

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: June 23rd, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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## Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you all for your patience to do this at a slightly later hour today especially to my colleagues, so thank you. With me is the woman who needs no introduction on my right, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Director. Good to have Dr. Ed Lifshitz back, another familiar face. Guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, Parimal Garg, and a cast of thousands.

I've got no real announcements today, so we're going to jump right into the numbers. First up, this morning we are counting a total of 4,843,934 fully vaccinated individuals who live, work, or study in New Jersey. If you are not yet counted in the numbers on the screen, there are more than 1500 places statewide where you can get vaccinated. Head over to that website, [covid19.nj.gov/finder](https://covid19.nj.gov/finder), to find a vaccination site near you. Then go out and do your part to protect yourself, your family, and your community. Our initial goal was 4.7 million fully vaccinated by June 30th. We're leaving that one in the dust. I would say, Judy, today, tomorrow, maybe the next day we'll cross the threshold of 70% of all adults vaccinated as well. We're going to stay at this. Let's see how far we can put these goals in our rear-view mirror by the time next Wednesday, June 30th rolls around.

In addition, we're reporting 213 new positive PCRs, 89 presumed positive antigen tests. You can see the rate of transmission – pardon me, the positivity rate. Those are reversed. That's not accurate. The rate of transmission is .99, and the positivity rate is 1.3%. We should make sure we correct that for the dashboard. Looking to our hospitals and healthcare systems, as of last night, 263 confirmed, 60 individuals awaiting results. You can see 58 of them whom were in ICU, 30 of whom were on ventilators. The daily admissions and discharge numbers are there as well, and from all of these numbers you can take two things really to the bank. First of all, our numbers are so low because our vaccination numbers continue to grow, and secondly, all of these numbers on the screen reflect individuals who are almost exclusively if not exclusively non-vaccinated. The number [audio difficulty] is this one. 99.94%, that's how effective the vaccines are proving to be right here in New Jersey in preventing illness, so again, the surest way to not become one of these numbers on the screen is to get out and get vaccinated.



Today, with the heaviest of hearts, we are also reporting an additional 10 confirmed losses of life from our New Jersey family. Ed's team has also updated the number of probable deaths, which now stands at 2,698. For the newly reported deaths, we haven't mentioned this caveat in a while, but it is worth putting out the reminder that these are not deaths that occurred over the past 24 hours. Those deaths are still to be confirmed. Indeed, nine of these deaths occurred between June 12th and June 18th, and one is from the week of May 2nd, so we're really reporting across a range, but this certainly does not diminish their impact, but it is important to keep that reporting in mind.

With that, let's take a moment to remember three more members of our New Jersey family who have been lost to this pandemic. Let's begin by remembering these two blessed individuals, Dr. Robert and Constance Kaczorowski. They had [audio difficulty] native of Camden. He was a career educator with an undergraduate degree from LaSalle University and a Master's of what was then called Glassboro State, which is now Rowan University. He taught at Willingboro High and at Bishop Eustace Prep while working towards his doctorate in education, which he received from Temple University in North Philly. He joined the faculty at Camden County College in 1970 beginning a 48-year career in which he would ultimately become the dean of the liberal arts college. When he wasn't at the college, Robert's time would be spent with his family, especially outdoors as he was an avid hunter and angler and enjoyed a round of golf.

Three days after Robert's passing on February 25th, the virus took Constance at the age of 73. Constance was a Philadelphia gal, born, raised, and educated there, including for her college years also at Temple University. Her focus was on looking after her and Robert's two boys, David and Peter, and she was also an active member of the Haddonfield Fortnightly Women's Club, which has played a deep role in the borough's civic life for generations.

They leave behind their boys as I mentioned David and Peter, along with David's wife Lisa. I had the great honor of speaking with David on Monday. He is planted his flag and his family's life in Haddon Heights. His brother Peter is not too far away in Voorhees. They are also missed by their five grandchildren, Sydney, Margot, Gabriella, Matthew, and Natalie, along with their nieces, nephews, and many other family and friends. We are exceptionally grateful to both Robert and Constance for their respective years of elevating education and to Robert for his role in making Camden County College one of our finest community-based institutions of higher education. God bless them both and watch over their souls and their family.

