be remiss in my duties as a moderator, as a returning citizen, as a state employee, to not acknowledge the fact that in my 35 years of incarceration, I witnessed multitudes of men die in prison who were just as, if not more, capable of what we all here have accomplished in coming home.

Every morning that I wake up, I never forget that. I can't be happy knowing about this.

Stackhouse spoke about the burden that we have. There's a burden on us, those who have been inside, sentenced to death. There's an expression, never let anybody's opinion determine your reality. When we were kids and we were being bullied and picked on, parents tell us, “never let anybody's words affect you or define you.”

Every day in prison, prison is a place hell bent on defining your reality. Every day that we wake up, every hour, every second – the rules, the regulations, the staff, the agents are seeking to determine your reality.

And so for most of us, we said, nah that's not going to happen. Because if I let you determine my reality, you controlled me. You defeated me. And you essentially killed me.

And so I don't want us to laud and revel in our accomplishments over the past 20 years. This Summit is a joint venture of individuals with lived experience of incarceration, individuals that are professionals, individuals that are indirectly affected, system impacted. So it's just an amalgamation, a coalition of different individuals who said:

“We are not going to let this repressive state apparatus define our reality. *We are* going to break down these laws; *we are* going to dismantle systems of oppression so it can be fair, just, and constructed in a way in which we can live out our own realities the way we see fit.”

We come into this world as unique beings, but most of us die as copies.
So with that being said, this is a movement.

And let us not forget how we survive – relationships and support systems are an umbilical cord to our humanity.



Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman is serving her fifth term in the United States House of Representatives, the continuation of a career in public service advocating for the needs of New Jersey families and the equitable treatment of all people. The first Black woman to represent New Jersey in Congress, Watson Coleman is a member of the Appropriations Committee and serves as Chair of the Policing, Constitution, and Equality task force in the Congressional Progressive Caucus. You can watch the following speech [here](#).

Thank you Cuqui for inviting me to speak today. I'm so sorry I could not attend live as we're starting the new Congressional session down here in D.C. Twenty years ago, the New Jersey Community & Corrections Working Summit mapped out an agenda for a radical transformation in how we approach criminal justice in New Jersey. As Majority Leader in the Assembly at the time, I was proud to shepherd many of the recommendations through the legislature, which the New York Times held as a model for the rest of the Nation on prisoner rehabilitation and relief. To this day, I consider the small part that I played in that effort to be one of the greatest accomplishments of my political career. You can still find it in my official bio on my congressional Website.

Over the past few weeks, I have watched with pride as the public's perspective of prisoner rehabilitation appears to be shifting. During the outbreak of COVID-19, in an effort to prevent the spread of the disease, thousands of inmates were taken out of prisons and jails and put in home confinement. The results were and are remarkable; thousands of men and women were able to serve time at home with their families, contributing to their communities. Recidivism among this population was almost completely eliminated.

Since 2021, I've been working with my colleagues to ensure that these people did not have to return to prison. On December the 12th, I was overjoyed to learn that President Biden had commuted the sentences of 1,500 of these individuals, ensuring that they could continue to serve out their sentences at home. Shortly afterwards, the president commuted the sentences of all but three federal death row inmates to life in prison. While I gladly applaud this progress, there remains so much work to be done.

The success of home confinement can be expanded. It showed definitively that we don't need to lock up so many offenders. At the same time, it is imperative that we end the use of for-profit private prisons. The profit motive has no place in our Criminal Justice System. The use of private prisons erodes the public's faith in the integrity of American sentencing policy. It leaves us to wonder if the motivation for lengthy mandatory minimums or forcibly detaining immigrants is an evidence-based conclusion or just a submission to the will of private companies profiting from mass incarceration.

To address this problem, Congressmen Rob Menendez Jr and I have worked diligently to prevent the expansion of the use of private prisons, whether in Elizabeth or Trenton, for the detention of immigrants detainees. Recently, I led the opposition to opening a private immigrant Detention Facility in Trenton, a proposal that is morally unacceptable and it runs counter to New Jersey values.

The shift in public opinion on prison reform has been significant since the first summit twenty years ago. The work of people like you has significantly changed how people think about criminal justice. That's no easy feat, and you should all be very proud of the work that you've done. So while our work continues, while we continue to fight for a more fair and compassionate country, know that your work matters and is making a difference in the lives of millions of Americans who have encountered our justice system, as well as their families and the communities from which they come.

So I want to thank you, God bless you and the work that you do, and know that I will be there with you. I look forward to our continued movement in the right direction.



Matthew Platkin was appointed by Governor Phil Murphy to serve as New Jersey's 62nd Attorney General on February 3, 2022, and confirmed to that role with bipartisan support by the New Jersey Senate on September 29, 2022. As New Jersey's chief law enforcement officer, Attorney General Platkin has prioritized the safety of New Jersey residents, focusing on combating violent crime and implementing innovative public safety strategies. He has also spearheaded efforts to change how law enforcement responds to mental health emergencies by connecting individuals to resources, underscored by the innovative ARRIVE Together program. You can watch the following speech [here](#).

Hi, everyone. I'm New Jersey Attorney General Matt Platkin, and I want to thank you for your partnership as we work towards a New Jersey where every resident has an opportunity to succeed. My thanks to the Latino Action Network for hosting this Working Summit and for providing an opportunity for the justice-impacted, advocates, community leaders, and decision makers to come together to discuss how we can bring an end to the systemic racial disparities that have plagued our criminal justice system.

As New Jersey's Chief Law Enforcement Officer, I'm wholly committed to instituting real changes in our public safety policies that achieve this goal. Achieving such sustainable, long-term change requires both funding and innovation. And I want to thank Governor Murphy and his administration for continuing to support this work on both fronts. Since 2021, New Jersey has invested more than \$55 million in our community-based violence intervention programs. These programs use a public health approach to interrupt cycles of violence, and this support makes it possible for so many grassroots organizations to serve communities across our state and do this essential work.

With the aid of street teams led by credible messengers, mentorship programs, and high-risk intervention, including de-escalation services, just to name a few, we're seeing a reduction in crime that is making our communities safer for all. For instance, shootings are down considerably thanks to the work of our law enforcement officers and our community leaders. And we continue to support community-based organizations as they look to expand their violence intervention services, including by prioritizing strategies to support at-risk youth and young adults and street intervention services that are grounded in a public health approach to violence prevention. We're also committed to strengthening the connection between our law enforcement agencies and the people they serve, to lay a foundation of trust which is vital to our public safety.

I welcome today's discussion and I look forward to the report of your findings. Thank you all for your hard work and please enjoy the Summit.

XII. OVERARCHING TRANSFORMATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following provisions apply to all three tracks: 1 - Front-End Systems; 2 - Systems of Custody; 3 - Re-entry & Sustainable Community Integration. These overarching recommendations establish the baseline standards of fairness, accountability, and data transparency that every agency and step in the criminal-legal system must meet, from legislation and arrest to incarceration and community re-entry.

Create a credible research source or partnership with a university, a policy lab, or a similar institution to fact-check the current landscape or the practicality of recommendations. This initiative or partnership may also take the lead on developing legislative drafts based on these recommendations and research/data collected.

Measuring the impact of legislation: The intention of the law should be to improve people's lives. Potential impact surveys should be distributed to those who are impacted to measure the perception, reality, and adherence of a proposed bill and its compliance. Passing legislation is only the first step; true success is measured by its impact on the lives of those it is intended to serve. To effectively evaluate this impact, it is essential to implement ongoing assessments, including surveys of affected individuals, to measure public perception, actual outcomes, and compliance with the law. For example, the NJCARES report about the Criminal Justice Reform Act and its impact on the system can be found here: [Can Bail Reform Improve Racial Equity and Perceptions of Fairness in Pretrial Systems? Impact and Interview Findings from a Study of New Jersey's 2017 Criminal Justice Reform.](#)

Fiscal Analysis: Always include a fiscal budget analysis with recommendations. This should include autonomy to collaborative partnerships that afford contingency plans.

NJ Comptroller investigations should be rolled out to determine what taxpayers are actually paying for in NJDOC, JJC, parole, and Re-Entry programs. These investigations should also examine how effectively this money is being used (ie. success of programs to their mission), including where there are gaps.

Restorative and Healing Justice Circles: Restorative circles and practices should be adopted by all stakeholders and systems that are engaging with justice-impacted communities and individuals. The goals should be to have widespread implementation of restorative justice and healing practices that would minimize the interventions of the criminal-legal system. Just one example of such restorative justice and healing practices (there are many), is Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM). VOM is a conflict resolution process in which a neutral and trained professional facilitates a dialogue between a victim and offender of a crime where both parties have the opportunity to discuss feelings and the impact of the conflict in a safe and structured space, and develop a mutually agreed resolution or restoration plan that seeks to repair the emotional and material harm caused by the crime (see the [Office for Victims of Crime](#) for more information). Research shows VOM programs are less expensive than traditional courts and incarceration, they reduce the risk of recidivism, and victims and offenders are more satisfied with the process and outcomes of cases that use VOM than with courts ([Jonas et al.](#), 2022; [Hansen & Umbreit](#), 2018; [Islam et al.](#), 2023). The evidence clearly shows that the benefits of VOM and RJ programs position the traditional court and judicial system as a less effective and beneficial, and more expensive method of achieving justice.

Increase language access resources. Require all rights notifications (e.g., Miranda rights, parole conditions, plea agreements), intake forms, legal notices, and court documents to be available in multiple commonly spoken languages. In particular, ESL programs/initiatives in prisons and jails need a great deal more support and resources to properly serve people whose first language is not English.

Cultural Competency: Policies & protocols should be reviewed and revised as necessary to respectfully and wholly recognize diverse cultural communities.

Voting Education: Establish programs and partnerships both in facilities and the community that expand the overall knowledge of the impact of voting at all levels of government.

XIII. TRACK ONE: FRONT-END SYSTEMS

This section describes the proposed transformative changes to Criminal-Legal Front-End Systems. Policies and procedures relevant to this track include crime prevention and community intervention measures, criminal law, police conduct and standards, judicial proceedings, sentencing reform, and oversight initiatives. These recommendations have been written in actionable language that may be conceptually used to draft and implement new policies or transform existing policies.

