

Governor Phil Murphy

"Why Black Lives Matter in New Jersey"

06/19/2020

June 19, 2020

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon, everyone!

First, I want to give Glory and Honor to God for allowing me to be here today.

To my Friend Reverend John Taylor, I give greetings to you and the First Lady, and to the Deacons, Trustees, Officers, members, and friends and family of Friendship Baptist Church.

Pastor Taylor, I must also thank you for your transformational leadership here in Trenton, and for all you do not just within the spiritual community here, but in the greater community that extends well beyond these walls. You have stood with the people of this great city during triumphant days and days where there have been trials.

You have stood with me in our commitment to socio-economic justice. We have known each other since before I took office, and I have always appreciated your guidance and support.

And, I thank you for inviting me to your house to celebrate this Juneteenth.

It was this day 155 years ago when Union General Gordon Granger, a white man, landed with troops in Galveston, Texas, to spread the word that all enslaved Blacks were, at last, free.

Yet, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on New Year's Day, 1863 – 900 days earlier. For 900 days, thousands of enslaved Black Americans continued to toil in the most horrible of conditions, not knowing that they were free men and women.

But, look at the history of Black America since then. Yes, we can celebrate the end of the literal and physical chains which held Blacks as chattel, but in doing so we cannot ignore the figurative chains which have kept our proud Black communities from achieving the full equality which they deserve, which they have been promised, and which is their most basic right.

This Juneteenth, it is Black America rising to tell us that we can no longer ignore the 401-year history of slavery and systemic racism – 401 years since the first enslaved Africans arrived on the shores of this continent – a history that is writ-large in the inequalities in wages and wealth, health care, in housing, in education, in economic opportunity, and on and on down the line, and, including in treatment by law enforcement.

The long history of slavery and the stain of racism is directly linked to the conditions of African Americans today. Systemic racism has not only existed in America and in New Jersey, but it still exists.

Those of us who have been granted privilege because of the color of our skin must recognize the many generations of pain which have been visited upon those without that privilege. I also recognize and celebrate the new generation of Americans who refuse to inherit this legacy.

 [celebrate to top](#)

Across our nation – and, indeed our world – hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people are awakening to the words written in Scripture, the Book of John Chapter 8, Verse 32, "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

Too many among us have kept our blinders on for too long. It has taken more than 400 years for the truth that "Black Lives Matter" to finally be given meaning and humanity.

For too long, and in too many corners, we couldn't see, or – even worse, in some cases did not want to see – the truth that systemic racism still to this day permeates our society, and our failure to address that truth has stunted our path to freedom.

Not your path to freedom – our path to freedom. This is not about one man or one woman. This is about all of us. Together.

And, let us always remember, that these values are the ones we must also bring to our fight for justice for our immigrant communities, who also face discrimination.

The reason that Black Lives Matter is because We are one state, one family, and we rise and fall – and we march and protest – as one. Saying Black Lives Matter is saying that in the struggle for the soul of humanity that we must acknowledge a community that has been victimized for 401 years by racism and discrimination.

Saying Black Lives Matter boldly states that we will not inherit your racism. We will fight it wherever it raises its ugly head.

Several weeks ago, I had an opportunity to attend a rally in Westfield organized by a 16-year-old student who challenged her city and school to look inside their souls and to proclaim, "Black Lives Matter." And there, I saw thousands of people – mostly White residents who have awoken the reality of what it means to be good allies – proclaim to the world that Black Lives Matter.

However, Black Lives Matter are not just words. It is a personal call to action.

Let me be clear, systemic racism is a crisis that has infected every aspect of American life. And I will work tirelessly to address it and its cascading effects.

I will continue to work with my advisors, members of my Cabinet, and the Legislature – especially with the members of the Legislative Black Caucus, led by Senator Ron Rice and Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter – on policy that will highlight and work to root-out the disparities in housing, income, transportation, education, and other issue areas, that have a direct impact on Black and Brown people.

And, I did not decide that Black Lives Matter last week – this has been a lifelong commitment.

Black Lives Matter in wages and wealth creation, so we will push for additional meaningful economic opportunities for our families.

Black Lives Matter in criminal justice reform, so we will continue reshaping a more community-centered form of law enforcement.

Black Lives Matter in housing, where we will continue to provide resources to support affordable homeownership and those needing rental assistance.

