

Governor Phil Murphy

Finishing the Job of Building a Stronger and Fairer New Jersey

2025 State of the State Address

Posted on - 01/14/2025

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2025 State of the State Address
Tuesday, January 14, 2025

Remarks As Prepared For Delivery

Lieutenant Governor Way.

Senate President Scutari. Assembly Speaker Coughlin.

Majority Leaders Ruiz and Greenwald. Minority Leaders Bucco and DiMaio. Members of the 221st Legislature, with special thanks to the bipartisan escort committee that walked me into this chamber.

Chief Justice Rabner, Associate Justices Patterson, Pierre-Louis, Fasciale, Noriega, and Hoffman.

Members of the Cabinet. Senior staff.

Former Governors DiFrancesco, McGreevey, and Codey.

Former Lieutenant Governor Guadagno.

First Lady Tammy Murphy and two of our four children, Charlie and Sam.

Distinguished faith leaders, veterans, our brothers and sisters in organized labor, special guests, friends.

And my fellow New Jerseyans.

Over the past seven years, we have risen to every challenge that has come our way.

And we have faced each and every one as a united New Jersey.

Together, we have built a state that is stronger, fairer, and more prepared to face the future.

A state that leads the nation in being the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

And a state where we live up to the American promise of liberty, justice, and opportunity for all.

We have defended the fundamental rights of every New Jerseyan — from voting rights to LGBTQIA+ rights to reproductive rights and to every right in between.

And we have unleashed a new era of economic opportunity – by raising wages for working New Jerseyans and bringing new industries and new jobs to every corner of our state.

So, as I stand before you today, I am honored to report that the state of New Jersey is strong, ascendant, and ready for our greatest chapter yet.

And though we have come far over the past seven years, let me be absolutely clear: Our jobs are not done. Not by a long shot.

And during this final chapter of our journey, our absolute top priority – as it has been since Day One – is delivering economic security and opportunity to every New Jerseyan.

But this noble goal demands constant dedication and unwavering commitment.

So, to all of our neighbors in New Jersey who feel as if they have been forgotten, I give you my word: we are going to spend every minute we have left fighting for you and your economic future.

I have your back. I always have. And I always will.

And today, as I share my vision for the future of New Jersey, I want to start by acknowledging the elephant that is not in the room.

In a few days, a new President will take power in Washington.

Now, I know there is some uncertainty – and even concern – about what this new Administration will bring.

So here is my promise to the people of New Jersey:

I will never back away from partnering with the Trump Administration where our priorities align.

But just as importantly, I will never back down from defending our New Jersey values – if and when they are tested.

After all, to borrow a phrase from a former Trenton-area bartender – the great Jon Stewart – “if you don't stick to your values when they're being tested, they're not values: they're hobbies.”

In New Jersey, our values are who we are.

So, if you respect us – we will respect you in kind. And we will always work together in good faith.

But if you try to attack our people or our values, without cause, make no mistake: we will fight back even harder.

The people of New Jersey deserve leaders who will fight for them.

And that is especially true at a time when millions of our neighbors are feeling anxious – and unsure – about their economic future.

Today, there are far too many Americans living one missed paycheck away from economic catastrophe. New Jersey is no exception.

It is a reality that keeps parents up at night – and keeps the American Dream out of reach.

I know these challenges.

Because they are the very same challenges that my own family faced when I was growing up.

For my parents, no matter how hard they worked, they could never shake the fear that they were always one bad month away from losing everything. Those struggles shape every part of who I am today.

Because, over the course of my own life, I have been blessed – through hard work and a lot of luck – to climb the ladder of opportunity and achieve my very own American Dream.

And the reason I ran for this office in the first place was to help every New Jerseyan achieve their own American Dream.

That has been the singular goal of our Administration: building a stronger and fairer economy for our educators, our caregivers, our entrepreneurs, our veterans, and everyone who keeps our state moving forward.

So, with 12 months to go in our Administration, I know some may think this would be the time to kick back, relax, and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done.

But today, I have a very different message:

I'm not done yet. And we're not done yet.

We're not done yet when it comes to fighting for the working people of our state.

And over the next year, we are going to fight to ensure that every New Jerseyan has a fair shot at a brighter future.

With the help of everyone in this chamber, we are going to leave our children a state that is better than we found it.

