

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Announces Pardons and Commutations for 36 Individuals

Posted on - 12/16/2024

**TRENTON** – Governor Phil Murphy today announced that he is granting clemency to 36 individuals, including 33 pardons and three commutations. Today’s announcement marks Governor Murphy’s first exercise of his pardon power.

Today’s actions build on the Governor’s efforts to address unfairness that has existed in the criminal legal system and his commitment to ensuring that individuals involved in the justice system have a second chance to rebuild their lives.

“Today, we rededicate ourselves to ensuring that New Jersey is the state for second chances,” **said Governor Murphy**. “I am proud to announce that through our historic clemency initiative, 36 individuals will be granted legal relief, either in the form of a full pardon, or by having their criminal sentence commuted. It is my honor as Governor to recognize the efforts each of them have made to prove that, in this country, redemption is achievable. As we approach the final year of our Administration, we will continue embracing a fair, impartial, and balanced approach for granting legal relief to New Jerseyans who have earned a second chance.”

“Today, thanks to Governor Murphy, and the thorough work of the Clemency Advisory Board, our state has taken another step towards creating a more equitable and fair justice system, and 36 individuals have the opportunity to turn their lives around,” **said Lieutenant Governor Tahesha Way**. “As a former judge, I am proud to be a part of an Administration that understands justice is not just about punishment, it is also about rehabilitation and second chances.

On June 19, 2024, Governor Murphy announced a [new clemency initiative](https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562024/20240619a.shtml) (<https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562024/20240619a.shtml>) through Executive Order No. 362 (<https://d31hzhk6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20241216/62/34/eb/61/de22d48e34256866c3ec3042/EO-362.pdf>). The Executive Order established a Clemency Advisory Board – the first of its kind in state history – to provide recommendations on individual applications for pardons and commutations. It also set out certain categories of applications that would receive expedited review by the Clemency Advisory Board during the Murphy Administration.

Examples of those receiving expedited consideration for pardons include individuals who committed certain non-violent crimes who have remained free from criminal justice system involvement for sufficient time. For commutations, individuals may receive expedited consideration if they are serving sentences that reflect an excessive trial penalty, or if they are victims of domestic or sexual violence or sex trafficking.

The individuals granted clemency by Governor Murphy today underwent an extensive review process, which included consideration by the Clemency Advisory Board. In addition, the process included more robust victim outreach than in prior administrations, ensuring that efforts were made to contact victims, solicit their input, and connect them with support services if desired. This process was designed to 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 well as by the perspectives of those impacted by crime.

This group of pardon recipients includes veterans of the U.S. military, faith leaders, small business owners, and

people who work or volunteer in settings where they provide support for individuals with substance use disorders or with criminal histories. All pardon recipients have been free from criminal justice system involvement for more than 10 years.

New Jersey's Constitution gives the Governor broad discretion to issue pardons and commutations to individuals for state criminal convictions. A pardon does not erase the facts underlying a criminal conviction, but rather officially forgives the recipient and relieves them of certain collateral consequences that flow from a conviction. Unlike a pardon, a commutation does not forgive the recipient for their conduct, but reduces the sentence they are currently serving.

The following individuals have been granted a pardon:

