

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: NJEDA Takes Steps to Advance Development of Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center in Trenton

03/10/2022

TRENTON - The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) today announced that its Board has taken steps to further the development of a first-of-its-kind Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center in Trenton. To ensure the success of the Center and its benefit to the Trenton community, the NJEDA's Board yesterday authorized Authority staff to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the John S. Watson Institute of Urban Policy and Research at Kean University (Watson Institute) to undertake an iterative community engagement process. This process is designed to build trust and support from Trenton residents and organizational stakeholders, as well as understand the services needed to improve maternal and infant health outcomes for Trenton's new and expectant mothers and children.

The MOU stems from a Request for Information about the Center issued by NJEDA in May 2021, in which respondents strongly emphasized that planning for the Center needed to be community-driven, with ample opportunity for Trenton community members and stakeholders to offer their perspectives on the Center's offerings, partnerships, and opportunities to leverage existing community assets in the City. The NJEDA Board also approved adding funds to its existing real estate services contract with Jones Lang LaSalle Americas, Inc. (JLL), with the intention of having JLL undertake the initial real estate planning for the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center.

"Because institutionalized racism has seeped its way into our maternal health outcomes, reaching our goal of ensuring that every mother and baby in New Jersey gets off to a healthy start will require a broad scope of work," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "The Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center in Trenton will play a leading role in this effort, providing care not only equitably and with leading maternal care practices, but also, from the very beginning, will be shaped by the input of the community it serves. Ultimately, we hope to solve our Black maternal and infant health crisis here in New Jersey and serve as the benchmark for maternal care nationwide."

"The Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center will be an asset to Trenton even beyond its obvious healthcare implications," **said NJEDA Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan**. "It will elevate the standard of care for local moms and newborns while catalyzing additional development. It will also revitalize the community by creating good jobs and generating economic activity. We thank Governor Phil Murphy, First Lady Murphy, and the Center's many supporters for their advocacy for and commitment to the well-being of Trenton families."

In 2019, First Lady Murphy launched Nurture NJ

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New Jersey ranks 47th in the nation for maternal deaths and has one of the widest racial disparities for both maternal and infant mortality. A Black mother in New Jersey is over seven times more likely than a white mother to die from maternity-related complications, and a Black baby is over three times more likely than a white baby to die before his or her first birthday.

Nurture NJ is guided by a strategic plan, published in January 2021, which included nearly 100 recommendations and strategies across nine domains to tackle this generational challenge, including a recommendation to establish a Center in the State capital focused on innovation in maternal and infant health through partnerships with the state's academic, funder, business, and faith communities.

The Center is intended to catalyze new innovations to drive improved maternal and infant health outcomes and to serve as a central hub for New Jersey's stakeholders dedicated to improving the health of New Jersey's babies and mothers through equitable delivery of health care services.

The Watson Institute's engagement will have a particular focus on what services are most needed, where the Center could be best located to serve the communities most in need, better understand the current landscape of service offerings for expectant parents and young children in Trenton, and opportunities to leverage existing community assets in the City. The Watson Institute will also partner with researchers at Stockton University as part of the community engagement effort.

"Saving the lives of the youngest and most vulnerable members of our community is critically important, and we wholeheartedly applaud First Lady Murphy and all those involved with Nurture NJ," **said Kean University President Lamont O. Repollet, Ed.D.** "The Watson Institute has a long history of service to New Jersey's urban centers. Our team looks forward to working with the stakeholders in the Trenton community to help bring this Center to fruition, leading to increased access to care for expectant mothers of color and their babies."

"Maternal health is an important indicator as to whether we're serving our citizens to the fullest," **Mayor Reed Gusciora said**. "These clinics will serve a vital need in our community, helping to bridge gaps in our safety net and ensure the wellbeing of our lifeblood, our mothers. They are the most valuable resource in the Capital City, and I am proud to support their health and wellness."

The New Jersey departments of Human Services and Health have played pivotal roles in the implementation of recommendations outlined in the Nurture NJ strategic plan and are key partners in the development of the Center.

"The First Lady's Nurture NJ strategic plan has laid bare the essential need for a center focused on innovation that will lead to the improved outcome for pregnant women and their babies," **said New Jersey Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "We are extremely pleased to see the NJEDA take the actions announced today, which will help combat disparities in care for mothers and babies of color."

"We have a moral obligation to ensure equitable access to healthcare for mothers and infants and are proud to work with First Lady Murphy and our partner agencies to implement the recommendations stated in the Nurture NJ strategic plan," **said New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli**. "The Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center will be a game-changer for moms and babies, and one that takes into account the needs and wants of the community it serves."

The NJEDA's efforts surrounding Nurture NJ and the Center for Maternal and Infant Health are being spearheaded by the Authority's Executive Vice President of Economic Security Tara Colton.

"Maintaining an open dialogue with community members about their needs is fundamental to dismantling systemic inequities that exist with respect to access to care for expectant mothers of color and their children," **Colton said**. "Our Board took an important step today in ensuring that the lines of communication not only stay open but stay strong."

Governor Phil Murphy

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