Community Street Teams & Credible Messenger Programs

- **Strengthening & Coordinating Street Teams:** Support, respect, and increase established, well-structured, highly coordinated street teams with defined roles to maximize community impact and responsiveness.
- **Comprehensive Training for Credible Messengers:** Continue to equip credible messengers with the expertise and tools to mentor, de-escalate violence, and support at-risk youth effectively. Implement "Train the Trainer" Models to provide intensive training in:
 - Trauma-Informed Care, Conflict Mediation, Life Skills training, De-Escalation, & Healing Techniques.
 - Resource Navigation – Connect individuals to housing, mental health services, job training, and more.
- **Professional Recognition, Respect, & Fair Compensation for Credible Messengers:** Establish credibility, stability, and sustainability for credible messengers as recognized professionals.
 - Develop living wages that include comprehensive benefits packages, including healthcare, retirement, and paid leave.
 - Increase funding for training, evaluation, assessment, and adjustment for certified messengers to ensure optimal outcomes.

Diversionary Programs: These programs and case management are essential in the earlier stages of law enforcement interaction. There must be a wider criterion for auto-diversion of juveniles and adults to further prevent their entry into the Youth Justice Commission or the NJ Department of Corrections. Diversion programs as a whole are in need of greater resources and support that will enable their expansion and enhancement.

Emergency Alert System: Establish community warning measures or a Nixel (text message alerts from townships or 911 dispatch, similar to a storm watch warning system) that informs community partners with city police forces (street teams, credible messengers, violence prevention organizations, mental health organizations, domestic violence prevention organizations, etc.) of potential mental health, domestic violence, and other social disturbances that doesn't necessarily only demand first responders with lethal force authority as a resolution. This system will ensure that "eyes" of partnering organizations are on the scene, which will improve police intervention.

Create and Pass a New Jersey “Eric’s ID Law”: Spearheaded by Eric Carpenter-Grantham and his mother Linda, “Eric’s ID Law” offers individuals with invisible disabilities to opt-in to adding a visual marker to state IDs, and provides law enforcement training on interacting with neurodivergent people (invisible disabilities), including how to recognize and respond to the visual indicators on their identification. Eric's ID Law has been implemented in several states, including Maryland, but it is not currently a law or drafted bill in New Jersey. New Jersey has a version of this concept that currently [operates solely in Passaic County](#). Therefore, this report recommends that New Jersey State draft and pass legislation that mirrors “Eric’s ID Law” and that is enforced throughout the state.

Increase law enforcement training, evaluation, & adjustment protocols focused on less lethal force tactics, cultural competency, and accountability by evaluation, assessment, and adjustments as needed to establish improved protocols and procedures with checks and balances.

Police Conduct: Require all police agencies to publish civil suits and officers' appeals of discipline on agency websites. Taxpayers should be educated as to the monies spent by towns and counties when police are accused of wrongdoing. The New Jersey system has become a cottage industry for well-connected attorneys to profit from police misconduct.

The Jump Out Boys: The outdated image of undercover officers quietly observing from an identifiable undercover car parked on some street corner and calling in backup for arrests is no longer the reality. Today, police are often operating in unmarked vans or luxury cars, dressed in black, without police identification and aggressively confronting and arresting individuals suspected of crimes, frequently without a warrant. Plain clothes police officers create a unique problem in urban communities. It is difficult (to say the least) to identify and hold these officers accountable. Often, law enforcement agencies transfer officers with high arrest rates and little supervision to these units. Additionally, these units are so low-profile that they are hardly publicized and difficult to research (they don’t even show up in a Google search), leaving the general public uninformed and ignorant of what (some of) their taxpayer dollars are spent on. Police units, as such, that are violent and without the proper accountability mechanisms do not create a safer or fairer New Jersey, and should not be tolerated. This report recommends: Do not assign officers to elite units with the worst performance records. Officers should wear LARGE-PRINT numeric identifiers on their outer clothing. Officers should carry and provide a business card with their information to any member of the public who asks. Police departments should periodically publish stop-and-frisk, arrests, traffic stops, and other statistical data that these elite street-crime units produce. Adopt strict guidelines for plain clothes units.

Police Accountability: Pass legislation to allow the Attorney General to supersede police leadership of any New Jersey law enforcement agency when certain criteria are met. The agency superseded would be responsible for the cost of intervention. Currently, no law specifies when or how a failed police agency may be superseded.

Police Internal Affairs: The public is left in the dark when it comes to county prosecutors or the Office of Attorney General investigating police conduct; this is unacceptable as police cannot police themselves. We recommend that internal affairs investigations, officer-involved deadly force encounters, in-custody death investigative findings, and major discipline data be made public within 90 days of completion. Either via policy or law, New Jersey agencies should regionalize the reporting of internal affairs; the Attorney General currently requires local police to publish information on their individual websites, but there should be one source or location to find all details on police conduct.

Civilian Complaint Review Boards (CCRBs): Legislate the creation of local and county CCRBs (composed of community members, qualified stakeholders, and law enforcement personnel) with subpoena power and investigative authority to audit police agencies. CCRBs should be tasked to mandatorily review officers' body cam footage every 60-90 days to reprimand bad conduct of officers, acknowledge and incentivise good conduct of officers, and should also be used to enhance police conduct/inform police training. There needs to be better guidance and processes for local communities to decide how they want to hold police accountable.

Citizen Complaint Reporting: The Office of Attorney General must update and publish its own citizen complaint intake process on its website. The agency that mandates all police departments to have internal affairs processes does not have one for itself. Visitors cannot readily access the citizen complaint system. Complainants do not receive acknowledgment for their reports or any guidance as to what the process is. The Office typically forwards their concerns to the agency it sought to avoid by going to the Attorney General in the first place.

Meaningful oversight of the county jails: Increased centralized monitoring of all facilities statewide to guarantee that conditions, policies, and practices are uniformly applied across the system. County jails are increasingly transferring incarcerated individuals from one facility to another as more jails close due to downsizing. This practice has led to overcrowded housing units for incarcerated persons. While youth facilities purport to have sufficient bed space, concerns remain about how these beds are allocated and where they are located.

Prosecutorial Discretion: All over New Jersey, prosecutors are haphazardly deciding when materials are turned over to the defense. Prosecutors also hold an immense amount of power and protections that unfairly determine the fate of any defendant (ie. charging decisions, plea bargaining, bail recommendations, sentencing recommendations, and more). Such prosecutorial discretion often leads to coercive plea deals, inconsistent justice (*two people charged with the same offense may receive vastly different outcomes depending on the prosecutor's approach or ideology*), and a lack of transparency and accountability. New Jersey should create a streamlined process that ensures the protection of the rights entitled to a defendant, and that is uniform across the State. The laws determining prosecutorial discretion, power, and protections should also be revisited and revised to make a fairer judicial process.

Compromised Counsel Protection and Accountability: In the event that a defendant's attorney or the prosecuting attorney of a defendant, is compromised by disbarment, charged with a criminal offense, or incarcerated during the proceedings of trial or indictment, and the defendant can prove either of these attorney's actions or status had an adverse effect on the case in any way, the defendant shall be entitled to a mistrial or an automatic review of their conviction to assess the validity and determine if a reversal is appropriate. This legislation should also include language that enforces stricter rules on a defendant's entitlement to financial reimbursement of attorney fees, when an attorney or prosecuting attorney experiences such disbarment, criminal charges, or incarceration.

Establish a Commission to Overhaul [Title 2C](#) of the New Jersey Statutes: Title 2C serves as the criminal code in New Jersey that defines criminal offenses, establishes classifications of crimes and disorderly persons offenses, and outlines penalties and procedures for prosecuting criminal matters. Effective 1979, Title 2C is 46 years old, and a comprehensive review and update of New Jersey's criminal code is crucial. The evolving understanding of justice, fairness, and rehabilitation necessitates that we adapt our laws to better align with current legal practices and societal needs. The commission should be composed of a diverse group of stakeholders, including lawmakers, legal experts, law enforcement representatives, advocacy groups, and individuals with lived experience in the criminal justice system. Its charge would be to propose a comprehensive set of reforms that address the above points and any other relevant issues within Title 2C. The commission should also ensure that any proposed changes are data-driven and supported by evidence of their potential to improve fairness, reduce incarceration, and promote rehabilitation.

Amend the Exceptional Progress Statute ([10A:71-3.5](#) - parole eligibility term reductions): Under current law, people who have committed the same crimes, just during different times, are subject to different treatment (according to the year they committed the crime). Title 2A was the governing criminal code, prior to 1979 and allowed for judicial discretion to determine sentencing. Title 2C is the current criminal code in New Jersey, effective 1979, which enforces mandatory minimums and removed judicial discretion in sentencing. For example, Person A was convicted of murder prior to Title 2C and Person B was convicted of a similar murder in 2000. Person B is not eligible for early parole under the exceptional progress statute, even if their disciplinary record is clean, but Person B under the same circumstances would be eligible. This differential treatment is due to the No Early Release Act (NERA) which went into effect in 1977, after Person A's and before Person B's convictions. This report recommends the complete reconstruction of Title 2C to eliminate mandatory minimums and restore judicial discretion, and the retroactive treatment of individuals who have been convicted of crimes under laws (2C) that differ from the current laws in effect today (2A).

Judicial and Sentencing Reform Recommendations:

- **The re-emergence of the Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission** has yet to be determined. Request public seats in the Criminal Sentencing and Disposal.
- **Holistic Defense:** Fully support and increase holistic, collaborative defense resources for the Public Defender's office.
- **Community Court Watch Program:** Implement programs in which advocates or community members systematically observe court proceedings; record and make the results of those observations public. These programs bring the community's voice into the courthouse and are a collaborative, community-based approach to criminal justice. Court watch monitoring is comprised of volunteers drawn from attorneys, community members and stakeholders to serve as a presence in courtrooms, observing legal proceedings focusing on treatment of litigants at every phase of the legal process, not to evaluate legal decisions, but to monitor the treatment litigants to ensure fair, impartial and courteous treatment. The data is compiled and submitted to judicial supervisors, legislators, and appointed town bodies, who then releases the data to the public. This method of accountability serves to ensure judicial appointments are based on relevant performance metrics and not merely on political or other reasons. The work of the courts to be conducted in public view provides an important check on the potential for abuse of power, allowing observers to better understand how the justice system operates and enhancing public confidence in the courts.
- **Alternatives to Incarceration:** Create and/or expand access to alternatives to incarceration that incorporate sentencing reform policies and community-based solutions, such as ankle bracelets, that allow for resentencing in interval schemes to reduce the prison population for long-term incarcerated persons (IPs) who are eligible for release.
- **Revise plea negotiations used by prosecutors:** Eliminate extreme trial penalties for using one's constitutional right to trial.
- **Eliminate Prosecutorial Immunity:** Prosecutors should be held accountable for misconduct and constitutional violations, just as other public officials are. Ending prosecutorial immunity would help ensure greater fairness, transparency, and trust in the justice system.
- **Increase access to complete discovery documentation:** Access to documentation that proves experienced trauma, abuse, and violence that may be used to support claims of social context during trial. Technology needs updating to preserve, sustain, and improve public access to documents.

