

## Governor Phil Murphy



photo: view of NJ Trenton DOM

# Governor Murphy Launches Historic Clemency Initiative

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06/19/2024

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*Executive Order Includes Standards for Expedited Consideration and Establishes Advisory Board to Provide Objective Review of Pardons and Commutations*

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*For Access to Application Materials for Executive Clemency, Visit [NJ.Gov/Clemency](https://NJ.Gov/Clemency)*

**NEWARK** – Governor Phil Murphy today outlined his plans to issue pardons and commutations using best practices that include expedited consideration for certain clemency applications.

[Executive Order No. 362](https://www.nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-362.pdf) (<https://www.nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-362.pdf>), which Governor Murphy signed today, sets out certain categories of pending or future clemency applications that will receive expedited review during the Murphy Administration. For example, individuals may receive expedited consideration for pardons for certain non-violent convictions if they have remained free from justice system involvement for sufficient time. Other examples of those receiving expedited consideration include individuals who are serving sentences that reflect an excessive trial penalty, and victims of domestic or sexual violence or sex trafficking who are incarcerated for committing a crime against the perpetrator. The fundamental goal underlying this initiative is to provide relief from inequities that have existed and been perpetuated in the criminal legal system.

The Executive Order also establishes a Clemency Advisory Board, which will be responsible for reviewing each clemency application and making recommendations to the Governor. The board will be the first of its kind in state history and will ensure that the Governor's decisions regarding pardons and commutations are informed by the advice of individuals with diverse experiences and expertise relating to criminal justice and clemency.

"As we celebrate Juneteenth and reflect on our nation's ongoing journey toward racial justice for Black and Brown Americans, I am proud to sign this Executive Order to help address inequities and unfairness in our system of justice in New Jersey," **said Governor Murphy**. "This new clemency initiative is a cornerstone of our Administration's efforts to make New Jersey the State of Second Chances. Today, we pledge to take a responsible and equity-driven approach to pardons and commutations that will prioritize the most compelling cases."

"In the spirit of Juneteenth, today we take another step forward in the ongoing struggle for racial justice in America," **said Lt. Governor Tahesha Way**. "Too many people have been failed by our criminal justice system. The signing of this Executive Order provides second chances for our society and those who receive clemency. I am proud to see our state build upon our efforts for a progressive criminal justice system that truly ensures justice for all."

New Jersey's Constitution gives the Governor broad discretion to issue pardons and commutations to individuals for state criminal convictions. Each clemency applicant will receive individualized consideration by the Clemency

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Advisory Board. The criteria for expedited consideration stated in the Executive Order reflect categories of applications that are particularly likely to warrant an exercise of executive clemency by the Governor.

The Clemency Advisory Board will include a designee of the Attorney General and public members with a variety of backgrounds, including from the defense bar and advocacy communities.

The appointed members of Governor Murphy's Clemency Advisory Board are:

- **Chair:** Justin Dews, Counsel at King & Spalding
- **Attorney General's Designee:** Michael Zuckerman, Deputy Solicitor General
- **Public Member:** Jessica Henry, Professor of Justice Studies at Montclair State University
- **Public Member:** Bishop Joshua Rodriguez, Bishop and Founding Partner of Cityline Church and Police Chaplin at Jersey City Police Department
- **Public Member:** JoEllyn Jones, Founding Partner at Jones & Ortiz P.A.
- **Public Member:** Ed Neafsey, Adjunct Professor at Rutgers Law School – Newark (<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy>)

Over the past six years, several initiatives have been implemented to ensure that individuals involved in the justice system have a second chance to rebuild their lives. From signing legislation banning the box in housing to restoring voting rights to over 80,000 residents on probation or parole to the creation of a petition process for "clean slate" expungements for certain offenders and more, the Murphy Administration has solidified New Jersey's standing as one of the nation's most progressive criminal justice systems.

In addition to today's Executive Order signing, the state launched a website to serve as a home base for those seeking more information on the Governor's executive clemency initiative. The website, [nj.gov/clemency](https://www.nj.gov/clemency/) (<https://www.nj.gov/clemency/>), also provides attorneys and those representing themselves access to application materials for executive clemency.

"In New Jersey, we believe in second chances and giving our residents every opportunity to succeed," said **Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin**. "Governor Murphy's creation of a Clemency Advisory Board and plan to ensure expedited consideration for a large number of worthy applicants demonstrates this administration's commitment to those principles."

"Corrections is based upon providing the opportunity for second chances, and our criminal and justice systems must provide meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation and redemption," said **Corrections Commissioner Victoria Kuhn**. "Clemency offers a chance for individuals to accept responsibility for their actions and to learn, grow, and become contributing members of society once again."

"The New Jersey Office of the Public Defender supports Governor Murphy's transformative clemency initiative which embodies the very essence of justice, compassion, and rehabilitation," said **Public Defender Jennifer Sellitti**. "Through the introduction of a clemency advisory board and the expansion of commutation application categories, he has created more opportunities for providing those in our community with a second chance and a path toward healing. As public defenders, we understand all too well the way in which excessive sentences have devastated families and disparately impacted our most vulnerable communities. This initiative stands as a beacon of hope for those affected, empowering them to rebuild their lives and achieve brighter futures."