1. **Shaukat A. Azad** – Arrested and sentenced in 1999 for terroristic threats. Arrested in 2003 and sentenced in 2004 for trademark counterfeiting.
2. **Abdur Azim** – Arrested and sentenced in 1986 for shoplifting. Arrested and sentenced in 1989 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance. Arrested in 1990 and sentenced in 1991 for robbery.
3. **Richard C. Barthlemess, Jr.** – Arrested in 1987 and sentenced in 1989 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance. Arrested in 1988 and sentenced in 1989 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
4. **Albert Baruffi** – Arrested in 1971 and sentenced in 1972 for larceny. Arrested in 1984 and sentenced in 1986 for two counts of possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance, two counts of possession of a controlled dangerous substance, and one count of conspiracy.
5. **Richard Best** – Arrested in 1983 and sentenced in 1984 for burglary and larceny. Arrested in 1985 and sentenced in 1986 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.
6. **Samera Bishop** – Arrested in 2002 and sentenced in 2003 for manufacturing, distributing, or dispensing a controlled dangerous substance and possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance within 500 feet of a public housing authority. Arrested and sentenced in 2003 for manufacturing, distributing, or dispensing a controlled dangerous substance. Arrested and sentenced in 2003 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.
7. **Raymond W. Blanks** – Arrested and sentenced in 1991 for distribution of a controlled dangerous substance within 1,000 feet of a school zone. Arrested in 2000 and sentenced in 2001 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.
8. **Hugh L. Carter** – Arrested in 1987 and sentenced in 1989 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance. Arrested in 1987 and sentenced in 1989 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
9. **Paul M. Chiang** – Arrested in 2005 and sentenced in 2006 for fraudulent use of a credit card.
10. **Luisa M. Cornielle** – Arrested in 2004 and sentenced in 2005 for conspiracy to distribute a controlled dangerous substance. Arrested and sentenced in 2010 for disorderly conduct.
11. **Alvaro C. Correia, Jr.** – Arrested and sentenced in 1995 for aggravated arson and receiving stolen property.
12. **Calvin Cuavers** – Arrested in 1978 and sentenced in 1979 for aiding and abetting robbery. Arrested in 2008 and sentenced in 2009 for disorderly conduct. Arrested in 2009 and sentenced in 2010 for obstructing administration of law or other governmental function.
13. **Michelle Cutler** – Arrested in 2000 and sentenced in 2001 for endangering the welfare of a child and use of drug paraphernalia. Arrested and sentenced in 2002 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.
14. **Dave K. Daniels, Jr.** – Arrested in 1989 and sentenced in 1990 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance. Arrested and sentenced in 1995 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.

15. **Charles DeFrancesco** – Arrested in 1993 and sentenced in 1995 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance and possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
16. **Roger Dewey** – Arrested in 1973 and sentenced in 1974 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.
17. **Jose A. Diaz-Garma** – Arrested in 1986 and sentenced in 1989 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
18. **Jenny M. Edwards** – Arrested in 1989 and sentenced in 1990 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.
19. **Quadir Evans** – Arrested in 1983 and sentenced in 1984 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance. Arrested and sentenced in 1986 for receiving stolen property. Arrested in 1986 and sentenced in 1987 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance and unlawful possession of a weapon. Arrested in 1990 and sentenced in 1991 for unlawful possession of a weapon.
20. **Ryan Fahey** – Arrested in 2006 and sentenced in 2008 for conspiracy to distribute a controlled dangerous substance and possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
21. **George W. Fischer** – Arrested in 1974 and sentenced in 1975 for shoplifting. Arrested in 1976 and sentenced in 1977 for robbery and conspiracy.
22. **David Florian** – Arrested in 1995 and sentenced in 1997 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
23. **Gregory J. Fuhs** – Arrested in 1988 and sentenced in 1990 for possession of a controlled dangerous substance and possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
24. **Dramane Goita** – Arrested in 1994 and sentenced in 1995 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
25. **Natasha Hawkins-Braxton** – Arrested and sentenced in 1995 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance, possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance within 1,000 feet of a school zone, and unlawful possession of a weapon.
26. **Calvin J. Henry** – Arrested in 1988 and sentenced in 1992 for unlawful possession of a weapon and conspiracy to possess a controlled dangerous substance with intent to distribute.
27. **Tyrone S. Howard** – Arrested in 2009 and sentenced in 2011 for making a false report to law enforcement.
28. **Karyl A. Knibbs** – Arrested and sentenced in 1994 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
29. **Jerry Lee Lassiter** – Arrested and sentenced in 1989 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
30. **Radames Lopez** – Arrested in 1995 and sentenced in 1996 for possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance.
31. **Henry Martinez** – Arrested and sentenced in 1999 for distribution of a controlled dangerous substance within 1,000 feet of a school zone. Arrested and sentenced in 2001 for receiving stolen property.
32. **James F. Mercer** – Arrested in 1988 and sentenced in 1990 for receiving a stolen vehicle.
33. **Humberto Portuondo** – Arrested and sentenced in 1986 for conspiracy to possess a controlled dangerous substance with intent to distribute.

The following individuals have been granted commutations of their prison sentences:

1. **Myrna Diaz** – Arrested in 2006 and convicted of murder, robbery, two counts of unlawful possession of a weapon, two counts of possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose, burglary, credit card theft, and conspiracy to commit robbery. Sentenced in 2010 to a term of incarceration of 40 years with 34 years of parole ineligibility followed by five years of post-incarceration parole supervision. Ms. Diaz will be released from prison and begin a five-year period of parole supervision.
2. **Dawn Jackson** – Arrested in 1999 and convicted of murder. Sentenced in 1999 to a term of incarceration of 30 years without parole eligibility. Ms. Jackson will be released from prison and begin a period of parole supervision until March 23, 2029.
3. **Denise Staples** – Arrested in 2001 and convicted of murder and possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose. Sentenced in 2004 to a term of incarceration of 60 years with 51 years of parole ineligibility followed by five years of post-incarceration parole supervision. Ms. Staples will be released from prison and begin a five-year period of parole supervision.