And this mission begins where it always should: investing in the economic security of our families.

As elected leaders, we must contend with an inescapable truth: there is a fundamental difference between a growing economy — and an economy that helps families grow.

And today, the reality is that everyday life is too difficult for our nation's working families.

While the stock market is soaring, the cost of living — from groceries to housing — has skyrocketed.

And here in New Jersey, as anyone will tell you: one of the biggest costs holding our families back is property taxes.

That is precisely why, under our Administration, we have provided more than \$14 billion in direct property tax relief to New Jerseyans through the ANCHOR program and other initiatives.

In other words, together — with the help of everyone in this room, and under the tremendous leadership of Senate President Nick Scutari and Speaker of the General Assembly Craig Coughlin — we have provided more property tax relief to the people of New Jersey than any Administration in history.

But property taxes are just one source of economic stress for our families, especially those that earn just enough money to survive.

When we entered office, there were hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans who were earning a minimum wage that was nothing more than a starvation wage.

That is unjust. Period.

And it is why, during our first term, I worked with you all to raise our state's minimum wage.

And now, as of 2025, New Jersey's minimum wage is nearly double what it was when I entered office.

At \$15.49 an hour, we are ensuring that our working neighbors can afford basic necessities — like food and housing.

But, let me be clear: these folks are not living a life of luxury. But they are living a life with less uncertainty and greater dignity.

And let's remember: when we first called for raising the minimum wage, there were many who said doing so would devastate our economy and hurt the very people we were trying to help.

But now, almost six years later, we can say unequivocally: a higher minimum wage has not held our economy back — instead, it has made our economy one of the strongest in the entire region.

That's what happens when you rebuild New Jersey's economy from the bottom-up rather than the top-down. A stronger

working class always leads to a stronger economy for all of us.

But of course, helping our neighbors earn a livable wage is merely a starting point.

One of the great responsibilities of my job is listening to New Jerseyans.

And when I meet with families across our state, I hear the same thing again and again: it doesn't matter where people live, they are worried about their future and their kids' future.

People are anxious about being able to save for an emergency, or simply, a dignified retirement.

So, to help strengthen the long-term economic security of our families, our Administration launched RetireReady NJ.

It is our state's first-ever, publicly run retirement savings program and it offers nearly every worker in our state an option to invest in their family's future.

It cost our taxpayers close-to-nothing to launch this program – and it is providing a big help to our families.

Because being able to save for retirement should be a fundamental right for every worker.

In that same spirit, I also believe that every working New Jerseyan should be entitled to another right: the right to paid parental leave.

And with that in mind, today, I am proud to announce that our Administration will be taking a new step – as part of First Lady Tammy Murphy's Nurture NJ initiative – to strengthen the economic security of our state's families.

Starting this year, we will introduce a new paid parental leave policy for the tens of thousands of public servants who work in state government.

This will ensure that these workers can continue earning a full salary while caring for a newborn during one of the most crucial stages of development.

Why are we doing this?

Because nobody should ever have to sacrifice their economic security in order to be a present and engaged parent.

And, while we are providing this new benefit to our state's public sector workers, we hope that it will become a new norm for all of our state's workers – in every sector and every industry.

Because if we want New Jersey to remain the best state to raise a family – we have to live up to that with our deeds and our actions.

So, from providing unprecedented property tax relief, to securing new benefits for our workers, during our final year, our Administration will continue making it easier for New Jerseyans to secure their future in the Garden State.

But when talking about the future of our families we must always prioritize our most precious asset of all: our children.

After all, if you want to measure the worth of a society look to how it cares for its kids.

Here in New Jersey, we have always believed that nothing is more important than nurturing the growth and development of our children.

That is exactly why we have invested record sums into strengthening the crown jewel of New Jersey: our best-in-the-nation public education system.

With our most recent budget, we became the first Administration in history to fully fund New Jersey's school funding formula.

That means we are directing more money to our school districts than ever before – especially those that have been historically under-funded.

And, at the same time, we are saving taxpayers money. Because every dollar the state spends on public education is a dollar our families and seniors get to save in property taxes.

But when it comes to caring for our children: we're not done yet.

Today, I am announcing a suite of new proposals, each crafted to support our children at every stage of life. From the cradle to the college campus and beyond.