"Crowding in our state prisons creates hurdles for safety, healthcare, and programming," said **Terry Schuster, New Jersey's Corrections Ombudsperson**. "Governor Murphy's announcement today clears the path for people who can safely return home, and eases the burden on the Department of Corrections to manage and improve prison conditions."

"Governor Murphy's establishment of a clemency advisory board reinforces the State Parole Board's commitment to fostering and recognizing individual rehabilitation, and reflects our criminal justice system's ability to balance accountability with benevolence," said **NJ State Parole Board Chairman Samuel J. Plumeri, Jr.** "The State Parole Board is eager to assist and provide support with the clemency initiative."

"Governor Murphy's announcement today regarding clemency and pardons is historic and transformational," said

**Reverend Ronald Slaughter, Senior Pastor, Saint James A.M.E. Church.** "Making an announcement of this magnitude in a Black Methodist church on Juneteenth is especially significant. Saint James wholeheartedly believes that all have sinned and fallen short, but there is room and appropriateness for forgiveness, love, and mercy. On this day that celebrates freedom, the Governor's initiative confirms that forgiveness, love, and mercy are alive in this state, paving the way for a more just and inclusive future for all."

"Governor Murphy's actions today are bigger than a new program or correcting a handful of injustices. This is an entirely new approach to clemency that is going to cut red tape and restore hope, dignity, and opportunity for people unjustly trapped in the system," **said Robert "Meek Mill" Williams, Co-Founder and Co-Chair, REFORM Alliance.** "I know personally the life-changing impact that clemency can have. Today's announcement means that many more people will have an opportunity to reunite with their families, get back on their feet, and chase their dreams. It takes true leadership to use executive power like this, and I applaud Governor Murphy for doing what's right and taking this bold step."

"Clemency is official forgiveness, and just like the forgiveness we experience in our own lives, clemency is a transformational act: it restores rights and reopens opportunities. Given the weight of the decision, the Governor's action is a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to the exercise of his authority," **said Justin Dews, incoming Chair of the Clemency Advisory Board.** "It is an honor to serve as Chair of the Clemency Advisory Board and to work alongside distinguished individuals who are committed to second chances. We appreciate the trust and confidence the Governor has placed in us, and we look forward to becoming part of the Governor's staff are grounded in fairness and justice."

"Clemency is about more than mercy – it can be a tool to end mass incarceration. We are grateful to Governor Murphy for embracing categorical clemency as a way to address the injustices in our criminal legal system. We are looking forward to New Jersey meeting its potential by pardoning and commuting the sentences of scores of people and cementing our place as a national leader on racial and social justice," **said Amol Sinha, Executive Director of the ACLU of New Jersey.**

"A criminal justice system that offers a second chance to those who have earned it is better for society," **said Senate President Nick Scutari.** "It gives them the opportunity to rebuild their lives and become productive citizens. Adopting a process to identify those with good records who should be considered for clemency will support our system of justice in achieving its goals of public safety, rehabilitation, and fairness."

"Giving individuals a second chance to make a fresh start is vitally important, and the new clemency initiative announced today will help do just that," **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin.** "I look forward to watching as Governor Murphy begins the process of launching this new initiative and to hearing how it assists people in uplifting their lives."

"Unfortunately, New Jersey continues to be among the leaders in this country in regards to the percentage of people incarcerated for extended periods of time. Too often, these are individuals who are persons of color or marginalized communities, who are often serving unjust sentences. I welcome the governor's renewed interest on this issue and his initiative concerning clemency for people who have served these sentences and who are deserving of a more just and equitable treatment. These racial disparities in imprisonment are not unique to New Jersey, but they are often prevalent. I want to thank Governor Murphy for his commitment to this issue and his vision in this realm, and look forward to seeing how it will make us a more just, and equitable society," **Senator Nellie Pou, Chair of the Legislative Latino Caucus.**

"It is no secret that historically Black and Brown people have suffered racial imbalances in our judicial system, resulting in higher incarceration rates," **said Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus.** "This clemency initiative is a crucial step towards rectifying these systemic injustices. By expediting the consideration of pardons and commutations, those who have been impacted by the grievous cycle of incarceration will have the opportunity to rebuild their lives. This is a step towards fostering rehabilitation and restoration."

"It is a tragic fact that our criminal justice system sentences many non-violent offenders of color to prison terms, which taints them with felony records, years of harsh confinement, and no support systems," **said Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka.** "It is difficult for these re-entering offenders to return to society as contributing members, capable of earning an income and avoiding the trap of recidivism. In Newark, our administration has worked to end both the stigma and suffering re-entering offenders endure, and we are pleased that Governor Phil Murphy is recognizing the importance of successful rehabilitation with his plans to offer a record number of 'systematic, category-driven'

clemencies on Wednesday. These clemencies will change the lives of hundreds of Newark and New Jersey residents for the better. It is fitting that the Governor is announcing this initiative in Newark, and even more appropriate that he is doing so on Juneteenth. Historically, that day marked the ending of slavery in the United States in 1865. I congratulate him on taking major steps to restore these lives."

