

State of New Jersey

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Modifying Investigations of Law Enforcement-Related Deaths

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TRENTON – Today, Governor Phil Murphy signed S1036 into law, providing that the Attorney General handle the investigation and prosecution of a crime involving a person's death that occurs during an encounter with a law enforcement officer acting in their official capacity or while the decedent was in custody.

"While this bill is a limited solution to a challenging issue, I have concluded that signing this bill will be an important step in improving police-community relations in New Jersey," **said Governor Murphy**. "I know we are a stronger and safer State when every law enforcement officer feels respected and every community feels valued."

Legislative leaders and local officials offered their support of the legislation.

"It is vitally important that deadly encounters resulting from police actions are investigated thoroughly and fairly and that the public trusts the findings," **said Senate President Steve Sweeney**. "Independent investigations that are not associated with the county in which the death occurred will have more credibility and will help remove any perception of a conflict of interest."

"Some of the police-involved shooting deaths that have occurred in multiple states have traumatized their communities and widened the divide between law enforcement officers and the residents they are sworn to protect," **the Senate President continued**. "We have a real problem when a portion of society feels as if the criminal justice system is not protecting them with equal justice. Trust is critical for law enforcement. Requiring independent investigations is beneficial for police officers, the criminal justice system and for the communities they serve and protect."

"As many great civil rights leaders have said, 'the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.' Today is a great day for justice, civil and human rights. I want to thank Governor Murphy for proving yet again his dedication to being progressive, not just in words but in action," **said Assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake**. "Signing this bill, which requires that an independent investigation occur when a person dies in police custody or during an interaction with law enforcement, is a great leap toward authoritative accountability. When administered, this law should be of assistance to officers who are doing the right thing while also sifting out biases that exist amongst those armed with power."

"As the mother of a son, it was important to me to fight for this bill to become a law, a law that will deter the use of excessive force and save lives. Thank you to the advocacy groups who have supported this law, and to the Assembly and Senate leadership, fellow sponsors in both houses, past and present. Without their leadership and courage this would not have been possible. Lastly, to the families of those who have unwarrantedly lost their lives amidst this nationwide issue, here's to justice," **Assemblywoman Timberlake continued**.

"I applaud Governor Murphy for signing this legislation," **said Newark Mayor Ras Baraka**. "It is a step in the right direction."

"I understand this is a hotly debated issue," **said Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh**. "However, any opportunities to increase transparency and restore public confidence in law enforcement should be explored. We appreciate the Governor's leadership on this issue, as well as the work of our own delegation – sponsors Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter and Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly, and supporter Senator Nellie Pou."

"The most important goal of any investigation is truth and accuracy so that justice is served," **said New Brunswick Mayor Jim Cahill**. "It is also important that all have faith in the process."

"The placement of the responsibility for these matters with the Attorney General's Office and the procedures provided for in the legislation help to address these objectives and allow for the establishment of a protocol consistent throughout the state," **Mayor Cahill continued**.

The bill was supported by a number of advocacy groups, including representatives of the faith community and communities of color.

"It is with sincere gratitude that I thank Governor Phil Murphy for staying true to his word and for his consistent efforts to be a champion for civil rights and social Justice," **said Richard T. Smith, President – NAACP NJ State Conference**. "Today he has signed an historic piece of legislation that requires that a Prosecutor designated by the Attorney General investigate a police shooting or death in police custody. Across this nation there has been a rash of police shootings against unarmed civilians, overwhelmingly African Americans. I commend Governor Murphy for being a trailblazer in our State because he realizes that this social schism across our nation has bred mistrust, disenfranchisement and alienation in our communities and by his action today he is ensuring that will not be the case in New Jersey"

"Signing this bill into law is one of the most important actions Gov. Murphy has taken," **said ACLU-NJ Executive Director Amol Sinha**. "With this law in place, New Jersey stands as a national leader in preventing the kinds of conflicts of interest that can arise when local prosecutors investigate the local departments they collaborate with so closely. The Governor recognized that providing accountable, independent investigations does not undermine prosecutors, but strengthens community trust in the fairness of investigations."

"While we realize this law addressing law enforcement-related deaths is not a silver bullet, it is indeed a good start to righting a wrong and creating trust between African Americans and law enforcement," **said Reverend Charles Boyer, pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Woodbury**. "We are encouraged by the Governor's commitment to a stronger and fairer New Jersey that includes us."

"Our Governor has had a commitment to civil rights social and economic justice before he became Governor and he is continuing this commitment as Governor," **said Reverend Steffie Bartley, Regional Director of the National Action Network**. "I am not surprised that he signed the bill. This is who he is."

"I commend and thank Governor Murphy for signing the Independent Prosecutor bill into law," **said Lawrence Hamm, Chairman of the People's Organization for Progress**. "By signing this bill the Governor once again puts New Jersey at the forefront for social justice. This is a day that will be remembered in the State's legislative history. It is a major step forward in the struggle for criminal justice reform and accountability."

"I commend those legislators that sponsored, supported and voted for the bill," **Mr. Hamm continued**. "And I especially express my deepest gratitude to those community activists all over the state that have been fighting for years to make this reform a reality."

"Today is a great day for the people of New Jersey," **said Reva Foster, President of the New Jersey Black Issues Convention**. "The New Jersey Black Issues Convention applauds Governor Murphy for signing this bill and taking another step to ensure justice. I am pleased that Governor Murphy continues his commitment to ensuring a stronger and fairer New Jersey for all."

A copy of the Governor's signing statement is available here. (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A_t_e2ma.net_click_n32g7_nrdit_raf2ig&d=DwMFaQ&c=4BTEw-1msHjOY4ITcFLmDM6JB8x6ZgbU2J24IH0HZLU&r=xF3DPDNEH8wpTwkOjb4MHQ0EgF6v3M0zt3hszQvyU&m=iYlnU3jkUzXAbDg6BtHYofzNaV6fyUslDoWdX0np0gl&s=CTmjqhFHBjNqtac3gR7WSWLvSs4Vuc&e=))

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