Today we also honor this guy, the life of Monmouth County's Nelson Joline, who passed away on December 30th at the age of 79. That is a million-dollar smile. I think we can all agree on that, right? He was born in Long Branch, raised in Little Silver, lived in Colt's Neck, and had most recently called the Port Monmouth section of my town, Middletown, home. Not that anything needed to be added to his Monmouth County bona fides, but he also attended Monmouth County University. Nelson had a 32-year career, Pat, with the Long Branch police department before retiring at the rank of captain, and for good measure, he also served the community as a volunteer fireman with the independent engine company of the Long Branch Fire Department. He was a long-time and active member of Fairhaven's storied Root Beer and Checker Club where he helped facilitate their weekly luncheons and tour weekly bike rides to Sandy Hook.

Nelson has left behind his wife of 36 years, Patricia, goes by Pat. I had the great honor of speaking with her on Monday. He's also survived by his children Michelle and Brian, for whom he was fan number one for any sporting event, along with Brian's family, his wife Jonelle, and their children, Nelson's grandchildren, Addison and Scarlett. We thank Nelson for his career of service to Monmouth County and its people, and may God bless him, his memory and look after his family. If you add up the confirmed and the probable losses of life, we've now lost a total of 26,410 New Jerseyans to this virus, and we remember each and every one. We can't get the number of those we lose to zero unless everyone does their part. Please, folks, please, please, please get vaccinated.

Switching gears, I want to give a huge shout-out to these gentlemen – actually to two gentlemen. We don't have their pictures unless there's another slide with their pictures, Ken DeRoberts and Phillip Gentile. These two friends have been for the past six years the force behind this organization, Soup Kitchen 411, a non-profit that brought technology to bear to fight food insecurity and hunger. Their database is – and check them out, [soupkitchen411.com](http://soupkitchen411.com), and that database provides information and interactive maps for some 250 kitchen and pantries in the tri-state area and more than 700 nationwide. Last year they took the next step by launching the Feed NJ campaign, which contracted with more than 80 restaurants across the state to provide an additional tens of thousands of meals that allowed numerous local soup kitchens to meet the tremendous demand for their support services, and in doing so, they kept these restaurants active and open.

Through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, Feed NJ is now also backed by a Sustain and Serve NJ grant, and I believe it's the largest grant to date of its kind, which has allowed them to reach out to partner with even more restaurants to provide more meals. Thanks to this great partnership, Feed NJ is delivering more than 10,000 restaurant prepared meals to food banks across our state every week, in total Feed NJ is on track to provide almost 250,000 meals by the end of July. Our local soup kitchens and food pantries have always been critical resources, but their work has never been as needed nor resources so stretched, so thanks to Soup Kitchen 411 and Feed NJ, more families have

access to the nutritious meals they need. I caught up with both Ken and Dan on Monday, had a great conversation and thanked them and their team for their tremendous work. I also want to give a huge thank you to a couple of guys on their board of directors, dear friend Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, another friend, chair of the board of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Kevin O'Toole. They have been big supporters of theirs and their efforts to combat food insecurity and hunger.

Before I turn things over to you, Judy, I just want to mention one more number today. This is a big one. 104,253. 104,253. That's how many of you have taken advantage of the Department of Environmental Protection's Vax and Visit program and gotten your free state park's Vax Pass. We are blessed as a state to be home to 51 tremendous state parks, I believe 18 of which have some sort of parking or admittance fee, and those state parks, the 51 range from Island Beach State Park on the shore to Stokes and Brendan Byrne State Forests and many more in between. Each provides a great summer getaway, and with your Vax Pass, you have free entry and parking at every one our state parks. For Operation Jersey Summer, I hope you continue to take full advantage of our 452,000 acres of state parks, forest, historic sites, and beaches. They are there for you, and we thank you for getting vaccinated. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. On Monday, we were noticed from the CDC and the US Department of Health and Human Services that they have awarded 59 jurisdictions, including New Jersey, funds to hire epidemiologists and other disease detectives who do contact tracing and investigate disease outbreaks. These disease intervention specialists are the backbone of the public health in the state and local health agencies in New Jersey and across the United States. They wear many hats to protect public health including prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis outbreak response, and HIV exposure notification. They bring a specialized set of skills. These funds are part of a total one billion investment over the next five years consistent with the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

As part of the award, New Jersey will receive a total of approximately \$26 million over five years to help support the state's local public health infrastructure and programs for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. Perhaps more than any other time in our recent history, people recognize the value of public health, so this funding will allow us to strengthen our public health workforce whose work was largely unknown to the public before this pandemic. The total funds, which CDC is funding through our STD program, will help our efforts to continue to build a resilient public health workforce in New Jersey that can deploy anywhere at any time and respond to any outbreak. For the first year, New Jersey will receive nearly \$5.3 million in workforce funding to help these efforts.