When I first ran for this office, I set the goal of putting New Jersey on a path to free, universal pre-K. And with the help of each of you, and especially Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz and Assemblymembers Andrea Katz and Sterley Stanley, we have done just that.

And this year, we will not only move forward in reaching this goal.

I am also going to work with you all to enact a new proposal requiring school districts to provide full-day kindergarten in the communities that still lack it.

To be sure: the vast majority of our state's school districts already offer full-day kindergarten.

But there are still some districts falling short. And as a result, families and children in these communities are being left behind.

With us today is Jen Lai.

Jen is one of our state's amazing health care heroes. She is a nurse who lives in Hillsborough with her four children and her husband, Vince, who is a hero, himself, as a volunteer firefighter.

Two years ago, Jen and Vince became the proud parents of twins.

They are thrilled to raise their children in Hillsborough. But today, it is one of the few towns in New Jersey that does not offer full-day kindergarten.

I believe that Jen and Vince's children deserve every opportunity in the world.

And by ensuring that they can enjoy a full day in the classroom — early in their academic life — we will set them, and every child, on a path to lifelong success.

And let's remember that this is not just an educational investment — it is an economic investment.

Because we will save every parent money by offering them a free, safe, and enriching environment to leave their child during the workday, whether it be full-day K or universal pre-K.

And when we talk about setting our children on a path to lifelong success, we must also ensure that our students are getting the most out of the classroom.

Unfortunately, as I can attest as a parent, in recent years, we have seen a new obstacle emerge when it comes to our children's education: cell phones.

Today, our children are inundated with screens.

And if you ask just about any educator, they will tell you that mobile devices are a distraction in the classroom.

They are fueling a rise in cyberbullying.

And they are making it incredibly difficult for our kids, not only to learn, but to retain the substance of what they learn.

Honestly, is it any surprise that the rise in smartphone usage has coincided with a growing youth mental health crisis?

Of course not. And I — for one — am not going to sit back as our kids suffer.

So today, I am officially announcing my support for a new proposal that will direct school districts across New Jersey to

adopt policies that ban cell phones from our K-12 classrooms and help establish phone-free schools.

And I want to thank Senator Paul Moriarty and Assemblywoman Rosy Bagolie for their leadership on this issue.

Every parent knows the damage that these devices can cause.

Enough is enough. It is time for action.

And as we continue moving forward in nurturing the development of our students, we remain committed as ever to helping them succeed after they graduate high school.

Over the past seven years, our Administration has made record-high investments into programs that help every student, of every background, afford a college education.

And we have made these investments for a simple reason: every child deserves the opportunity to chase their dreams.

But, a college education is just one pathway to economic success.

I have always believed that our goal, as leaders, should be rebuilding as many pathways as possible to the American Dream.

Because it should not matter whether you have a college degree, or if you work in the Trades, or if you live in Paterson or Princeton, at the end of the day, economic opportunity should be guaranteed to all of our children.

For that reason, our Administration has worked to unleash a new generation of economic opportunities in every community.

As a testament to that fact, as of last year, New Jersey has more workers employed than ever before and more small businesses in operation than ever before.

And we are growing. Fast! In fact, over the past year, New Jersey has emerged as one of the top-10 fastest-growing states

([https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zof2wm/7q6qms2d/7udv5ab_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LkXuvE_grjW1Y8-8solFTh2jKStbQlFXq-gylCh66rvcgb0q97b8YYXbYYjzGJUheAsCMw52l-VduNue5A\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zof2wm/7q6qms2d/7udv5ab_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LkXuvE_grjW1Y8-8solFTh2jKStbQlFXq-gylCh66rvcgb0q97b8YYXbYYjzGJUheAsCMw52l-VduNue5A$)) in the country.

We are one of only two states in the entire Northeast to make the list.

Apparently, there are far more moving vans coming into New Jersey than leaving.

But, even so: we must do more to create new opportunities for our students, our workers, and our entrepreneurs.

Especially the members of our Black and Latino communities who have historically been excluded from the path to prosperity.

And sadly, our state's history of exclusion is more recent than we may care to think.

Last year, our Administration published the most comprehensive disparity study in New Jersey's history.