- **Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences to restore judicial discretion in sentencing:** Mandatory minimum sentences regularly fail to consider the individual circumstances of offenders, their potential for rehabilitation, or the nature of the offense committed. Many studies have shown that mandatory minimums contribute to overcrowding and disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Revising these laws would reduce prison populations, help shift the focus back to rehabilitation, and reduce the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, particularly those who have faced racially biased charging and plea bargaining practices. The goal is to create a more just and rehabilitative criminal-legal system.
- **Eliminate mandatory supervision for life** for cases that do not have a sexual element.
- **Fairness in Sentencing:** People of color are entitled to equal protection of the law, as all people are, yet they often experience discrimination in judicial and trial procedures. Mechanisms need to be put in place that prevent discriminatory practices, mitigate implicit bias, and foster trust through cultural competency – inspired by the legacy of Trayvon Martin and other individuals whose deaths have underscored the urgent need for reform in how the justice system engages with communities of color.
- **“Restorative Legislation” in Sentencing:** The courts, trials, plea bargaining, and sentencing should consider the mitigating factors and social context (using a systems lens) under which crimes were committed (i.e. age and maturity, a defendant from an impoverished or violent environment with the experience of physical, sexual, emotional trauma/abuse and/or substance addiction).
- **Felony Murder:** Abolish the Felony Murder Statute Rule in New Jersey and use the current degrees of murder convictions in nationwide statutes (ie. first-degree, second-degree, manslaughter, vehicular manslaughter).
- **Veterans**
 - Defendants who are veterans or were honorably discharged should be entitled to these statuses being considered as a mitigating factor during trial, plea bargaining, and sentencing.
 - Expand the **Veterans’ Diversionary Program** to allow for the entry of additional deserving veterans who are routinely denied diversionary programs.

Juveniles

- **Recreational Community Programs:** Government funding should be able to provide and/or expand recreational programs all year round for low-income communities. This recommendation is to prevent youth from contact with the criminal-legal system by providing them with healthy and productive resources that will support their development.

- **Draft and pass proactive and retroactive legislation that ends the use of Juvenile Waivers in New Jersey:** [Statute § 2A:4A-26.1](#) governs the procedure and criteria for waiver of juvenile court jurisdiction in the state; it allows prosecutors “waive” youth aged 15 or older of their “minor status” and so they may be tried as an adult when accused of any of the 15 identified offenses (such as homicide, sexual assault, and certain drug or firearm-related crimes). Prosecutors must file a waiver motion within 60 days of receiving the complaint, accompanied by a written statement of reasons setting forth their assessment of a list of factors such as the youth’s age, maturity, culpability, degree of criminal sophistication, and prior delinquency record. This report recommends the immediate elimination of the Waiver Process for all youth under the age of 18 that may be used proactively (in future juvenile cases) and retroactively (reverse waiver decisions on all youth already convicted). Additionally, legislate a mandatory minimum age below which a waiver to adult court will not be considered under any circumstances.
- **Implement a Reverse Waiver Process in New Jersey:** The Reverse Waiver we are recommending for the State of New Jersey may be filed after sentencing and provides our youth with an opportunity to prove that they may be rehabilitated and resentenced as a juvenile.
- **Consideration of youth mitigating factors/Upgrade Comer Guidelines:** Landmark Supreme Court cases such as *Miller v. Alabama*, *Graham v. Florida*, *Comer v. New Jersey*, and *Zuber v. New Jersey*, underscore that even youth who commit the most egregious acts possess a unique capacity for change and rehabilitation. These decisions, along with developmental science, affirm that the severity of a crime does not define who a young person will become, nor does it erase their potential for growth and positive transformation. There are various mitigating factors that should be considered at a youth’s sentencing: including immaturity and failure to appreciate risks and consequences, family and home environment, cultural and peer pressures, an inability to deal with police officers or prosecutors or the juvenile’s own attorney, and the possibility of rehabilitation.
- **Community Service Projects:** Engage juveniles in community service projects that not only benefit the community but also instill a sense of responsibility and accomplishment for participants. Community providers and partners could use the YJC programs to expand printing shops, dog training, gardening, cooking, mechanics, construction, and other vocational kinds of work that can help youth build skills.
- **Juvenile Habilitation/Rehabilitation/Healing:** Introduce restorative justice practices that encourage juveniles to understand the impact of their actions on victims while fostering empathy and accountability.

- **Elder-to-Youth, Peer-to-Youth, & Peer-to-Peer Mentorships:**

- Develop peer-to-peer programs where youth can establish positive relationships and learn from their peers who have successfully navigated the justice and education systems.
- Mentorship Programs where trained returning citizens/trained professionals and community members guide juveniles through their educational journey, helping them set goals and stay motivated.

Immigration

- **Establish statewide, one-stop Immigration resource centers:** These should include legal assistance, crisis intervention/mental health services, community outreach, and public education on rights and services available, emergency response planning for families impacted by ICE actions, and family reunification assistance.
- **Expand Trauma-Informed Care Resources:** Equip schools and healthcare providers with trauma-informed resources to better serve immigrant families. Include culturally competent mental health services that address the trauma caused by uncertainty, fear of deportation, and family separation.
- **Strengthen Credible Messaging Programs:** Utilize credible messengers from the immigrant communities to build trust and provide accurate information on immigrant rights. This can reduce fear and anxiety in immigrant communities, raise awareness of available legal resources and rights to empower families, and help communities navigate the complexities of the immigration system through trusted and experienced advocates.
- **Safe Schools for Immigrant Families:**
 - **FERPA Protections:** Student immigration status is protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA); schools cannot share such data without parental consent or court order.
 - **ICE-Free Zones:** NJDOE advises districts not to allow ICE enforcement unless there is a signed judicial warrant, making schools de facto safe zones.
 - **Local Safe Zone Advocacy:** NJEA encourages school boards to adopt local “Safe Zone” resolutions, though these carry symbolic weight unless supported by policy.
- **Draft and pass the Rights to Legal Representation Act** to ensure state-funded legal representation for individuals in immigration court. Community legal clinics in underserved areas are designed to guarantee broader access to justice. While programs as such are in effect, they are not legally protected.
 - **Universal Representation Model:** New Jersey’s Detention & Deportation Defense Initiative (DDDI) ensures detained immigrants receive state-funded legal aid, regardless of case strength. Over \$8 million was allocated in the 2023–2024 state budget, with bipartisan support.
 - **Equity in Legal Access:** Focuses on underserved communities and deters wrongful deportation through fair representation.

- **Family Unity Protection Act:** Prevents deportations of individuals with strong familial ties to the U.S. and creates hardship waivers for primary caregivers, long-term U.S. residents, and individuals who are integral to their family's well-being. This would also recognize a person's of long-term ties in the U.S., considering years of residence, community impact, and U.S. family dependency before removal.
- **Draft legislation that prohibits incarcerated people (IP) with Orders of Deportation from serving time beyond their sentence waiting for deportation**, and that mandates that any IP with a Order of Deportation (who has served at least half of their sentence and has a record of good behavior) be considered for resentencing to facilitate deportation to native country (will save budget money and minimize over-crowding).
 - **Budget & Capacity Relief:** Aims to reduce prison overcrowding and spending by transferring custody to federal immigration authorities sooner.
 - **Ethical Considerations:** Proposal must address whether individuals would have any say or legal options before deportation; language must avoid coercion.

Decriminalize Homelessness: Recently in New Jersey, some municipalities are adopting ordinances that criminalize people for sleeping in public spaces – essentially criminalizing homelessness and people who are poor. These ordinances impose jail time and/or fines up to \$2,000 for people who are found guilty. Laws and rules such as this do not make the general public safer, nor is it justice; the only thing they accomplish is another pipeline to funnel people into the criminal legal system and further push them into poverty. Incarceration is not a solution to social problems, and prejudice in any form goes against American values and should not exist in any law. This report entirely objects to these ordinances and recommends their immediate reversal.

The Federal Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act: New Jersey should adopt requirements for the purchasing of firearms that are reflective of the Brady Law. Create a licensing process for the purchasing of firearms and include a renewal mechanism that requires people to demonstrate responsible gun ownership.

XIV. TRACK TWO: SYSTEMS OF CUSTODY

This section describes the proposed transformative changes to Systems of Custody. Policies and procedures relevant to this track include adult and juvenile prisons and jails, facility management and standards, the rights and opportunities of incarcerated people, programming, and resources available to incarcerated people. These recommendations have been written in actionable language that may be conceptually used to draft and implement new policies or transform existing policies.

Update NJDOC Administrative Code Title 10A: Statute 10A ([here](#) and [here](#)) encompasses the comprehensive set of rules and regulations governing the operations of the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC). This code establishes the legal framework for the management of correctional facilities, treatment programs, inmate rights, disciplinary procedures, and parole operations within the state. Since its original drafting 50 years ago, parts and sections of the code have been revised and amended; however, much of it remains unchanged and outdated, unreflective of current laws. This report recommends that a committee or task force be assigned to thoroughly examine, update, and improve where necessary so that the manual reflects the language of new laws, including all guidelines on de-escalation and disciplinary protocols.

Conduct an audit and propose recommendations based on the recent large-scale downsizing of carceral systems in New Jersey. Reallocate saved funds to in-custody and re-entry programs that increase humane, “successful”, and viable carceral custody for individuals serving time and those newly returning to the community.

Capital improvement funding: Appropriate funds are needed to upgrade structural improvements to facilities to ensure the housing and treatment of incarcerated people meet humane and healthy standards.

Increase Transparency in Carceral Facilities

- **Expand the New Jersey Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson (NJOCO)’s jurisdiction to include county jails.** These facilities have little to no oversight currently.
- **The NJOCO should have access to video footage and other records from carceral facilities** so they may investigate allegations of mistreatment, even when the NJDOC Special Investigations Division (SID) is conducting an open investigation. The office should not have to wait until SID is finished with their investigation in order to see the video and records.
- **Require the inclusion of the NJOCO’s investigation team in the SID’s investigations;** these organizations should collaborate in their efforts to ensure regulations are adhered to.
- **Increase structural collaboration** between county and state Ombudsperson offices for better oversight.
- **Remove the barriers currently cited as “security concerns”** that prohibit surprise health/safety inspections or visits by oversight boards, legislators or Ombudsperson personnel.

Conduct a thorough review and update of recruitment, training, hiring, evaluation, and adjustment practices for correctional police officers (CPO) & employees that includes true diversity, a balance of life experience perspectives, and academic degrees in hiring.