Moving on to my daily report, we are seeing a slight increase in our hospital census. Among those COVID-19 confirmed and PUIs, we've seen an increase in 21 additional patients in the hospital in the past 24 hours from 302 to 323. That's about 13 higher than our 7-day average, so we will continue to monitor this, and as the Governor has asked you, please, if you are not vaccinated, please get vaccinated. Many of these new hospitalizations are due to individuals who are not vaccinated. Our positivity test rate and case rates were declining but have now flattened over the next two weeks, so again, we will remain vigilant as we review the data.

We're continuing to monitor the Delta variant. Earlier today, Dr. Fauci said it poses the greatest threat to all of our work to eliminate COVID because it is highly transmissible, and it is associated with increased disease severity and risk of hospitalization. It may result in local surges among the unvaccinated. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory children – inflammatory syndrome in children, and none of these children are currently hospitalized, and no new cases among our residents at the veterans' homes and no new cases among our patients in our psychiatric hospitals. The Governor shared the positivity rate for New Jersey. As of June 19th, it was 1.3. The northern part of the state 1.31, central 1.31, southern part of the state 1.27%. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, and our friends. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you. The numbers, a little bit sideways. Wednesdays I look back and compare week to week. Wednesdays are almost entirely – Parimal's the one that got me out of this trend – lower than Tuesdays. Tuesday's are the day that usually spike. Today it was what we're reporting today, but I, again, cannot say this more strongly enough and that is get vaccinated because this is overwhelmingly now a pandemic of unvaccinated, but having said that just to ask you and maybe Ed to weigh in, no evidence – we want to keep asking this question and keep raising it. The vaccines work based on everything we see against the variants including the Delta variant, and that continues to be the case. Fair to say? Ed, would you agree? Okay, nodding his head. Thank you for that. Pat, if this is not a day the Lord made, I don't know what is. You can quit for the rest of the year after the weather you produced today, but over to you for any updates you've got.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** We should all rejoice and be glad in it, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You bet.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Don't really have anything to report. The weather looks a good stretch other than Saturday some isolated thunderstorms. Nothing really.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Let's hope it stays that way. I know one thing on a more sober reality, I know you and the attorney general, local law enforcement, keeping a very keen eye on what is a national reality right now and that's a lot of folks breaking out sadly in some cases – In many cases gun violence on the rise, and I know you're trying to do everything you can to stay out ahead of that.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** We are, and our troopers – there's probably not a day goes by that our investigation detectives aren't – from ghost guns to assault rifles to high-capacity magazines that aren't taking those crime guns off the street, but it is a daily mission for us.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Amen. Amen. Thank you for that. We'll start over here. We're going to be on, I think, the same rhythm that we've been on of late. I'm not sure we'll be on the road, Judy, at the end of the week. We might be. We shall see on that front, but we'll start – we'll be back to you then again on Monday, and I'm not sure the exact format on Monday, but we'll let you know that, and putting that aside, Brent, we'll say hello to you and welcome.

#### Q&A Section:

**Brent Johnson, NJ.com:** Hi. Are the numbers of deaths, hospitalization cases that you just mentioned, can we expect this to be the stabilization over the next few days now that the cases have dropped and stabilized, is this where we expect it to stay, or could the Delta variant change that? Governor, do you think the state budget votes and the legislature have gone too quickly? Votes happened just minutes after the final bill was introduced yesterday, and some have complained that you did not end the capital to operation transfer for NJ Transit in the state budget after all that tax revenue windfall. Is now not the time to install a long-term funding source for the agency? Loretta Weinberg specifically said it's mind-boggling that this didn't happen.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Maybe we'll do the medical stuff first. I used the word sideways. I don't want to make that a turn of art in the medical and the scientific communities, but is this – are we in a range that you and Ed would expect we'd be in here for a little bit of a period?

**Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz:** Sure. After I answer that, I'll tell you who's going to win the World Series and some other things as well. That's exactly the problem. We have competing forces going on. We have people getting vaccinated all the time. That's good. Increasing immunity, that's good. Nicer weather, people going outside, that's all good, and of course, that's competing against the fact that there probably is a decrease in mask wearing and other social distancing factors. You do see people acting with more abandon. You do have concerns about the new variants coming in as well, about increased communicability and so forth and exactly will – where all that will land. The answer is I don't know. It's hard for me to imagine we'll go back to as bad as we were in the winter, but certainly, I am concerned, and we do watch the numbers every day to make sure that we're not turning around and going higher, and I would certainly prefer that we continue to go down instead.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Put the variants inside, we're now almost – Ed makes a good point. On Friday we'll be four weeks since we lifted the indoor masking mandate, and frankly, things have stayed pretty darn good in the – I think you all would expect you'd have to wait a couple weeks after that, but now almost four weeks in, you'd have some sense as to whether or not it was going to explode, but the fact of the matter is even if it's staying sideways – Judy, are you – would you color yourself satisfied with the numbers where they are today?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, I'm not overly concerned. We'll certainly monitor it, but I do want to share that right now our outbreaks in long-term care, which you know has fully vaccinated almost every resident, close to 90%, is down to 33 from 456 in January, and that just shows you the impact of vaccination. That's the only thing that has changed significantly is the vaccination rate, and the residents are vaccinated. They're vulnerable. They're not getting sick. They're not being hospitalized and only 33 active outbreaks today.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That's extremely encourage. Brent, in terms of the – your second question was on the – is this done too quickly. I've said this before. I get the chance to compare New Jersey's process with other governors. I was just on a Democratic Governors' Association call earlier today, and you exchange notes, you compare. I think as a general matter, New Jersey's got a good process, so for instance, I'll tell you from our side, presented our budget in February, countless hearings – I think 19 before the assembly budget committee, 17 before the senate – of our cabinet members, regular revenue updates, particularly as of late when revenues began to spike meaningfully higher than expectation. Would I be open-minded to a window between posting and voting? Yeah, that's something that I would welcome the opportunity to talk to the legislative leadership about it. In fact, we have talked about it. I think that would be a potentially good step. I'll leave it at that.

On NJ – was it NJ Transit? I would say I could apply these comments to the overall state of the state and the budget, but I can certainly apply them to NJ Transit. The wreck within the wreck was NJ Transit. I think the appropriation in this budget is something like \$2.65 billion. I believe it's a 15-ish percent increase over two years ago. It has the lowest capital to operating transfer in 15 years. NJ Transit, I have to remind everybody, is eligible for +/- \$2 billion in American Rescue Plan money. We have aggressively used the pandemic period to accelerate the fixing of NJ Transit, everything from the customer experience to station improvements to communications, hiring more engineers. We just got here three and a half years ago, and I think that we made an enormous amount of progress. By the way, no rate hike during our time, and I hope it stays that way. I can't promise it will stay that way, but to me, that's a pretty darn good package, and we'll leave it at that. Thank you. Daniel, is that you? We'll go to Daniel behind you. That's Brenda with the microphone, by the way.

**Daniel Munoz, NJ BIZ:** Hi, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Hi, Daniel.

**Daniel Munoz, NJ BIZ:** Why not put more monies in the unemployment? Isn't that going to essentially doom businesses to have to pay that back with tax increases starting on July 1st? Do you plan to sign the budget and the tax rate cleanup bill as is, and if so, how long after lawmakers send it to your desk will you sign it? The speed at which the budget is moving through the legislator and the fact that it's being introduced just minutes after being – the fact that it's being approved just minutes after getting introduced to the public, this doesn't seem like the kind of thing that we'd like – I imagine we would want to see in a healthy democracy. I'm just wondering if you see it that way, or if you see it differently, and if the budget has to proceed in this fashion. I get it that this happens in previous budgets in other states, but does it mean it has to keep happening here? Lastly, why not make more upgrades to the unemployment system. We saw how overwhelmed –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Why not what? Sorry.

**Daniel Munoz, NJ BIZ:** Why not make more upgrades to the unemployment system beyond just the 10 million we saw how overwhelmed and under-prepared the Cobalt computer system was during all the unemployment filings and all the system crashes last year, so I'm just wondering if there's going to be more money to upgrade unemployment.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. I'm going to ask Ed to take the budget questions. Sorry. Just making sure you're still paying attention, Dave. Mahen reminds me we are not live on Monday. We will be virtual Monday, but we will be at 1 o'clock on Monday, and then we'll be back here live at 1 o'clock a week from today unless you hear otherwise. Real quick, Daniel, on unemployment fund money, I signed a law, Parimal, several months ago that pushed back the employers' contribution obligations. Secondly, we have enough money to pay unemployment insurance, so that has not been a danger, and we continue to put a ton of money into our small business community, and God knows they need it. I signed six bills yesterday totally \$235 million. I'm going to look to the American Rescue Plan for even more money so when you look at the broad tapestry, our small businesses need the help, and we've not impacted, I think, over 60-some thousand small business, and we are going to stay at it, and I promise folks that.