Appallingly, yet unsurprisingly, it found that minority- and women-owned businesses in New Jersey have been disproportionately excluded from doing business with our state government.

That is inexcusable.

And to correct this injustice, today, I am calling on the Legislature to enact a legislative package — supported by Senator Nilsa Cruz-Perez and Assemblymembers Shavonda Sumter, Benjie Wimberly, and Sterley Stanley — that will connect our state's family-owned businesses with new public contracting opportunities.

And taking this step is not just about addressing a legacy of exclusion.

It is also about ensuring that we give a leg up to our local, small business owners — instead of leaving them behind.

With us, today, is one of our state's phenomenal business owners: Brian Grant.

A little over a decade ago, Brian founded Grant Engineering in Newark. And today, his company leads construction and engineering projects all across the country.

Let us take legislative action this year to make it easier for business owners like Brian to keep their doors open — and pass on a proud family legacy to their children.

I believe that every New Jerseyan like Brian deserves the opportunity to build generational wealth.

But one of the biggest barriers our families face — when it comes to building wealth — is the skyrocketing costs of housing.

And that is why, last year, our Administration worked with all of you to pass the most sweeping affordable housing legislation in more than 40 years.

And now, as we work to convert that landmark law into action, I am ready to work with you, again, to lower housing costs for New Jerseyans.

This year, I am calling on the Legislature to reform our state's zoning and permitting laws, with a number of proposals led by Senator Troy Singleton and his colleagues, so we can make it easier to build new housing in the communities where it's needed most.

By cutting red tape and easing outdated restrictions, we can build potentially thousands of new, affordable housing units over the next decade.

This is absolutely essential to helping our families access new opportunities to improve their economic well-being.

And, on the topic of helping New Jerseyans access new economic opportunities, let us remember that we all rely on the same literal framework to get us where we need to go: our infrastructure.

Under our Administration, New Jersey has embarked on a historic undertaking to rebuild and reimagine our entire transportation system.

We have created new, dedicated funding streams to support the future of NJ TRANSIT. And by the way, we didn't mooch off our neighbors to meet our fiscal needs, and we have not stopped fighting for one second to defend our commuters going in and out of New York. Stay tuned.

Our Administration has also secured billions of dollars in federal funding to complete the Hudson River Tunnel Project, which will reduce transit delays and double the number of one-seat rides to and from Manhattan.

In sum, we are finally building the world-class transportation system our families deserve.

But we're not done yet.

This year, Commissioner Fran O'Connor and I are going to work with all of you to make New Jersey's roads safer for drivers, pedestrians, and everyone who calls the Garden State home.

As part of this effort, by the end of this year, we are going to overhaul our state's ten most dangerous intersections to keep our families safe and to help prevent avoidable tragedies.

And, we are also going to work to enact legislation — introduced by Assemblymembers Lisa Swain, David Bailey, and Heather Simmons — to update our driver education programs to focus on cyclist and pedestrian safety.

With us today is Sangeeta Badlani, the Founder of the Nikhil Badlani Foundation and Families for Safe Streets New Jersey.

In 2011, Sangeeta's precious son Nikhil tragically lost his life in a car crash. He was just 11 years old.

Nikhil was a tremendously gifted student, a Boy Scout, and a passionate musician. He should still be here today.

In Nikhil's honor, we must now enact policies that protect our children — and make our transportation system safer and more reliable for everyone.

And our commitment to reimagining New Jersey's transportation system is also reflected in our commitment to reimagining our economy.

In fact, one of the hallmarks of our Administration has been restoring our state's reputation as a bedrock for revolutionary innovation.

And we have made this a priority not simply for the sake of economic growth.

It is because, as new industries — like generative AI and clean energy — take root in the Garden State, so, too, do opportunities for our workers and students to find their place in the economies of tomorrow.

Look no further than the series of Strategic Innovation Centers that we have launched alongside our state's finest institutions of higher learning, from the NJ AI Hub at Princeton University to the New Jersey Fintech Accelerator at Stevens Institute of Technology to the Helix, in the Hub City, the home of Rutgers-New Brunswick — and the many other hubs we have continued to launch.

With each one of these innovation centers, we are bringing together our students, industry leaders, and innovators to shape the future of technology.

And unlike previous generations of leaders — who have made decisions based only on the here and now — we are proud to be building not just the New Jersey of 2025, but the New Jersey of 2035 and beyond.