- Mandate all CPO candidates' results from training and psych evaluations by the corrections police academy to be sent to the YJC, county jails, NJDOC, and parole officers prior to hire.
- Mandate a review and upgrade of the psych evaluation guidelines and procedures to ensure multicultural competencies for potential CPO candidates.
- CPO training should focus much more on incarcerated people's mental health and well-being rather than on gaining compliance/control of them.

Create and implement employment incentives for CPOs: Such incentives may be college scholarship opportunities for employees or their dependents. *This recommendation in its entirety was submitted by the East Jersey Incarcerated Focus Group!*

Improve the orientation/intake process and handbook for incarcerated people: Orientation should clearly explain the rights and entitlements of incarcerated people, including relevant laws such as the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), and provide a thorough description of available programming, services, and grievance procedures. Orientation should also set clear expectations for facility rules, outline avenues for seeking assistance or redress, and be delivered in a manner accessible to all individuals, regardless of language ability, literacy level, or disability.

- Upgrade identifiers in the NJDOC intake structure that include race, ethnicity, and gender to increase the accuracy of origin.

Entry Assessments & Discharge Planning must begin immediately upon entrance to a carceral space, not 90 days before release.

- Perform a habilitation/rehabilitation-focused assessment for incoming IPs.
- Increase mental health resources and evaluation protocols. This should be implemented at county jail intake, prison intake, and periodically that will follow an individual throughout their incarceration, and upon exiting the carceral space.
- Ensure that adequate medication supply is provided for those exiting the carceral space.
- Schedule an appointment with a mental health and a healthcare provider before the individual's release, to take place once the individual is in the community.
- Ensure that every incarcerated person has a complete resume before release.

Improve discharge planning/reintegration resources while incarcerated: Data proves that grassroots resource providers and community-based programs are effective. It is essential to continue investing in and expanding these local supports. One proposal is to create an interactive, publicly accessible community resource website, housed within the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and regularly updated by DCA staff. This platform would allow communities to easily access up-to-date information on available services and programs. If you have access to a strong network, you are unlikely to reoffend.

Vital Identifying Documentation: Create a mandatory protocol, where upon entry NJDOC must acquire electronic files of vital ID documents (State ID, birth certificate, SS card, passport, medical history, etc.). If any individual does not have such identification documents, the facility should assist in their attainment prior to release.

Enhance educational opportunities and programs for the incarcerated population:

- **Make education in prison a right**, not just a privilege.
- Each facility should have a **funding incentive related to programming** (ie. more funds if more programs are available to incarcerated people).
- **Develop an individualized and tailored curriculum** that caters to the specific needs and interests of each incarcerated person (adult and youth).
- **Create life skills training** including financial/tax literacy, socio-emotional skills, and conflict resolution.
- **Implement Honors Housing Units** for incarcerated people who are of good-behavioral standing and are enrolled as college students. Create honor unit policies with in-house populations to recognize and promote positive comportment throughout the facility. Honors Dorms and similar incentive-based programming would encourage a more communal environment, which is safer for everyone, and also allows for students to have a more focused and distraction-minimized environment to focus on studies.

Enhance English as a Second Language (ESL) Learning Resources:

- Resume bilingual classes, ESL instructors, and school readers (removed during the COVID-19 pandemic).
 - Short-term: Teach reading levels up to 8th-grade standards.
 - Long-term: Preparation for GED or college programs.
- Carceral libraries need books in Spanish and other frequently used languages other than English about language, punctuation, basic math and science, and GED prep books.

Real Employment Opportunities

- **Career Development Workshops:** that include resume building, interview preparation, and professional networking skills tailored specifically for adult/youth individuals entering the workforce.
- **Incentives for Employers and Community Service Programs:** Create and continue to increase incentive programs for businesses and organizations willing to hire at-risk youth or those who have been involved in the Youth Justice Commission. This should include expanded federal and state tax breaks or grants for companies that provide stable employment opportunities.
- **Internship/Apprenticeship/Certification Programs:** Develop internship programs within various sectors where youths and adults can gain real-world experience while being supervised by professionals committed to their development. This can be done virtually as several positions are remote in nature. Promote collaborative partnerships between the trades and the carceral facilities to train and hire returning citizens.

Minimum Wage: Follow New Jersey law to afford the minimum wage to the incarcerated workforce.

Legal rights to communication: Draft and pass legislation to mandate the rights of incarcerated people to access phone, video, and email communications. Currently, no law exists that requires facilities to offer phone/communications services (at a cost or free), except for when IPs need to get in contact with their lawyer. Not all, but most facilities do offer telecommunications services at an expensive cost, but they are not legally mandated to do so. Telecommunication costs in carceral facilities are the highest in the nation, resources [here](#). See Section XVI. Current Advocacy Campaigns & Legislative Bills of Merit for more information on current prison/jail telecommunications advocacy campaigns.

Update technology access (infrastructure, platforms, apps, resources) and teach incarcerated people how to operate technology. Technology also currently does not reach beyond the US borders, causing incarcerated people to be left without any family communications bonds, connections, or support if they live outside of the United States.

Family Contact Visits: Implement better systems of communication for the incarcerated persons population with a direct family focus. Family support is an umbilical cord to one's humanity. Reviewing the current tools in place and assessing how they may be improved to grant better ability for family interaction and relationship development.

Rights of Family Members of Incarcerated People

- **Improved and required family notification** procedures on medical information and emergencies; add “[My Chart](#)” style application access to incarcerated people's health histories.
- Independent and public representation on the Advisory Board for the Department of Corrections.

Rights of Incarcerated People

- Increased purposeful activities with a wide range of procedures for volunteer recruitment, programs, and curricula.
- **Establish a comprehensive Incarcerated Person's Bill of Rights** that includes clear protocols for improved humane living conditions, safety, and trauma-informed care, including health care, education, work, disciplinary measures, telecommunications, etc.

Gender-Based Issues

- **Establish a New Jersey Incarcerated Women's Bill of Rights** to preserve the MANY reforms that have taken place at the New Jersey female facility in the last 2 years; i.e. ensuring parity in education, programming, appropriate medical services, gender-informed criteria/training, classification practices, trauma informed care, PREA compliance and enforcement.

- **Revisit the current gender-based structure** in correctional facilities and identify training needs and assessment tools. Definitions, policies, and protocols need updated language to the administrative code for transgender incarcerated persons.
- **Establish appropriate intake identifiers and safer housing for transgender incarcerated people** to avoid unsafe and hateful environments of all kinds (officers, staff, religious hate, incarcerated peers, etc.).

Medical & Mental Health Care

- **A thorough review of the process and policies of medical and mental health care** for the NJ Department of Corrections (NJDOC). This review of language must thoroughly define the distinct roles between NJDOC & Universal Corrections Health Care (UCHC). It is necessary to make clear that medical professionals require a certain degree of autonomy and authority over corrections police officers in the best interest of their patients.
- Based on the above, **complete retraining of the NJDOC & UCHC personnel**, to ensure knowledge and compliance with all relevant healthcare-related policies and procedures.
- Based on the above, **all UCHC staff must immediately report to the leadership of UCHC if they are blocked from the administration of care**, and steps shall be taken to contact the facility and immediately resolve the situation.
- Have the Patient Advocate take a more active role in pursuing problems and issues of health care. This would include (at a minimum) quarterly visits by the Patient Advocate to each facility's infirmary, with public reports and recommendations issued on findings by location.
- Create a new position for Mental Health Patient Advocate to oversee and address the care being provided, with an emphasis on people being held in any form of restrictive housing.
- **Working together, NJDOC and UCHC must develop appropriate and clear guidance for the gender identification of prisoners.** Create and implement policies for appropriate mental health, medical, and housing procedures for special needs based on gender identity and overall facility health and safety.
- **Survey the prisoners and personnel annually and upon release** regarding the adequacy, access, and effectiveness of health care available to them while in custody, and recommendations they would offer.
- **Review, update, and ensure implementation of the existing Executive Order # 124**, which stands alone for a safeguard for COVID/viral outbreaks and hygiene requirements for those in carceral spaces, both staff and incarcerated people.

- **Evaluate and upgrade mental health services specifically:** Improve current programs to maximize mental health, behavioral therapies, and drug diversion programs. This can increase a holistic approach with proper habilitative/rehabilitative assistance for each individual.

Reinforce a "Remember Their Service" platform universally for the incarcerated persons veteran population. The platform should adhere to the current East Jersey State Prison program that has been successfully in place and beneficial to the population and be expanded to include all DOC facilities where veterans are serving sentences.

Honors Credits for Good Behavior in Prison: Draft legislation that provides for the application of exceptional progress and discipline-free time that can increase sentence-reduction credits for any custodial sentence. Amend the existing requirement/mandate that incarcerated people be within 2.5 years of parole eligibility to 5 years.

Clemency/Pardon Council to explore increasing transparency in the pardon process: Provide clear guidelines and consistent standards for eligibility. Offering more opportunities for individuals to petition for a pardon or commutation. Strengthen the role of the Clemency and Pardon Council to create a more transparent, efficient, and fair process for granting pardons and commutations. Further, explore reforms that would make the pardon process more accessible and equitable, ensuring that those who have served their time and proven their rehabilitation can have their records cleared or sentences reduced. Streamlining the pardon process would provide individuals with a "true" second chance to reintegrate into society, free from the stigma of a criminal record. It would also reduce the lifelong consequences of criminal convictions, especially for those who committed nonviolent offenses or those who have shown genuine remorse and rehabilitation.

"Look Again" Review: Implement a "Look Again" clear and consistent review process that allows for the reevaluation of long-term sentences. This process would be fair and transparent, and give incarcerated individuals an opportunity for periodic review or re-examination of sentences based on demonstrated rehabilitation, good behavior, and changes in the law or society's approach to sentencing. It would also provide an opportunity for justice to be served equitably, particularly for those who have served lengthy sentences and shown they are no longer a threat to public safety. This could result in the release of individuals who have truly rehabilitated themselves, reducing overcrowding and shifting resources to those who pose real risks.

Food Tasting: In custody unit representatives should be given the opportunity to participate in food tasting when contracting with new food providers/vendors.

XV. TRACK THREE: RE-ENTRY & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

This section describes the proposed transformative changes to Re-entry & Sustainable Community Integration. Policies and procedures relevant to this track include parole and probation, re-entry support services for returning citizens (ie. employment and housing), and life after incarceration. These recommendations have been written in actionable language that may be conceptually used to draft and implement new policies or transform existing policies.