Black Lives Matter in infant and maternal health, where we must eliminate disparate treatment in medical care.

Black Lives Matter in education, from pre-school to a college degree, where we must make equity a core value in how we develop education policy.

Black Lives Matter in the environment, where we must eliminate unequal community impacts.

And, Black Lives Matter in Camden, Atlantic City, and Trenton, and in suburban and rural communities alike. Already, we have taken big steps together.

We have put our minimum wage on a solid path to \$15 an hour. We have given everyone who works the guarantee of a paid sick day and access to expanded paid family leave. We know these progressive steps predominately benefit people of color, who have held a disproportionate number of low-wage jobs.

We have increased funding for our public schools and investments in pre-K – a cornerstone for building a stronger future for countless thousands of kids. And we started a historic program which today is allowing thousands of residents to attend community college and get their associate's degree tuition-free.

Through the tremendous work of the First Lady – who has brought together 18 different state departments and agencies, faith and community leaders, health care leaders, and elected officials from across our state – we are meaningfully confronting our infant and maternal health crisis. A black woman in New Jersey is nearly five times more likely than a white woman to die from pregnancy-related complications, and a black baby is three times more likely than a white baby to die before his or her first birthday.

This abhorrent reality is why we have joined together with hundreds of partners throughout the state to develop a statewide strategic plan to decrease our rate of maternal mortality by 50 percent over five years, and completely eliminate the inequities in birth outcomes.

And, given the current national tenor, we have put New Jersey squarely at the forefront of the national fight for justice.

In December of last year, I was proud to sign bills addressing some of the ways our criminal justice system holds people back even after conviction. New Jersey now has the most progressive expungement reform in the nation allowing for the expungement of records of residents whose futures have been held back because of past convictions, and gives residents on parole or probation back their right to vote.

I believe in second chances, and that is why we created the second chance agenda. As I sought this office, I heard the stories of those whose futures were uncertain because of a low-level offense on their record and because of that record could not get employment. The expungement law, in particular, helps to reverse the impact of unjust laws and sentencing that started during slavery and continued for decades.

Our commitment to creating safe communities and neighborhoods through a criminal justice system that lives up to that all-important word, "justice," and enacting the recommendations of the Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission – which include the elimination of mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses – has only grown stronger.

And, through the tremendous work of Attorney General Gurbir Grewal and State Police Superintendent Colonel Pat Callahan, we are undertaking a transformation in the culture of policing across our state. They have, to their credit, traveled across our state building partnerships with faith and community leaders, residents, and stakeholders so that this transformation in policing and police culture is achieved through direct and open collaboration with our diverse communities.

And, we have seen across our state over the past few weeks the natural outgrowth of these efforts – law enforcement joining their communities in committing to the simple, natural law that Black Lives Matter. Under Attorney General Grewal, New Jersey has emerged as a national leader in increasing accountability, transparency and professionalism – which bring us closer to a reimagined police culture.

Just this week, the Attorney General directed all law enforcement agencies to make public the names of officers who are fired, demoted, or suspended for more than five days due to serious disciplinary violations. This speaks to a core value – those who discredit their badge should not be allowed to hide behind that badge.

Superintendent Callahan is taking this directive even further. He has committed to not just releasing these names in the future, but releasing twenty-years-worth of names from State Police. As a result, other agencies are taking similar steps – a sure sign that they not only wish to change for the future, but that they also wish to account for their own pasts.

That is what lays at the heart of this matter. It is well time for us to account for our past.

We cannot escape the fact that our own criminal justice system has an inconsistent past in its relationship with Black and brown communities.

In New Jersey, we have our own history of police-involved deaths. Maurice Gordon is just one example. Our condolences, thoughts and prayers go out to the family of Mr. Gordon and every family who has shared this kind of tragic loss. And, here, we have a law which I signed that requires our Attorney General to independently investigate officer-involved deaths and to present evidence before a grand jury.

We will lead the nation in creating a system of transparency and integrity in the legal process.

Ours is a nation conceived in liberty, and, yet, 244 years after our founding document declared "to a candid world," that "all men are created equal," we must reckon with the fact, in the starkest of terms, and in the sharpest of images, that we are far from achieving that promised equality.

Ask George Floyd if he was treated as an equal. Ask Breonna Taylor. Ask Ahmaud Arbery. Ask Rayshard Brooks.

