

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Further Reform New Jersey's Criminal Justice System

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TRENTON -- Governor Phil Murphy today signed three pieces of legislation that make various reforms to New Jersey's criminal justice system. The bills will ensure personnel files of law enforcement officers are shared when applying for employment at other agencies, accelerate juvenile justice reforms, and expand critical re-entry benefits.

"I've been clear that New Jersey will be as aggressive as any state in the nation in our efforts to reform a criminal justice system that has largely failed our Black and Brown communities for far too long," said **Governor Murphy**. "Among other important changes, these measures promote a greater degree of professionalism in law enforcement hiring practices and ensure that young people and formerly incarcerated individuals who are re-entering society are provided with a meaningful chance to reach their full potential."

The Governor signed the following bills into law:

1. **A744 (Johnson, Holley, Conaway, Wimberly/Weinberg, Turner)** - Requires law enforcement agencies to provide internal affairs and personnel files of law enforcement officers to other agencies under certain circumstances.
2. **S2511 (Pou, Turner/Wimberly, Reynolds-Jackson)** - Accelerates rescinding of certain juvenile delinquency fines and making discretionary post-incarceration supervision due to COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **S2331 (Sweeney, Cunningham/Pintor Marin, Quijano, Verrelli)** - Assists inmates released from incarceration in obtaining necessary re-entry benefits.

Primary sponsors of A744 include Assemblymembers Gordon Johnson, Jamel Holley, Herb Conaway and Benjie Wimberly, and Senators Loretta Weinberg and Shirley Turner.

"Operating with minimal information does more harm than good when it comes to hiring an officer charged to serve and protect, said **Assemblyman Gordon M. Johnson**. "With this legislation, we intend to give departments and jurisdictions all the information they need to determine if an applicant is the right fit. For us to reform police culture, we must ensure agencies are first aware of any disciplinary history."

"There needs to be more accountability," said **Assemblyman Jamel C. Holley**. "If an officer faces disciplinary action within one agency in one town and can easily move on to another agency in a different town without their record following them, we have an accountability problem. Making sure agencies aren't kept in the dark about the background of candidates – good or bad – is what this legislation does. This is critical in our efforts to rebuild trust in law enforcement."

"Ensuring departments have access to the personnel records they need to bring a new officer on board is about trust and confidence," said **Assemblyman Herb Conaway**. "Law enforcement officers are sent into the community every day and while most adhere to the highest professional standards, others may not. If

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that's the case, departments need to know."

"To strengthen the view of police as a force for good in the community, policies requiring disciplinary histories to be shared must be status quo," **said Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly**. "Most officers spend their entire career acting honorably, but to maintain accountability, policy has to acknowledge the potential for bad actors to exist."

"Police officers are given an immense amount of power and responsibility and the vast majority serve with honor and deference to the position," **said Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg**. "In cases where incidents do occur, however, it should be reviewable by any agency being asked to hire that person in the future. How can we expect agencies to weed out bad actors if they can't review an applicant's full history? When the public's trust is on the line, no stone should be left unturned and I am glad the Governor has taken such swift action on this bill."

"Police officers, quite literally at times, have the lives of our state's most vulnerable in their hands," **said Senator Shirley Turner**. "It is incredibly important we are thoroughly vetting any individual bestowed with that badge, and in turn, the power that comes with it. This legislation will create greater oversight, transparency and accountability to prevent departments from hiring bad actors."

Primary sponsors of S2511 include Senators Nellie Pou and Shirley Turner, and Assemblymembers Benjie Wimberly and Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.

"The juvenile justice reform bill we signed into law earlier this year was written before we had ever heard of the coronavirus," **said Senator Nellie Pou**. "The pandemic, however, has made the implementation of this law that much more crucial as it will help lower populations in certain juvenile facilities and create greater opportunity for proper social distancing. I am glad the Governor has recognized the urgency of signing this legislation today and discarded any further delay."

"Right now, those going through our justice system face particular vulnerability and risk of contracting COVID-19," **said Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly**. "This fact is no different for our youth who are in custody or under supervision, and often in detention for minor, non-violent infractions. To put the safety of our children first it is therefore critical to speed up the implementation of policies intending to protect against harsh juvenile sentencing, and to ensure greater priority for community-based rehabilitation and reintegration exists. Not only is it about health and safety, but it's also about justice."

"We have to do everything in our power to curb the spread of COVID-19, especially among our youth in the juvenile system who are at greater risk because of their physical circumstances," **said Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson**. "Thankfully, the mechanisms to keep children out of detention facilities and prioritize community-based programming were already in motion. Under this legislation, these reforms will now only be implemented much faster."

Primary sponsors of S2331 include Senators Sweeney and Cunningham, and Assemblymembers Pintor Marin, Quijano, and Verrelli.

"The legislation will require that prisons begin to prepare persons for life outside the wall," **said former Governor & New Jersey Reentry Corporation Chairman Jim McGreevey**. "Qualifying folks for Food Stamps, General Assistance, and Medicaid ensures persons will have the essential building blocks to survive. Food, housing, and healthcare are the Required first steps to a Second Chance at a healthy productive life."

"This will offer former offenders a fair opportunity at a second chance by addressing the obstacles to their successful reentry into society," **said Senate President Steve Sweeney**. "The barriers they encounter are even greater during the public health crisis we are now experiencing. Providing basic services can make a real difference in the lives of men and women who are returning to their families and communities as productive members of society."

"This law will help to address the significant obstacles faced by state and county inmates in obtaining what can be life-sustaining benefits when they are released from incarceration, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic," **said Senator Sandra Cunningham**. "One of the biggest barriers facing the reentry community upon release is lack of photo identification, which is needed to apply for general assistance, housing, or employment."

"After release, many offenders face a lack of access to resources, and many won't have support from their families," **said Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin**. "By facilitating enrollment in Medicaid, as well as enrollment assistance in programs that provide food and housing security, this legislation helps the reentry process in the time of the coronavirus to be less challenging."

"A non-driver ID card is one of the most important tools for securing reentry benefits and assistance from social services," **said Assemblywoman Annette Quijano**. "Prioritizing access to this proof of identity following release from prison or jail is essential for self-sufficiency and to help individuals rebuild their lives, especially while we navigate this public health emergency."

"Removing obstacles to emergency housing for the duration of this state of emergency is critical to preserving our public health objectives," **said Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli**. "Individuals reentering society need a place to self-isolate or quarantine. Enabling organizations with the space, but who currently lack the licensing, to provide temporary shelter is key to making sure that need is met."

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