Will I sign the budget as is? I'm not going to make news today, but obviously, we're not going to let any grass grow. Obviously, it'll get done by June 30th. I can tell you that much. The speed I think I've addressed. Brent had asked that question, and I think I've addressed it. Would I be open-minded to some – requiring some kind of window, I think we've said before we would be, and I would be today, but as we say, if you go back to when we first put this out in February, the hearings, the regular reporting on the revenue adjustments, which this year were significant, those are all things that I think are good elements, but again, the open-minded to talk to the legislative leadership who I want to commend as having done a terrific job on this budget, I have to say. Would I be open-minded to speaking with them about creating some kind of a window? Very much so.

On the unemployment system, I have said this, but in fairness, I haven't said it for probably a few months that what we don't want to do is put good money after bad, and what I mean by that is the big challenge is the federal piece of this, so if we were to just throw a whole lot more money at the state level and the feds did not improve their technology, that would be good money after bad. The good news is thanks to Rob Asaro-Angelo and team, we're in a partnership – I would even call it a pilot with the federal government, and I think that reality may well change. I think one of the big reactions that we've all had is that we need a stronger unemployment insurance benefit system period everywhere in the country, and that we can never afford to go into a tsunami like this every again.

Please, God, we never have to and we never do but without having the federal backbone a lot stronger and more modern than it is, and I think with that step, and God willing, the Biden team will take that working with congress to get that appropriation. We then have the ability to – I'm going to use to phrase double down on our investment. The money we're spending is real. It will make it better. There's no question about that. God willing, it will make it faster and easier for the folks that are using the system, but we need that quantum leap, and we need the feds to be with us for that. Thank you. Alex, good afternoon.

**Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey:** Good afternoon.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon.

**Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey:** Dr. Lifshitz, with rate of transmission spot positivity falling, at what point does COVID in this state become essentially like a bad flu wave? Are you seeing the positivity numbers at this point that would indicate some sort of comparison between the two, and with so many people vaccinated, is the rate of transmission still a reliable indicator of the danger of COVID in this state? For the commissioner, can you give us an update on cases in long-term care facilities? Have COVID cases completely gone away or decreased measurably as a result of intense vaccination campaign?

For the Governor, on the budget, there are items like \$10,000 for Brian Stack to have an intern, 100,000-dollar renovation of the Manville VFW, a half a million dollars for a bandshell in Hopewell, \$15 million to knock down buildings in Camden. Some of these you proposed, some of these you didn't in the budget. Are you going to allow all of them to go through, or will you use your line-item veto to strike some of them? Do you believe those are fair uses of taxpayer money, and in general, on the budget, as a general matter, when you look at the process, how much of this process is dictated by the legislature? How much of this is them driving the process rather than you? Finally, on your comment a moment ago that you are open to a period of time where a bill has to be public, does that mean you're endorsing the idea of your opponent, Jack Ciattarelli, who said this morning that he would commit to not signing a bill until it had been public for seven days? Is this a first point of agreement for the two of you in the campaign?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Before Judy and Ed jump in, let me start on that front and maybe ask them to take the lead on the health and medical stuff, and I'll come back on budget if that works. I – Ed and Judy, you are the experts here, but I think we've signaled – I think many people signal that when this thing finally settles, it feels like it well may be a flu-like reality in the sense folks should not expect every single number to go to zero and stay at zero forever and always. It'll be in our midst. My gut – I don't want to preempt Ed's answer. My gut is that if that's true, we're not there yet, getting there but not there yet. I think Judy, on the long-term care cases, you mentioned a minute ago that's in a dramatically different and better place, but you can reiterate what you said a minute ago. Do you mind if we start with Ed? Is that alright? Ed, is that – how do you like – how do you feel about that analogy that it gets to the place where we've beaten it but it's in our midst at a low level and we have to keep an eye on it?

**Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Edward Lifshitz:** No, I agree, and I think that's an excellent question and exactly where it's going to settle out and where it's going to end up and what sort of response will individuals take, states take, the federal government take, is still to be decided and certainly isn't for me to decide. When you ask to compare it to the flu, in a typical bad flu season, New Jersey will lose roughly a thousand residents or so. That would be a typical bad season. I just did a back-of-the-envelope calculation as we were sitting here. Last week has been one of our better weeks, and we've lost about 42 New Jerseyans, which averages out to about 2,000 over the course of the year, which means that in the last week, we've lost on average about twice as many as we would in a bad flu season.