Returning Citizens should be legally classified as a protected class: As a protected class (similar to that of race, national origin, religion, sex, disability, etc.), they would be able to enjoy all of the rights and privileges associated with that designation, such as access to employment, housing, education, public accommodations, and federally funded programs without discrimination.

Amend No Early Release Act (NERA) [N.J.S.A. 2C:43-7.2](#)

- **Youth:** At 25% sentence completion, perform reassessments on youth's maturity and growth as determining factors in eligibility for release. Accomplishments such as educational degrees, certificates of achievement, employment, anger management and conflict resolution training, and life skills attainment. These levels of accomplishment should have ranked scores in the interest of fairness and balance.
- **Adults:** Reduce the amount of NERA time that an adult serves from 85% to 65% with the possibility of further reductions upon milestone accomplishments such as educational degrees, certificates of achievement, employment, anger management and conflict resolution training, and life skills attainment.

Returning Citizen Credible Witnesses: Create funded programs for returning citizens to evaluate and prepare recommendations and testimony when someone is given an opportunity for resentencing. This is already being done through volunteer efforts with the Returning Citizens Support Group. Formalize these resources to institutionalize these judicial discretionary considerations.

Parole and Probation

- **Develop a parole handbook,** that includes explicit protocols and processes on appointments, expectations, and obligations. Parole should assist with the acquisition of all vital documents necessary for returning citizens, if currently not in the possession of the individual. Parole should afford (at least 6-months prior to release) accessible resources on safe housing, clothing, financial support resources, and literacy/technology programs. Parolees should be afforded the right to counsel at parole hearings. Create a safe and effective policy or process for parolees to report inappropriate behaviors of parole officers.
- **Offer parolees a network** that would allow them to report to their designated parole office closer to their place of residence OR create an account with a discounted transportation provider (Uber/Lyft) that can strictly be used to reach the parole office.

Implement new criteria for non-criminal Technical Parole Violations (TPVs):

- To reduce remand and reincarceration for unanticipated circumstances that revoke conditions of parole agreements.
- TPVs currently include non-criminal issues such as housing instability, substance abuse relapse, or failure to appear for parole meetings, accounting for approximately 30% of New Jersey's current prison population. At a very high taxpayer cost, many individuals are reincarcerated not because they committed new crimes, but because they struggled to meet the strict conditions of parole, often due to challenges that stem from reentry itself.

Expanding Furlough Authority: The New Jersey Department of Corrections' furlough authority should allow eligible individuals with technical parole violations to be diverted from full reincarceration. Instead, they could be placed in structured, community-based furlough programs focused on stabilization, treatment, housing assistance, or employment support. This change would reduce prison overcrowding, lower correctional costs, lower taxpayer costs, and focus resources on addressing the underlying issues that led to the violation. It would also encourage a more rehabilitative and supportive approach, rather than one rooted in automatic reimprisonment for non-criminal behavior.

A reformed furlough system for Technical Parole Violators should prioritize:

- Access to substance use treatment and mental health services;
- Transitional and supportive housing opportunities;
- Employment and skills training programs;
- Strengthened case management and support for successful reintegration.

Re-entry Programs for Max Outs: People who max out of prison (people who leave prison without any further supervision, surveillance, parole, or probation mechanisms attached to their freedom) currently have little to no resources available at all to support their return home. Programs need to be developed and financially supported; they should include housing assistance, substance abuse programs, workforce development programs, food security assistance, vital identification attainment assistance, transportation needs, computer and financial literacy programs, and other services that recognize issues when they arise, etc.

“Take a Chance” Campaign: Increase incentives, protections, enforcements, and requirements for workforce employers to hire returning citizens.

Reentry & Community/Faith-based Programs: The Reentry Industry must be completely evaluated and overhauled in New Jersey. Presently, the Re-entry Industry is dominated by professional corporations, state agencies, non-profit organizations, city governments, and some community members/organizations. This domination is both financial and political, which excludes the people most qualified to provide reentry services and support: Returning Citizens, the people with the same lived experiences. The NJ State Parole Board and NJ Department of Corrections are allocated tens of millions of dollars between them. However, very little is known about how these funds are used. What we do know is that private Reentry Corporations are given large contracts to provide services, minimal custody facilities, and a host of services that are similar to the programs provided inside prisons.

- **The exclusion of reentry services for all Returning Citizens, including max-outs, must be addressed.** As a remedy to this issue, it is recommended that more funds and support be provided to organizations that are providing reentry services and are managed by returning citizens or people with lived experiences. People who max out of long-term incarceration have zero resources available to them. The Returning Citizens Support Group in Newark, NJ, is one of the very few organizations as such.
- **Establish a “new” Faith-Based(FBO)/Latino Community-Based (LCBO) Reentry Coalition separate and distinct from the existing Contractor Coalition.** FBOs & LCBOs by nature will have a greater impact on “court-involved” individuals/returning citizens and their families than the small insular group of contracted entities who have benefited for decades from policies we seek to change. Renew interest from the Department of Community Affairs and expand funding opportunities like NJDOC's “NJLEAD” programs to increase vital resources for this population.
- Increase LCBO/FBO legal resources to serve returning citizens, juveniles, and immigrants as much as possible.

Implement therapeutic and trauma-informed halfway houses upgrades for mental health parolees:

- Making halfway houses a right, not just a privilege.
- Create new or restructure existing institutions; outpatient and inpatient management systems.
- Expand HEMM and PROMISE halfway house programs’ mental health services to all halfway back programs.

Housing is one of the most challenging issues for returning citizens.

- **The state should offer independent housing** for potentially homeless returning citizens, parolees, and max outs in each county.
- **[The Fair Chance in Housing Act](#) (FCHA, [P.L.2021, c.110](#))** should be strengthened by eliminating carve-outs and look-back periods, and by increasing penalties for landlords and agents who violate the FCHA.

- **More grants and funding opportunities** should be made available to organizations that offer housing assistance programs to returning citizens. These grants should be only available to organizations that do not contract third parties, to ensure as much funding as possible is allocated to services – for example, community organizations that have boots on the ground, such as the Returning Citizens Support Group in Newark, NJ, and other grassroots organizations like them.

Analyze and Update Hiring Systems and Employers: The standing Governor should instruct the Commissioner of the Department of Labor, Workforce, and Development, in partnership with the Department of Human Services, to review and update the accrediting process and deliver a memo to the vendors contracted to provide. Merge employee certifications and hiring policies so that both flow properly with criminal background requirements (ie. home health aides).

Expand “Ban the Box” Legislation: Also known as the Fair Chance or Second Chance laws, currently only prohibits an employer from having a checkbox on a job application, asking “Have you been convicted of a crime?” However, any background check will reveal criminal records anyway. Therefore, “Ban the Box” legislation, as it currently stands, only delays the inevitable denial of employment and wastes both parties’ time and money. This legislation is a shell of the originally proposed bill; this legislation warrants reconsideration so that the protections and enforcements that were slashed can be built back into the law.

Legislation for blanket re-sentencing: Every incarcerated person should be entitled to a resentencing hearing after serving 10 years. At this hearing, individuals would have the opportunity to present evidence of their programmatic accomplishments, demonstrated improvements in behavior and discipline, and their evolved perspectives and rehabilitation efforts. These factors should be real determinants in deciding whether a second chance at freedom is appropriate. This process recognizes the human capacity for growth and change, promotes hope and incentive for rehabilitation, and ensures that continued incarceration remains justified based on who a person is today – not solely on the crime committed in the past.

NJDOC’s Locally, Empowered, Accountable, and Determined (NJLEAD) Reentry Grants Initiative: The Department of Corrections should explore expanding the use of its NJLEAD grants to fund rehabilitative programs, diversion initiatives, and other restorative justice practices. Ensuring equitable access to these grants for underserved communities and prioritizing programs proven to reduce recidivism and support successful reentry. This will encourage and increase the development of community-based resources that address underlying issues such as substance abuse, mental health, and recidivism, offering alternative paths for individuals to reintegrate into society.

Expand, Diversify Funding, and Increase Accountability for Re-entry Programs:

- Set up community case management before release to ensure a seamless continuation of progressive mental health services, medications, and therapies to returning citizens.
- At least a 2-year re-entry service follow-through for all returning citizens.
- Expand long-term assistance for returning citizens - there are currently time limitations on receiving services/support, so X number of years after re-entry, returning citizens are no longer eligible for programs' support.

Implement more ways to bring returning citizens into formal view at the state level, thereby including their voices in decision-making councils, task forces, and advisory boards. One specific recommendation is to hire/appoint returning citizens to serve on parole boards and/or as parole officers. As people with lived experience, they are the true peers of parolees or probationers and they understand best what returning citizens need.

XVI. CURRENT ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS & LEGISLATIVE BILLS OF MERIT

This section lists current legislative bills and advocacy campaigns that have merit and are in the process of becoming law. All are aimed at transforming the conditions of the criminal-legal system, and creating a more fair, just, and equitable New Jersey. Through these bills and the greater movement, “WE WILL KEEP DOING IT!!!”, see Appendices XVIII.4 “WE DID IT!” and XVIII.5 “WE DID IT AGAIN!! to see what this movement has been able to accomplish thus far.

TRACK 1: FRONT-END SYSTEMS

Amend the 13th: [Federal S.J.Res.33](#)

Proposes a joint resolution to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States to prohibit the use of slavery and involuntary servitude as a punishment for a crime.

New Jersey Reparations Task Force Bill: [S3164/A602](#)

Establishes a “New Jersey Reparations Task Force” to conduct research and develop reparatory proposals and recommendations to address the generational harms caused by New Jersey’s role in America’s institution of slavery and its legacy of systemic racial discrimination.

The John R. Lewis Voter New Jersey Voter Empowerment Act: [S3009/A4083](#)

As our voting rights continue to be attacked and protections from the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) continue to be weakened, the John R. Lewis New Jersey Voter Empowerment Act (NJVEA) would protect New Jersey voters of color through state law. This bill—a New Jersey voting rights act—would help build and protect a stronger democracy by incorporating protections from the federal VRA into New Jersey law, prohibiting intimidation and deceptive practices at the polls, stopping discriminatory voting laws before they are passed, and reducing barriers to voting. It would help protect voters against discrimination based on characteristics such as age, disability, and criminal history, increase language access and assistance for voters with limited English proficiency, and ensure that communities of color will have their ballots counted.