Ask John William Smith, whose arrest in Newark in 1967 sparked the Newark uprisings.

Ask Medgar Evers. Ask Emmitt Till. Ask Dred Scott.

This brings hope to the quest for justice.

The names of the slaves in Texas who learned of their freedom on Juneteenth are unknown but to history. But, the names of those whose lives have been cut short because of systemic racism are known to us all. They must be.

And, lest we forget, the first American killed in the nation's first fight for independence and liberty, in 1770, was a Black man, Crispus Attucks. How have we honored that legacy?

We cannot allow ourselves to walk through this world with blinders on, claiming emptily that we don't "see race" – when what that means is we are ignoring the inequalities that exist today.

We cannot escape the fact that systemic racism – not the outward racism of hate groups, but the silent racism of complacency – has bled into nearly facet of facet of our society.

New Jersey is a leader – and will remain a leader – in bringing the change we need. Our administration came to office with a commitment to tackling and dismantling systemic racism, but despite our strides thus far, we know that work is far from over.

We will continue to stand in solidarity with everyone in this sanctuary, with every one of you watching, and with everyone protesting in the streets.

Our goal – not as an administration, but as a society – is this: That the pain of yesterday, and the pain of today, does not become the pain of tomorrow.

There are too many who are not with us as we continue this work to ensure true freedom and equality – in word and in deed – for all. But their memories, and their spirits will guide us forward, as they always have.

Let's do this together. Let's make this Juneteenth 2020 a day not just of historical celebration, but the day where we took another step forward in transforming our state in a way that future generations will celebrate.

And, as we move forward, let us be led by the words found in Second Corinthians, Verse Three, Chapter 17, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

Let this be our charge.

Thank you, and may God bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

[Home \(/governor/\)](#)

Administration

[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about/\)](/governor/admin/about/)

[Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver \(/governor/admin/lt/\)](/governor/admin/lt/)

[First Lady Tammy Snyder Murphy \(/governor/admin/fl/\)](/governor/admin/fl/)

[Cabinet \(/governor/admin/cabinet/\)](/governor/admin/cabinet/)

[Office of Health Care Affordability and Transparency](/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml)

[\(/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml\)](/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml)

[Boards, Commissions & Authorities \(/governor/admin/bca/\)](/governor/admin/bca/)

[Internship Opportunities \(/governor/admin/internship.shtml\)](/governor/admin/internship.shtml)

[Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket \(http://drumthwacket.org/\)](http://drumthwacket.org/)

Key Initiatives

[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](/governor/initiatives/#Economy)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](/governor/initiatives/#Education)

[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](/governor/initiatives/#Environment)

[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](/governor/initiatives/#Health)

[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Justice)

[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

News & Events

[Press Releases \(/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news_archive.shtml)

[Photos \(https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy\)](https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy)

[Public Addresses \(/governor/news/addresses\)](/governor/news/addresses)

[Executive Orders \(/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html\)](/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

[Administrative Orders \(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

[Direct Appointments \(/governor/news/appointments\)](/governor/news/appointments)

[Advice and Consent Appointments \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

[Statements on Legislation](/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

[\(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

[Administration Reports \(/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

[Press Kits \(/governor/news/press\)](/governor/news/press)

Social

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/>)

Twitter (<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy>)

Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/>)

Snapchat (<https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy>)

YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/njgovernorsoffice>)

TikTok (<https://www.tiktok.com/@njgov?>)

Contact Us

Scheduling Requests (</governor/contact/scheduling/>)

Contact Us (</governor/contact/all/>)

Statewide

[NJ Home](//www.nj.gov) (<//www.nj.gov>)

[Services A to Z](//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/njgov/alphaserv.html) (<//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/njgov/alphaserv.html>)

[Departments/Agencies](//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/) (<//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/>)

[FAQs](//www.nj.gov/faqs/) (<//www.nj.gov/faqs/>)

[Contact Us](//www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html) (<//www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html>)

[Privacy Notice](//www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html) (<//www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html>)

[Legal Statement & Disclaimers](//www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html) (<//www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html>)

[Accessibility Statement](//www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html) (<//www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html>)

(//nj.gov/opra/)

(https://my.state.nj.us/openam/UI/Login)

Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2023
Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000

(https://tech.nj.gov/)