"Juneteenth is a time for us to celebrate freedom fighters. Governor Murphy's clemency initiative honors that spirit. But today, the Governor is not just unlocking physical freedom - he's unleashing human potential of thousands of people who have been stuck in the system. He's telling them that their struggles, their growth, and their perseverance matter and can lead to a new beginning for them and their families. This is a game-changer for New Jersey that is going to create a positive ripple effect statewide," **said Wallace "Wallo267" Peoples, Chief Marketing Officer, REFORM Alliance.**

"By taking a categorical approach to clemency, Governor Murphy and his administration recognize that injustice is not solely limited to individual cases but is often systemic," **said Jessica Jackson, Chief Advocacy and Operations Officer, REFORM Alliance.** "This new approach will streamline and modernize New Jersey's clemency process, allowing the administration to get straight to the process of undoing harmful policies of the past at scale. (advmurphy) especially applaud the Governor's creation of an independent commission, shielded from political pressures and influence. This commission will ensure transparency, diverse perspectives, and objective analysis for the best criminal (njdpcr) decisions, replacing outdated decision-making processes with more consistent recommendations that prioritize rehabilitation and ensure a swifter, fairer path to justice for thousands of New Jerseyans." (http://www.nj.gov/governors/office)

"Clemency provides the governor with the power to grant reprieves, commutations, and pardons. Since the earliest times, wise leaders have understood the importance of weighing compassion against the law's judgment. (https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/) Governor Murphy has been an advocate of Second Chances for those who would transform their lives," **said former (https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy) Governor James McGreevey, Executive Director and Chairman of NJ Reentry Corporation.**

"I am encouraged to see Governor Murphy taking this historic and powerfully symbolic action. There are far too many people incarcerated who pose no public safety threat. Everyone deserves a chance to be restored and set free from past trauma and mistakes. New Jersey has dropped to historic lows in the prison population under this administration while crime rates have also dropped. It is a testament to their commitment to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly," **said Rev. Dr. Charles F. Boyer, Founder, Salvation & Social Justice.**

"The Institute welcomes Governor Murphy's initiative to reform a clemency process much in need of invigoration. New Jersey's criminal justice system has some of the worst racial disparities in the country, and clemency is one tool that can respond to that devastating reality," **said Yannick Wood, Director of the Criminal Justice Reform Program at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice.** "We hope that the new advisory board will bring more transparency and compassion to clemency and will draw on the voices of formerly incarcerated people to lend their insights on applicants. This will go far in ensuring that clemency brings a fresh start to as many people as possible."

"FAMM is so excited to support Governor Murphy's new clemency initiative, building on the administration's dedication to making New Jersey's legal system more fair and just. A mistake should not define someone forever - people change, and clemency is a valuable tool that recognizes the power of redemption and second chances. Providing expedited pathways for people to be considered for clemency will help support New Jersey's communities for generations to come," **said Celeste Trusty, Deputy Director of State Policy, FAMM.**

"Long sentences and harsh punishment don't deliver safety or real accountability to survivors of crime. A more effective response is to support survivors with the services they need and facilitate repair and change among those who commit harm so that they can safely come home and be contributing members of our communities. Vera commends Governor Murphy for using his power of executive clemency to begin bringing home two groups of people currently in prison: criminalized survivors of domestic violence where abuse and trauma was a factor in their conduct that resulted in incarceration, and people who suffered the trial penalty and received longer sentences after trial than they would have had if they had pled guilty. It takes courage and clear-headedness to release people from prison who should not be there. Thank you, Governor Murphy, for helping to build a criminal legal system with more integrity," **said Marta Nelson, Director of Sentencing Reform at the Vera Institute of Justice.**

"NACDL commends Governor Murphy for his bold leadership in issuing an Executive Order that supports

categorical clemency, a crucial step towards rectifying injustices within our criminal legal system. By recognizing and addressing the severe impact of coercive plea bargaining and extreme trial penalties, the Governor is upholding the principles of fairness and justice. We strongly encourage him to go further and fully utilize his clemency powers to provide relief to those serving disproportionately long sentences simply for exercising their constitutional right to a trial. This action will not only help to correct past wrongs but also set a powerful precedent for meaningful reform," **said Lisa Monet Wayne, Executive Director of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.**


"As a vestige of slavery, the criminal legal system in New Jersey has funneled Black people into prison cells for far too long, devastating the Black community while creating the largest racial disparity within prisons in the country. Today Governor Murphy's clemency initiative takes steps to repair the harm done by creating a path to set the captives free so they may realize the joy of freedom we embrace today on Juneteenth. Thank you Governor Murphy, we look forward to an expedited process so our families and communities can begin to heal," **said Charlene Walker, Executive Director of Faith in New Jersey.**

"Returning Citizen Support Group support the Governor's clemency initiative. Through this initiative we hope the Governor will not only provide a second chance for returning citizens but to transform the criminal justice system that has often hinder their reintegration," **said Edwin Ortiz, Co-Founder of Returning Citizens Support Group.**

To view Executive Order No. 362, click [here](https://www.nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-362.pdf) (<https://www.nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-362.pdf>).


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