Law Enforcement Misconduct and Accountability Portal: [S4172/A3275](#)

As part of a 2020 directive issued by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General (NJOAG) to enhance transparency and accountability of law enforcement agencies, the NJOAG launched a law enforcement misconduct database in 2022 that primarily records instances of major disciplinary actions against law enforcement officers, such as suspensions, demotions, or terminations. Bills S4172 and A3275 have been introduced to supplement and enhance this directive by legally mandating law enforcement officers to anonymously report observed misconduct by fellow officers within 72 hours. Under these bills, officers are legally obligated to report misconduct, including unjustifiable use of force, deprivation of civil rights, any other criminal offenses, and any non-criminal policy violations committed by fellow officers within 72 hours.

Use of Force by Law Enforcement Bill: [S1093](#)/[A813](#) in Session 2022 - 2023)

Codifies the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General's directive concerning criminal investigations of law enforcement use-of-force and in-custody deaths. This bill mandates all law enforcement agencies to notify the county prosecutor's office of any such incidents, which in turn must immediately inform the Director of the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability (OPIA). The OPIA Director is responsible for appointing an independent investigator to handle the case, ensuring impartiality and avoiding conflicts of interest. The bill also outlines procedures for such investigations, including the preservation of evidence, the release of law enforcement footage, and the preparation of a summary report with findings and recommendations. Additionally, it requires county prosecutors to educate the public about these provisions to strengthen trust between law enforcement and the community.

Civilian Complaint Review Board: [A3441](#)/[S2943](#)

Civilian Complaint Review Boards gives communities throughout the state the authority to establish strong community member boards to review the policies, practices, and actions of local police departments and officers, and the power to: conduct independent and concurrent investigations of wrongdoing by officers; issue subpoenas; and establish disciplinary recommendations that are enforceable to action in cases of officer misconduct.

While this report finds this bill to have great value, we further recommend that the bill be edited to include direct and actionable language so that accountability procedures may be strengthened and not undermined.

Jury Service Bill: [A909](#)/[S292](#)

Expands the list of eligible jurors by removing juror disqualification for criminal convictions and including the database used by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Department of Community Affairs to identify jurors. This bill requires close attention and monitoring; there is a critical need for legislation that enables Returning Citizens to serve on juries, as they offer essential lived experience and represent genuine peers within the justice process... Read more about this [here](#):

Immigrant Trust Act: [S3672](#)/[A4987](#)

By passing the Immigrant Trust Act, New Jersey would limit involvement in the federal detention and deportation system by creating new data privacy protections for people who interact with state and local agencies, and by strengthening and codifying the separation between local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement.

Whistleblower Protections Against ICE Misconduct - Anti-Retaliation and Protection Act: [S1124](#)/[A3167](#)

- **Existing CEPA Protections:** NJ's Conscientious Employee Protection Act covers employees who report illegal acts, including public or private entities.
- **No ICE-Specific Safeguards:** There is no state law that explicitly protects individuals or nonprofits reporting ICE-related abuse or misconduct.
- **Proposed Expansion (S1124):** The Bill would restrict confidentiality clauses in whistleblower settlements to improve transparency in government accountability cases.

TRACK 2: SYSTEMS OF CUSTODY

Evaluate Corrections Health Care: [A5457](#)

This would require the Department of Corrections to conduct a study on healthcare in correctional facilities, including response and resolution time for addressing health concerns or medical requests, evaluation of per day visits made by medical staff, and identifiable gaps in quality of medical services and the reasons for these gaps.

Free Phone Communications in NJ Prisons & Jails: [S2526/A3988](#)

Provides free telecommunication services for incarcerated persons at State, county, and private adult and juvenile correctional facilities. Free telecommunications are vital to incarcerated people because exorbitant phone and video rates often result in families incurring debt and the severance of the critical connections between incarcerated individuals, their children, and support systems, increasing feelings of isolation and anxiety in both family members and incarcerated people. Studies show that maintaining affordable communication not only improves mental health and behavior during incarceration but also supports successful reintegration and reduces recidivism.

Phone Discipline Restriction: [S3660/A4906](#)

Restricts telephone calls taken away as a disciplinary measure during incarceration.

TRACK 3: RE-ENTRY & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Second Look Act: [S2338/A4463](#)

Offers the humane treatment of incarcerated individuals who are terminally ill or elderly and pose no risk to public safety, which in effect will reduce the financial and ethical burden on the correctional system. This legislation provides a resentencing pathway for people 60 and over who have served 20 years or more and for people 62 and over who have served more than 30 years for murder. Legislation similar to this was passed in Bonnie Watson-Coleman's 2010 Omnibus Legislative Package, formerly known as the **Early Release Act**, but was removed the following year by NJ Governor [Chris Christie](#). WE recommend its immediate reinstatement.

Second Chance: [A2835/S2583](#)

Establishes the Second Chance Program within the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, tasked with providing real and lasting career opportunities through labor organizations for formerly incarcerated individuals, with the intent to reduce recidivism. A2835 passed in the Assembly in September, 2024, and is currently awaiting a Senate hearing and approval!

Familial Housing Expansion for Returning Citizens: Bill: [A5458](#)

Requires the Department of Community Affairs and housing authorities to allow nonviolent and eligible individuals who are being released from incarceration to reside with an immediate family member living in subsidized housing for a period of up to 6 months.

XVII. SUMMIT PROMOTION & MEDIA

**SCAN THIS QR CODE OR CLICK [THIS LINK](#):
TO VIEW PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS OF THE 2025 WORKING
SUMMIT EVENT AND PROMO VIDEOS OF THIS REPORT
(REAL EVENT FOOTAGE)!**



XVIII. EVALUATION OF SUMMIT

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF THE WORKING SUMMIT

Of the Summit participants who submitted event evaluation feedback forms, there were several interesting themes to note. Guests felt one of the most impactful parts of the Summit was hearing from impacted voices with lived experiences of the criminal legal system. “The discussions on collaborative solutions to pressing challenges, particularly community reintegration and rehabilitation, provided valuable insights. Hearing from those with lived experiences and experts in the field was eye-opening and motivating, reinforcing my commitment to contributing to positive change in the system.” Summit guests also felt that the event provided them with beneficial networking opportunities to connect with like-minded advocates and share best practices.

Summit participants also submitted recommendations on how future Working Summits may be improved. Participants noted they wished the event was held all in one building to prevent walking outdoors (because January 7th & 8th were unfortunately the coldest days of the 2024/25 winter). Guest also shared that many breakout rooms were not focused on compiling reform recommendations from the session participants, which was their intent, and were instead heavily emphasizing storytelling dialogue. Additionally, participants felt that the Summit covered a broad range of topics within the criminal legal system, but in future events, greater attention could be given to more issues such as the school-to-prison pipeline and strategies of trauma-healing.

Of the Summit participants who submitted event evaluation feedback forms, most attendees heard about the Working Summit through a community or partner organization and colleagues. Other attendees shared they found the Working Summit through the LANF website or newsletter.

Quoted Narrative Feedback from Participants:

“The 2025 Working Summit at Monmouth University was an incredible experience, bringing together a dynamic and passionate group of leaders, advocates, and experts all united by a common goal: addressing the racial disparities in New Jersey’s criminal justice system. It was inspiring to see so many individuals dedicated to creating real change. I left feeling motivated and hopeful about the progress we can make together...”

“The summit reinforced the idea that while we've made progress with reforms like police licensing and sentencing changes, there's still much work to be done. It made it clear that meaningful change is within reach through thoughtful, innovative, and compassionate approaches to both juvenile justice and prison reform. Personally, the discussions—especially the one on juvenile justice—deepened my belief that a more equitable system is not only possible but achievable through continued collaboration, ongoing reform efforts, and a collective commitment to breaking the cycle of incarceration.”

PLANNING TEAM MEMBERS' EVALUATION OF WORKING SUMMIT

In an event debriefing meeting with the Working Summit partners, the discussion reviewed the event's outcomes and evaluative feedback. Of primary note, the partners generally agreed that there was a need for stronger collaboration between justice organizations and better institutional accountability. While the Working Summit did involve and consult government and systemic stakeholders greatly in the planning process, the partners felt a sense of absence and wished there had been stronger relationships and involvement of these agencies (including academic, faith-based, and other institutions).

There were many themes that the partnership felt were highlighted by this event. Inhumane conditions, social death, mental health support and stigmas, peer-led leadership and support, and re-entry, . The fact this event was entirely facilitated by and it centered the voices of those with lived experiences was universally agreed and celebrated as a historic achievement!

Another assessment made by the partnership was a strong sense of justice-impacted leadership and inclusion. As a reform advocacy movement, we are deeply concerned about the inhumane conditions in facilities and the treatment of incarcerated individuals. The leadership empowerment and inclusion of justice-impacted individuals as facilitators, leaders, and storytellers was very powerful and an effective means of communicating the urgency of reform.

Family, community, and collateral impacts were another acknowledgement of the partnership. Incarceration and all of its implications affect more than just the individual; families and communities also bear the impact. Some of the partnership noted that future Working Summits should elicit more inclusion and discussions around family and support systems that are indirectly impacted by a loved one's incarceration – not that they weren't invited and present at the current event, but a greater presence would be warranted.

Lastly, the partnership discussed the frequency and structure of future Working Summit events. The partnership made broad agreements that events like these are valuable and should occur more often. Future events should demand the inclusion and participation of county jails in the conversation; more resource tabling by community partners, and a greater focus on constructive reform recommendations in breakout rooms rather than story-telling. Participants were strongly encouraged to refrain from story-telling and focus on constructive recommendations to transform our criminal legal system, yet these requests were difficult to enforce. The partnership discussed event anniversary timelines; every 5 years seems appropriate to host a Working Summit to 1) analyze achievements thus far, 2) plan for the future, and 3) network, organize, and mobilize for power!

XIX. EVENT AGENDA

DAY 1: TUESDAY, JANUARY 7TH, 2025

8:30 - 9 A.M.

Registration & Continental Breakfast (Pollak Theatre)

9 - 9:15 A.M.

Welcome/Overview Monmouth U Welcome Cuqui (Pollak Theatre)

9:15-9:50 A.M.

Keynote Speech by Mr. Jerome Harris (Pollak Theatre)

10 - 12:15 P.M.

Morning Break-Outs (see “Tracks & Break-Out Sessions” for locations)

Track 1 - Criminal Justice Front End Systems:

- Law Enforcement Transparency & Accountability
- Diversionary Programs for Adults
- Juvenile Justice Commission & Diversionary Programs for Juveniles
- Community Street Teams / Credible Messengers

Track 2 - Systems of Custody:

- Entry Assessments
- Education / Volunteer / Training Programs
- Gender-Based Incarceration

12:15-1:30 P.M.

Lunch and Visual Artistry by Mr. Suliman Onque, “The Art Way”

Located in the Student Center, Anacon Hall (second floor)

1:35-3:15 P.M.