Even now when we are feeling good and certainly are in a whole lot better place than we were several months ago, it is important to remember that we're not there yet, that we have not yet gotten it down certainly to a level that I would be happy with that would make this feel like a typical flu season. We're still not there yet. I certainly hope that we do get there.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, long-term care, dramatically better, still not in the end zone. Is that fair to say?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** But getting there, 33 active outbreaks. We have ten of those facilities are working out their outbreak status. Remember when they have an outbreak, you have to be free of cases for 28 days, so you work out that status. Ten are in that process, so there's a good possibility that we could be around 20, 22, 23 active outbreaks if everything else stays stable. We see one to two outbreaks – new outbreaks a week, which is very low as compared to what we experienced obviously last year but just comparing it to the beginning of this year in January where we had over 400 active outbreaks. Definitely moving in the right direction, and I expect those improvements to continue.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Again, remember, in long-term care, the numbers are getting better but the staff is at a much lower vaccination rate than the residents. That continues to be the case but getting better.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** It's improving. We want the staff to be at 70% or better. The last report I saw, they were about 60%. There's some – we are calling every facility where the uptake of vaccine in the staff is at low percentages to see what help we can give the facility to help increase awareness and educate and increase those numbers.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you both. On the budget items, Alex, I'll tick through. I won't comment on particular items, but it is a tradition that there be a combination of governor-initiated programs and expenditures and legislative-initiated programs and expenditures, and this budget has that reality as well. I'll leave it until we do the final signing of this, but the process has been a really good one, I have to say. Importantly, since we got here, doing things in a fiscally responsible way has been a guiding light. Not only were we standing for stronger, fairer, now more resilient, particularly after a pandemic, but we were making up for lost time. We had under-funded schools. We had not make our pension payments. We hadn't smartly managed healthcare and sought smart savings. We had indebtedness that was exploding, and we continue on a – we're not – this took us decades to get to that point, but we've made a lot of progress over the past several years This budget has a very big surplus.

If you look at the combination of the debt defeasance bucket with debt avoidance bucket with the even further increase in the pension payment, that's about equal to the indebtedness that we took at the worst moments of the pandemic. As I mentioned, the surplus is significant. We've not been heroic in our revenue projections as has been the case in the past, just to go like this in June to try to get a bigger number to cover up. We just haven't done that. The process – I wrote this – yeah, it's both legislature – it's both sides. That's why I side – sitting down and trying to figure out a good way forward is something I think I'm open-minded to. Again, I like the fact we present this in February. There's hearing after hearing, again, I think several dozen. There's a regular updating of our reality, especially revenues, and they moved around a lot this year. Again, if there's an opportunity to work with legislative leadership to create that window, that's something I'm open-minded to.

I did not see the assemblyman's suggestion but this is something that we've been on record pre-pandemic that we would be supportive of. This goes back a ways for us, and I continue to be today. Thank you.

Sir?

**Reporter:** Governor, if the state receives a claim from a medical provider for a COVID test taken by somebody without insurance, does the state cover it, or is that person charged? How much do those tests cost? Why is there no additional relief for undocumented workers?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Sorry, for a test or a vaccine?

**Reporter:** A test.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** A test, okay.

**Reporter:** Why is there no additional relief for undocumented workers in the budget bill despite a \$10 million surplus? Advocates say that the 40 million excluded workers' fund is not enough and have called about a billion dollars for direct checks in unemployment-like payments for undocumented workers. Have you begun to distribute that \$40 million in CARES money for excluded workers? Finally, what is your response to two Atlantic City council members calling for state intervention to address violent crime in the city? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. On the medical claim – on the tests where you got billed, I have to come back to you on that. Parimal, I assume that's something we want to follow up on.

**Chief Counsel Parimal Garg:** Yeah, we can follow up with you. I think it varies from testing center to testing center and insurer to insurer.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** So bear with us on that. Listen, I was grateful that we were able to get to the point where we could put together from the CARES Act money the \$40 million and we said then this was not a forever and for always state, but it was the right thing to do. It was in the category of the right thing to do. Are we open-minded to try to find resources for more? Yes, if legislation came our way, is that something we could be supportive and constructive on? The answer is yes and/or other sources of money. On the status of the 40 million and whether or not – to what degree that's been spent, I'd like to follow up on that. Is that okay, Parimal? Will you make sure we do that?