“Today has giving me the ability to understand what perseverance looks like, what it means to be resilient through difficult times, and to keep striving no matter what life may throw at you,” **said Loreale Wilson, daughter of commutation recipient Dawn Jackson.** “Dawn Jackson is resilient, dedicated, and fearless. She never gave up the good fight and that’s why I stand here today on her behalf. What this means for me, I can’t begin to put into words, but that I am completely speechless, overwhelmed with joy, and can’t wait to experience all that God has for us. Thank everyone who truly made this possible, including Governor Murphy, but most importantly to my mother for never giving up.”

“I want to give a personal and special thanks to Governor Murphy,” **said pardon recipient Abdur Azim.** “Your governorship has been reflective of challenge, courage, and perseverance. Your commitment to public service and change has been at the forefront of your policies. Thank you for your courage and commitment to champion some of the most progressive initiatives to this date.”

“Today’s pardons and commutations are a significant first step in fulfilling Governor Murphy’s commitment to exercising his clemency authority in a fair and just manner,” **said Justin Dews, Chair of the Clemency Advisory Board.** “The Board and I commend the Governor for his deliberate consideration of our recommendations, and we give a heartfelt congratulations to today’s clemency recipients. While we celebrate today, our job is not finished. We look forward to continuing our work and seeing future clemency recipients enjoy the restoration of their full citizenship and the opportunity to thrive in their communities.”

“Thank you, Governor Murphy, for your compassion and moral courage,” **said criminal justice advocate Kim Kardashian.** “By granting these clemencies today, you’ve shown that we can choose redemption over condemnation. Dawn’s second chance and impending freedom shows us what’s possible when we focus on supporting survivors, prioritizing safety, and committing to real justice. There are countless others who deserve the same chance, and I’m grateful for your pledge to expedite and expand clemencies so more lives can be reclaimed.”

“As a 20-year New Jersey community reentry service provider and advocate for the justice-involved, I am proud to witness this transformative moment,” **said Rev. Dr. Pamela B. Jones.** “On Juneteenth 2024, Governor Murphy set a new standard for compassion and progress via a pardon & commutation process establishing New Jersey’s first Clemency Advisory Board. This bold step in criminal justice reform addresses harsh sentencing’s impact on marginalized communities, reflecting his commitment to equity, fairness, and meaningful relief.”

For more information on Governor Murphy’s Clemency Initiative or to apply for Executive Clemency, please visit [www.nj.gov/clemency/](https://www.nj.gov/clemency/) (<https://www.nj.gov/clemency/>).

## Governor Phil Murphy

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

### Administration

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

[Lt. Governor Tahesha Way \(/governor/admin/lt\)](/governor/admin/lt)

[In memoriam of Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver \(/governor/admin/lt-sheila-y-oliver\)](/governor/admin/lt-sheila-y-oliver)

[Senior Staff \(/governor/admin/staff\)](/governor/admin/staff)

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

[Office of Climate Action and the Green Economy \(/governor/climateaction/\)](/governor/climateaction/)

[Office of Equity \(/governor/admin/equity/\)](/governor/admin/equity/)

[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)

[New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission \(https://www.nj.gov/puertoricocommission/\)](https://www.nj.gov/puertoricocommission/)

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

[Governor's Fellows Program \(/governor/admin/fellows\)](/governor/admin/fellows)

[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 \(/governor/news/news/562024/approved/news\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/news/562024/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)

[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 \(https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/\)](https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/)

[Twitter \(https://twitter.com/GovMurphy\)](https://twitter.com/GovMurphy)

[Instagram \(https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/\)](https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/)

[Snapchat \(https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy\)](https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy)

[YouTube \(https://www.youtube.com/njgovernorsoffice\)](https://www.youtube.com/njgovernorsoffice)

## Contact Us

[Scheduling Requests \(/governor/contact/scheduling/\)](/governor/contact/scheduling/)

[Contact Us \(/governor/contact/all/\)](/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, 1996-2024  
Office of Governor PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000

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