Afternoon Break-Outs (see “Tracks & Break-Out Sessions” for locations)

Track Session 2 (continued) - Systems of Custody:

- Voting Rights
- Mental / Medical Health Services
- Challenges of Immigration Detention & Resources & Multi-Lingual Landscape
- Prison & Jail Operations

Track Sessions 3 - Re-entry and Sustainable Community Integration:

- Discharge Planning
- Re-entry & Community Programs
- Parole Programs
- Max Out Programs & Challenges

3:20-3:45 P.M.

Closing Remarks & Brief Plenary (Pollak Theatre)

DAY 2: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8TH, 2025

8:30 - 9 A.M.

Continental Breakfast (Pollak Theatre)

9 - 9:15 A.M.

Housekeeping by Cuqui Rivera (Pollak Theatre)

9:10-9:50 A.M.

Keynote Speech by Dr. Joël Núñez (Pollak Theatre)

9:50 - 10 A.M.

Break

10 - 12:10 P.M.

Dignitaries Panel (Pollak Theatre)

Moderated by Damon “Sharuka” Venable (Returning Citizen, NJOPD)

Dr. Jesselly De La Cruz (Latino Action Network Foundation, Executive Director)

Racquel Romans-Henry (Salvation & Social Justice, Policy Director)

Myrna Diaz (Returning Citizen)

Dameon Stackhouse (Returning Citizen)

Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (US House of Representatives, NJ 12th District)

Matthew Platkin (New Jersey’s 62nd Attorney General)

12:30 - 2 P.M.

**Lunch and Visual Artistry by Mr. Suliman Onque, “The Art Way”
Located in the Student Center, Anacon Hall (second floor)**

2:10-3:30 P.M.

Full Plenary Dialogue (Pollak Theatre)

- Partner Commentary
- Plenary Reports and Feedback
- Next Steps
- Closing Remarks

XX. MEET THE BREAKOUT ROOM FACILITATORS



Miseka Diggs was sentenced to 14 years with a mandatory minimum of 7 years for a nonviolent drug offense. While in prison, Miseka earned her Associate's degree of Sociology and received a scholarship for the Honors Learning Living Community at Rutgers Newark. She now continues her education at Rutgers, majoring in Social Work and minoring in Social Justice. Miseka continues her passion for advocating for carceral-impacted people, inside and out.



Christopher Etienne is a documentary filmmaker and an Africana studies historian who seeks to use his accolades to spotlight injustice and raise awareness about social issues. Currently, Mr. Etienne works as the Student Engagement Coordinator for the Prison Teaching Initiative at Princeton University where he creates curriculum and educates incarcerated college students seeking post-secondary opportunities. As Mr. Etienne looks towards the future, he hopes to continue to use education to enlighten the uninformed, extend educational opportunities to the justice impacted, and liberate minoritized communities from the chains of oppression.



Nafeesah Ali Goldsmith is a transformative leader and passionate advocate for justice reform. As the first Community Outreach Specialist for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, and former co-chair of NJ Prison Justice Watch, she leverages her personal journey and professional expertise to create meaningful change.



Nicole Guyette is an NJSTEP alum with a Bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Rutgers University-Newark. Currently serving as a ICMS Case Manager, her role involves bridging gaps in healthcare, housing, mental health services, and crisis intervention to enhance clients' overall well-being. Nicole is an advocate for change in New Jersey's Criminal Justice system, passionately believing that the humanization of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people is possible.



Dontae Thomas is a Trenton, New Jersey native, and a High-Risk Interventionist supervisor with the Salvation and Social Justice's Trenton Restoration Street Team. He is also the CEO of Team Chizel, a fitness company dedicated to promoting health and wellness in the Mercer County communities. Through his efforts, he has helped over 250 individuals transform their lives through fitness.



Ray Jackson is a Justice Studies graduate with a minor in Psychology from Rutgers-Newark, is currently pursuing a Master's in Public Administration. Jackson also serves as a Peer Educator for the Mayor's Leadership Academy and head facilitator for the TRHT (Truth, Racial, Healing, and Transformation) program.



Edwin “Chino” Ortiz is a Co-Director and Co-Founder of the Returning Citizens Support Group in Newark, New Jersey. This group is premised on the principles of self-determination, agency, & self-reliance. Survivors of the American mass incarceration agenda are best suited and best prepared to determine their own paths of re-entry into society. After serving 30 years of his life in carceral space and experiencing all of the challenges one would face upon his release, he created this support group because, too often, returning citizens specifically, long term offenders, don’t have the support needed to properly adjust to mainstream society.



Rev. Dr. Russel Owen is an organizer with Faith in New Jersey (FNJ), which focuses on ending gun violence, mass incarceration, criminalization, and police brutality at the local, state, and national levels. FNJ is a multi-faith, multi-racial civic engagement vehicle for faith communities and everyday people who strive to fight for social justice. As the CEO of Transformative Leadership Consultation Services, he works as a Justice Impacted Trauma Support Therapist in communities of color to address mental health needs and various degrees of trauma.



Ronald Pierce, Deputy Ombudsperson in the Office of the NJ Corrections Ombudsperson, is an NJ-STEP alum who earned his Associate’s degree at Mercer Community College while at East Jersey State Prison. After his release, he earned a Bachelor’s in Justice Studies (2018) and a Master’s in Criminal Justice (2023) at Rutgers University, Newark, with scholarships from the Vera Institute and NJ-STEP/Mountainview Program. A graduate of Just Leadership USA’s Leading with Conviction program, Ron has also contributed two chapters to *American Prisons and Jails: An Encyclopedia of Controversies and Trends*.



Samuel Quiles, a LAN Foundation Fellow, holds a BA in Criminal Justice from Rutgers University and works as a case manager with Newark Community Solutions' Alternative to Incarceration Program. A system-impacted scholar and advocate for the NJ-STEP program, Sammy’s passion for global and racial justice stems from his lived experience as a Puerto Rican, formerly incarcerated individual from an underserved community. His journey fuels his commitment to activism and supporting marginalized groups.



Tiece Riddick is the Assistant Dean of Community Relations at NJ-STEP. She completed her Master’s and Bachelor’s degrees in Social Work from Rutgers University and has a social work career that spans nearly 20 years. Tiece has been part of the NJ-STEP, Rutgers community since 2019, as a Mountainview Community (MVC) Program Manager. She has worked diligently to support students during their transition from prison to on-campus studies and cultivated student success.



Hassan Shakur is a returning citizen who served 32 years of a life sentence. He is the Board Chairperson of Right My Wrongz, a re-entry agency in Cumberland County that supports returning citizens with their reintegration. Hassan is a student in Camden County College as a Criminal Justice major.



Dameon Stackhouse, MSW, LSW, CPRS, is a Justice Fellow with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and a board member of the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, where he advocates for equitable access to education and opportunities for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. He also serves as the Community Police Alliance Supervisor for Somerset County, supporting individuals in crisis through collaborative efforts with law enforcement and community partners.



Jim Sullivan is the Deputy Policy Director for the ACLU-NJ, where he leads the development of campaigns on criminal legal system reform. Jim is justice-impacted, having experienced incarceration and probation, parole, and collateral consequences, all of which informs his expertise and passion for reforming the criminal legal system. He was previously active in the movement for economic and racial justice in the Philadelphia area and later became the political director for the powerful Culinary Workers Union in Nevada.



Damon "Sharuka" Venable is the Community Affairs & Policy Specialist with the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender (NJOPD). He was tried as an adult and convicted to a sentence of life imprisonment for a crime he committed when he was 16. Damon was released on parole after serving over three and a half decades in prison. While inside, he graduated from the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. After his release, he joined the NJOPD as a paralegal and is now serving in a number of roles in that office, including as a liaison for interagency collaborative initiatives.



Jennifer Love Williams is a formerly incarcerated black transwoman, an entertainer, and an activist. Jennifer Love is the Foundress of the Jen Love Project. Miss Love is a lead organizer with Black and Pink NYC chapter. Jennifer Love Williams serves as (Interim) Co-Chair of the board for Black and Pink National. She also does work with The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. Miss Love is an organizer with Reclaim Pride Coalition (Queer Liberation March). She is also a board member of Garden State Rainbow Sports.



Al-Tariq Witcher is a community organizer, advocate, real estate investor, entrepreneur, and youth mentor. His daughter Messiah inspired him to turn his life around after serving more than 20 years in prison. He has become a beacon of light for other Returning Citizens and at-risk youth.



Robert "Salaam" Ziegler is a community activist and Certified Nonprofit Manager. He holds a BA in Criminal Justice and is a current graduate student attending Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration. Robert is also a Research Fellow, Case Manager of Pretrial Services (Office of the Public Defender), and a member of the Returning Citizens Support Group.

APPENDIX XXI.1

**TO VIEW THE WORKING SUMMIT 25 PROGRAM BOOKLET,
SCAN THIS QR CODE OR CLICK [THIS LINK](#):**



**TO VIEW THE 2003 NJ COMMUNITY & CORRECTIONS
WORKING SUMMIT REPORT,
SCAN THIS QR CODE OR CLICK [THIS LINK](#):**



APPENDIX XXI.2

WE DID IT! Bonnie Watson Coleman Omnibus Legislative Package, 2010

Here are the bills that have made it through both houses and were signed by the Governor on January 18, 2010! Congratulations! These Bills are a reflection of our collective voice:

1) Strengthening Women and Families Act: A4197 and S1347 (EFFECTIVE: MAY 1, 2010)

- ✓ Lifts the felony drug ban on TANF and food stamps.
- ✓ Establishes a commission to strengthen bonds between incarcerated parents and their children.
- ✓ Prohibits confining female inmates to male institutions.
- ✓ Requires incarcerated people to be placed in facilities close as possible to family.
- ✓ Establishes the Division on Women as the semiannual depository for all complaints filed by female incarcerated people.
- ✓ Assigns a DOC Deputy Commissioner to be in charge of issues involving mothers with children.
- ✓ Provides incarcerated people with info about child support modifications.
- ✓ Requires visitation statuses to be placed on the DOC website.

2) Reduction of Recidivism Act: A4201 and S502 (EFFECTIVE: MAY 1, 2010)

- ✓ Allows for a 90-day grace period for outstanding fines.
- ✓ Provides returning citizens with: written notification of fines, outstanding warrants, voting rights, expungement options, an ID Card, birth certificate, a list of prison programs participated in, medical records, assistance with obtaining a social security card, two weeks' medication, a one-day bus or rail pass, and a rap sheet.
- ✓ Eliminates the post-release Medicaid enrollment gap.
- ✓ Establishes a Prisoner Reentry Commission.
- ✓ Establishes a Blue Ribbon Panel for Review of Long-Term Prisoners' Parole Eligibility.
- ✓ Assigns DOC the dissemination of info on available re-entry services to returning citizens.
- ✓ Provides returning citizens with an outside checking account and gives banks the option of issuing a debit card using funds in his/her account.
- ✓ Requires DOC to report to Gov. and Legislature on results of recidivism reducing measures.
- ✓ Requires DOC-issued ID Card to count as two points when obtaining a driver's license.