In Atlantic City, Pat, I think we addressed it, but I think it may be worth repeating what you said on Monday in the sense that this is already a very deep relationship. It's not like we woke up on Monday and realized that we needed to focus on public safety in any community, certainly including Atlantic City. Any reiteration of some of the things you said on Monday in terms of the areas of cooperation that take place in the here and now?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Yes, sir, thanks, Governor. Yes, as discussed on Monday, the support for Atlantic City and a lot of our urban cities come, one, in the form of our real-time crime centers where we have troopers dedicated, collecting intelligence, trying to keep gun violence and violence generally down in our cities. We have the Atlantic City Task Force, which is a combination of the state police and Division of Criminal Justice detectives in

concert with the prosecutor's office. We're – in the last two days since that letter came in, we've had discussions with the attorney general's office, with Atlantic City, on how we can perhaps retool our efforts down there given the violence, as the Governor said, which is not simply relegated to Atlantic City. We're seeing it across the entire country.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yep, amen, and we're on with the folks in Atlantic City all the time. Kaleem Shabazz and I were exchanging texts last night. I mean, this is a regular and deep relationship that we have with the community.

Nikita, let's go to you up back. Is that alright? Good afternoon.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Good afternoon, Governor. So a federal judge yesterday ruled that regulated industries like banks and utility companies can make independent expenditures in campaigns. I'm wondering if you agree with that decision and whether you believe it should be appealed. Next, will your name appear on checks going out under the Homestead Benefits program and the \$500 tax rebate program approved as part of a deal to enact a millionaires' tax last year? Next, what did you and Jack Ciattarelli discuss during your private conversation at yesterday's NJBIA event?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** We were talking about you.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** I'm sure. Then lastly, you've mentioned the waiting period a couple of times, and I know that you had a bill out a couple of years ago that would require, I think, a three-day waiting period, so that measure hasn't moved. Then also, legislators, before the pandemic, wanted to increase the number of brackets on their financial disclosures. That also hasn't happened. Do you, I'm wondering, believe that there's actually an appetite for any sort of pro-transparency reform within the legislature?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Parimal and I had a very brief – brief, Nikita, would be defined as 20-second discussion about this decision in the federal court. Parimal, anything you want to add to that?

**Chief Counsel Parimal Garg:** Yes, so no news on the appeal, but I would just note that Judge Martinotti's decision was very consistent with what the attorney general had asked for.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Names on the checks, I don't know that we've made that call yet. Stay tuned on that one.

Listen, as I mentioned the night that he won the primary and the night of our primary, I reached out to the assemblyman, congratulated him. He was gracious coming back, and last night was in a similar spirit. I think we had been at one event before and missed each other, and we each were happy that we saw each other. No more news to report beyond that.

I don't want to speak for the Legislature because I think Alex asked the good question: is this – where does this lie in terms of the potential for reform, and I think it's all of us. I don't want to speak for them, but I actually am reasonably optimistic, maybe naively so, but I think there's a general sense that folks want to, at every turn, do the right thing. If we can find ways to – again, we presented February, tons of hearings, regular updates. That part works, I think, really well. I compare that not just to our past but to other states. If there's an opportunity to create that window a la that bill that you talked about, I'm open-minded and my gut tells me I'm not the only one who's open-minded to that. Again, I want to thank the legislative leadership just as a general matter because I believe at the end of the day, this budget's going to change and save – I think, Judy, certainly change and I believe save a lot of lives in this state. That's a really good result, so thank you.

Dave, although is it the gentleman to the right should we be deferring to?

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** No, actually he's my bodyguard and he's also an intern with us for the next couple of months.

**Brendan, NJ 101.5:** Brendan.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Brendan? Fantastic. The guy with the mic is Brendan, too, so you guys should compare notes. Nice to meet you. Dave.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Thank you, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Bless you.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** There's been some discussion about this today, but I was wondering if we could follow up a little bit, especially with the Health Commissioner and Dr. Lifshitz. The RT and hospitalizations are inching up. I know that we've been talking about the stuff is going sideways. I know we don't know, but do you think this is linked to the Delta variant or some other variant? Is it worrisome? Is there a concern that we could see a significant uptick in cases and hospitalizations when the summer, which has actually just started, is over and all of a sudden it starts to get cool and we're all of a sudden back now indoors again? In the fall, even if our vaccine numbers continue to increase, if we have, I don't know, 2 million people in New Jersey that decide they don't want to get vaccinated for whatever reason, does this open the door, keep it open, for more variants to pop up including possibly dangerous ones that might not be controlled

by our vaccines? I've heard that's a concern. Finally, question from our newsroom, how many people, Governor, have signed up to have dinner with you? Any other update on how many people took advantage of the beer and wine incentives? Are there any other incentives coming down the pike, especially for younger people? Perhaps you and Tammy would accompany them to a rock concert, VIP, meet the band, and so forth, anything like that. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I love the way you think. Let's start with the – I'll start with the end. I think about 14,000 people signed up for the dinner, and we've very excited about it. We have a winner; we've not said who it is yet, but we have a winner and that person is going to bring a significant – a partner of some sort. I'm very excited to do that.