3) Education and Rehabilitation Act: A4202 and S11 (MOSTLY EFFECTIVE: AUG., 1, 2010)

- ✓ Reviews vocational programs to meet demand job skills and standards.
- ✓ Allows formerly incarcerated persons to visit any prison in the State for motivational purposes.
- ✓ Establishes a peer mentoring program in each facility.
- ✓ Establishes the “contract parole” option and annual review for defendants who want to rehabilitate.
- ✓ Provides options for special credits for education/workforce training skills achievements.
- ✓ Requires the DOC’s education dept. to use volunteers, technology and private resources.
- ✓ Requires DOC to report an incarcerated person’s educational and workforce training skills progress to the State Parole Board.
- ✓ Permits DOC’s education depart. to use digital and online technology.
- ✓ Establishes educational and programmatic benchmarks that must be reached within nine years.
- ✓ Assigns the Re-Entry Commission the review of DOC educational programs and policies.
- ✓ Caps parole ‘hits’ at 3 years before being given another hearing.
- ✓ Mandates all community release beds be filled by those eligible before county jail beds.
- ✓ Mandates incarcerated people to participate in education and workforce training programs.
- ✓ Ensures all vocational programs issue state-recognized certification.

APPENDIX XXI.3

WE DID IT AGAIN!! The following are codified legislative successes that have been signed into law since 2010; this list was generated in 2024 and updated in 2025. All are a direct reflection of our collective voices and work in this movement, pursuant to justice, accountability, and equity...

The Newark Police Consent Decree, ordered 2016

- An agreement between the government and police department as a court order, that requires law enforcement to undergo a series of reforms through new policies, training, and data tracking within a specified period of time.
- Identifies a panel of independent experts to serve as the [Independent Monitoring Team](#) of the Newark Police Department (NPD), which will conduct an annual survey to assess Newark community experiences with and perceptions of the NPD
- Requires the NPD to complete training to improve the quality of policing, community engagement, and oversight, and develop new protocols.

Cash Bail Reform, 2017, NJ State

N.J.S.A. 2A:162-15 to -26 - Sections of The Criminal Justice Reform Act

- Eliminates cash bail; judges now decide on a detainee's risk assessment and whether or not they should be awarded pretrial release (bail).
- Enhances the right to a speedy trial; all defendants must be released or incarcerated within 48 hours of arrest, and if formally detained, a trial must occur within 180 days.

Racial Ethnic Impact Studies, 2018, NJ State

Requires the Office of Legislative Services to prepare any criminal justice-related bill to include a study in its language of the potential impact on racial and ethnic communities and disproportionate or unique concerns.

The Office of Public Integrity & Accountability (OPIA), 2018, NJ State

Within the Office of the Attorney General, the [OPIA](#) was created with a dual mission: to investigate violations of public trust and to develop policies that would rebuild faith in both government and our criminal justice system. OPIA includes both criminal prosecutors and trained investigators, who work together to prosecute cases involving public corruption, criminal violations of civil rights laws, and illegal use of force by law enforcement/corrections police officers, as well as the Office of Policing Policy to strengthen policing practices.

Isolated Confinement Restriction Act (for Adults), 2019, NJ State

Prohibits NJ prisons and jails from housing any incarcerated person in solitary confinement for more than 20 consecutive days or longer than 30 days during a 60-day period. Vulnerable populations are defined and protected from any isolation.

- See New Jersey Prison Justice Watch's [full report and press conference here](#).

Earn Your Way Out Act, 2019, NJ State

P.L.2019, c.364, Prior to release, all incarcerated people will be assessed for a comprehensive re-entry or discharge plan including medical, psychiatric, psychological, educational, vocational, substance abuse, and social rehabilitative services.

Record Expungement, 2019, NJ State

P.L. 2019, c.269, Revises expungement eligibility requirements and creates a petition process for an automated "clean slate" expungement, with an online and free filing application (eliminates expungement filing fees). People with low-level drug and nonviolent offenses may have their records automatically expunged if they do not commit another offense for 10 years.

Parolees' and Probationaries' Suffrage Rights, 2019, NJ State

P.L. 2019, c. 270, Individuals on probation or parole have the right to vote; restores voting rights to over 80,000 New Jerseyans and strengthens democratic inclusion and participation.

Public Emergency Release (COVID-19 Pandemic), 2020, NJ State

The first Act of its kind in the nation for the Public Health Emergency Credits; allows people nearing their release date to leave prison up to eight months earlier to prevent the spread of any infectious disease under a statewide public health emergency order by the Governor's office. Approximately 9,000 people have been released to date under this act.

Prison Gerrymandering, 2020, NJ State

Requires NJ incarcerated individuals to be counted at residential address for municipal, county, and congressional redistricting purposes and provides inmates the support to have a successful reentry into society.

[More info here.](#)

The Dignity for Incarcerated Primary Caretaker Parents Act, 2020, NJ State

P.L.2019, c.288, Protects justice-impacted family and children's rights, and prohibits pregnant and in-labor incarcerated women from being restrained. [More info here.](#)

Marijuana Decriminalization & Cannabis Legalization, 2021, NJ State

P.L.2021, c16-38, includes [The New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory, Enforcement, Assistance and Marketplace Modernization Act](#); [marijuana decriminalization](#); [other clarifying provisions](#) (marijuana and cannabis use, and possession penalties for individuals younger than 21 years old); and [additional clarifying provisions](#) (parental notification of juvenile possession of alcohol, marijuana, hashish or cannabis, and amends provisions of N.J.S.A. 2C:33-15).

Body Worn Camera (BWC) Policy, 2021, [Federal](#) & [NJ State](#)

Mandates the wear and use of BWCs by all uniformed patrol officers and correctional police officers.

The Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act, 2022, [Federal](#)

Amends the Communications Act of 1934 to require the Federal Communications Commission to ensure just and reasonable charges for telephone and advanced communications services in correctional and detention facilities.

Police Licensure Act, 2022, NJ State

- Requires police officers to hold valid and active licenses issued by the Police Training Commission. Police officers who do not meet the necessary criteria will have their license suspended or revoked, in which case they cannot be legally employed by any NJ law enforcement.
- This act makes policing a licensed profession, designed to ensure that officers are in good standing with their employers, meet certain professional standards, and receive ongoing training in best practices in the field.

The Fair Chance in Housing Act, 2022, NJ State

- Prohibits housing providers (realtors, property sellers, landlords, sublessors) from asking an applicant or a third party about criminal history on housing applications.
- [Know Your FCHA Rights wallet card](#)
- [More information/details](#)

The ARRIVE Together Act, 2022, NJ State

P.L.2022, c.36, establishes the Alternative Response to Reduce Instances of Violence and Escalation (ARRIVE) Together Pilot Program under the Attorney General's jurisdiction; designed to provide accessible crisis intervention, mental health screening, or other support to individuals experiencing mental health crises who have contacted or are engaging with law enforcement. Appropriates \$2 Million.

Public Defender Fines & Fees, 2023, NJ State

“[Eliminates public defender fees](#) going forward but applies retroactively to all unpaid outstanding costs, and any unsatisfied civil judgments, liens on property, and warrants issued based on unpaid balances for services rendered by the Office of the Public Defender.”

Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act, 2024, NJ State

Establishes Community Crisis Response Advisory Council and community crisis response teams pilot program; appropriates \$12 million. [More info here](#).

The Clemency Project, 2024, NJ State

- On June 19, 2024, Governor Murphy issued [Executive Order No. 362](#), which established the Clemency Advisory Board to review and make recommendations regarding clemency applications. Categories of cases that are eligible for review:
 - Victim of domestic or sexual violence or sex trafficking and was convicted of a crime against the perpetrator of violence or sex trafficking, or of a crime or offense committed under the duress or coercion of such perpetrator.
 - Cases that involve a crime or offense that is no longer unlawful; or the conviction would have resulted in a less severe sentence under current law (excessive penalty).

APPENDIX XXI.4

MEET THE ARTIST



Suliman Onque, “The Art Way”

Muralist, Live Painter, Digital Artist, Comic Book Artist

At the Workin Summit event, the partnership contracted artist Suliman Onque to create a canvas piece of art live at the 2025 Working Summit, that visibly portrayed this historic event. This canvas was auctioned to the highest bidder at \$550 on Day 2. The proceeds were added to the fund to be split and donated to the Salvation & Social Justice’s Trenton Street Team and Returning Citizen Support Group.

Instagram: Slimsuliart_world

www.3theartway.com



Scan this QR code or go to
<https://linktr.ee/Slimsuliart>

APPENDIX XXI.5

Click on the following hyperlinks for additional resources:

[Latino Action Network Foundation](#)

[Salvation & Social Justice](#), Trenton Community Street Team

[Returning Citizens Support Group](#)

[Integrated Justice Alliance](#) on Facebook

[Latino Action Network](#)

[New Jersey Department of Corrections](#)

[New Jersey Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson](#)

[American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey](#)

[Latino Action Network](#)

[Returning Citizens Support Group](#)

[New Jersey State Parole Board](#)

[New Jersey Office of the Attorney General](#)

[New Jersey Office of the Public Defender](#)

[New Jersey Youth Justice Commission](#)

[American Friends Service Committee \(Prison Justice Watch\)](#)

[United Black Agenda](#)

[UU Faith Action NJ](#)

[New Jersey Policy Perspective](#)

[Puerto Rican Action Board](#)

[Solitary Confinement Simulator](#)

[U.S. Congresswoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman](#)

[Dr. Joël Núñez](#)

[New Jersey State Governor](#), Phillip Murphy

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JOIN & SUPPORT THE MOVEMENT!

All future donations will be divided between Returning Citizens Support Group (Newark, NJ) and Salvation & Social Justice's Trenton Community Street Team to support their vital work in this movement.

To date, we have raised just under \$5,000 to be split and sent to these two organizations!

Please continue to support this cause if you're able—the need for preventative efforts to criminal-legal involvement and re-entry support services are great.

Every dollar goes directly to supporting front-line community leadership, advocacy, and transformation.

Let's keep the momentum going!

Scan this QR Code or click on this link:

[Donate Now](#)