I think we're still – I love your rock concert idea. I will put note to file. I don't know that we've got a lot more incentives, programs in all seriousness. We can get you the numbers, Mahen, if you can maybe get a sense. We've given you the state park numbers. I think I'm about right on the dinner sign-up, and we'll give you the beer and wine and other incentive numbers and we'll follow up with that. I think – and Judy, you should – this gets back to a serious public health question. If there's an opportunity, if there's something – a moment in time that we can capture an opportunity to shine a light on something and move the needle, we'll stay open-minded to it. I think it's going to be much – however, much heavier in the one foot in front of the other, the door-knocking. I've speaking to some senior folks in Hudson County today. They said they need to get a lot better in Bayonne, as an example, which is one of our great communities. The Community Corp, Judy, has been knocking in Bayonne. I don't know for how long, but I think for a few weeks, and that's a community. That's the sort of stuff we're going to stay at doggedly. You'll see, I think, more Grateful for the Shot initiatives as well and things like that. If there's an incentive opportunity that we think we can move the needle, absolutely will have that on the list.

I'll turn this over to Judy and Ed, and just with – again, I'm the least qualified person here to address this, but are the numbers up in part because of the Delta variant running among unvaccinated folks? I bet you the answer is yes, at least in part. Could we have an uptick in the fall? Yeah, as we all go back indoors, I would think the answer is that is something that we will be focused very closely on. I think your derivative question from that is if you've got a couple million people in the fall and as we go back in and could – with the potential of other variants, does that leave us exposed, and the answer's got to be yes. I think overwhelming, to repeat what we discussed at the top of the program, top of the hour here, overwhelmingly that will be a reality for unvaccinated people because based on everything – I think you've heard this several times from us, from Tony Fauci and others. The vaccines – fully vaccinated people – so get your booster shot. Don't assume if it's Pfizer or Moderna that one shot's enough because it isn't. Fully vaccinated people are protected against serious illness and, thank God, please God, death even with the variants I think the answer to all three of those questions to be yes. With that, Ed, correct the record.

**Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz:** Yes, and I'm going to start with actually the last thing the Governor said. That second dose is very important particularly for the mRNA vaccines. We know that they are very effective against the Delta variant, but we know that a single shot is a whole lot less effective, only about a third effective, versus over 90% effective if you get two doses, so absolutely get that second dose.

As to the question are the variants, particularly the Delta variant, playing a role in our numbers holding steady or going sideways again, the answer again is almost for sure yes. We've seen this movie before, to some extent. We saw it back in the fall with the Alpha variant when that came in, and it was more transmissible than the other variants. At that time, vaccination was just starting and we were in a whole lot worse situation, but we saw our decline stop and go back up and almost for sure that was because the Alpha variant then. Now we're getting a variant that's circulating that appears to be even more infectious than the Alpha variant, the Delta variant. We are seeing an increase as a percentage of the cases that we're seeing in New Jersey. We're in a whole lot better situation, primarily because of vaccination but because of also being outdoors and other things as well. Immunity's going up a whole lot. Our numbers are not increasing like they were back in the fall but yes, I have to believe that the – one of the reasons why we're going sideways is because of this new variant.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, any other thoughts about today or the fall?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Totally agree with what you said. We're vigilant every day. The surveillance and the data analysis on COVID is going to be with us for quite some time. Hopefully more people get vaccinated. We can stop this virus because it'll have no place to go before new variants come in.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah. It's also – Dave, you didn't ask this, but it's – I'll leave you – leave us with this thought. It's another reason why we don't want to go down this – we don't want to see this movie twice, so it's why we're keeping a lot of infrastructure in place. It's why you'll see in the budget, by the way, a lot of investment in public health infrastructure which Judy's been pounding the table on. It's quite clear as a country, never mind New Jersey, we've under-invested in public health infrastructure and public health generally. We got to make sure those beds – I hope to God, Pat, we never use them again, but those beds from the field medical station, Judy, are still in storage.

With that, Judy and Ed, thank you. I'll mask up. Pat, as always, thank you. Parimal, Mahen, cast of thousands. Again, we will be virtual for the next few days. We will have a virtual event, though, on Monday. I don't want you to think we're just going to be emailing you. We will have – unless you hear otherwise, 1 o'clock, we will be with you but it will be virtually. Then we'll be back at it again a week from today here at 1 o'clock Again, everybody, keep up the great work. Enjoy this extraordinary weather and please, please, please get vaccinated. God bless.

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