With us, today, is one young innovator who is helping make that future a reality: Tom Steen, the Co-Founder and CEO of Planthopper, a start-up, based in Asbury Park, that is pioneering a revolutionary approach to pest management, that aims to protect our environment as well as our state's farmers at the same time.

Tom is also a member of New Jersey's first-ever class of Innovation Fellows.

With this program, Tom — and dozens of his fellow, first-time innovators — are receiving direct funding from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to turn their game-changing ideas into commercially-viable ventures.

And I want to thank the EDA's CEO, Tim Sullivan — and his entire team — for their leadership in launching the Innovation Fellows Program.

This is just one example of how New Jersey is leading the world in building a stronger and fairer innovation economy — one that creates new opportunities in every city and every town.

And while these particular initiatives represent new endeavors for New Jersey, the fact is: innovation has always been at the heart of who we are.

And I believe we should apply that same spirit of innovation to how we solve problems on behalf of the people we serve.

In that spirit, today, I am asking you all to send to my desk legislation — sponsored by Senator Pat Diegnan and Assemblywoman Annette Quijano — that will allow every New Jerseyan to obtain mobile driver's licenses and IDs, accessible from their smartphone.

This is just common sense.

Mobile driver's licenses allow people to update personal information in real-time, like changing their address. And it also means that, if you lose your physical license, you will still have a form of verifiable ID on you at all times.

Taking this step will make life easier for the people we serve.

And is that not what good government is all about?

Making our institutions more responsive to the needs of New Jerseyans?

And listening when people speak up and bring new issues to our attention?

To that point, I want to acknowledge somebody who is in the audience today.

His name is Jack Curtis. He is a retired school principal from Mendham Township.

Now, I first got to know Jack when he called in to my "Ask Governor Murphy" radio show.

He reached out to voice his concerns about a loophole in our state's tax code. So, I invited him to meet with me, in my office, to keep the conversation going.

And I invited Jack to join us, today, to thank him. Because he has raised our attention to a flaw in New Jersey's farmland assessment tax system that allows the wealthiest among us to avoid paying their fair share.

That is wrong.

If our state's law enforcement officers, veterans, nurses, and other working people are paying their fair share — so, too, should those at the top of the economic ladder.

So, this year, I am calling on the Legislature to reform New Jersey's tax system — with a proposal led by Senator Joe Pennacchio and Assemblywoman Aura Dunn — to eliminate this flaw once and for all.

This topic may seem obscure but it matters. It shows that we are listening when the people of New Jersey speak up. And at the end of the day, taking this step will ensure our tax system is stronger and fairer for everyone.

And, as public officials, we all bear a responsibility to correct the failures and injustices of the past — whether it be fixing our tax code or refusing to repeat the mistakes made by previous generations.

Each one of us has only a limited window of time to do whatever we can to leave this state we love better than we found it.

And the reality is, when I entered office, there was a giant stack of unpaid bills piling up on New Jersey's kitchen table.

But unlike previous Administrations — of both parties — we refused to continue skipping out on paying our bills.

For that very reason, we have made the full payment into our state's pension system not once, not twice — but four years in a row. And for the first time in a quarter century.

We have also restored full funding for our public education system, our public transit system, and other vital public programs on which our families rely.

And, by keeping these promises, we have also restored trust in Trenton's fiscal leadership.

Because, after decades of drowning in a sea of credit downgrades, New Jersey has been buoyed — over the past seven years — by a new wave of credit rating upgrades.

The bottom line is: we are paying our debts. And we are keeping our promises.

And yet, despite this historic progress, I know there are some who say that they'd rather go back to the budgets of yesterday. That they would rather go back to the days when New Jersey kicked the can down the road. They claim it's cheaper that way.

And these same voices complain that the budget today is bigger than it was when we took office.

Yes — the budget is bigger. Because that's what happens when you finally pay your bills and you actually meet your obligations to the people.

Passing the buck was Trenton's favorite game for far too long.

Let me be clear: those days are over. And we are not going back.

Because you know what happens when you abandon your responsibilities to New Jerseyans?

People get hurt.

So, to those of you running around, complaining about our Administration's spending priorities, why don't you level with the people of New Jersey?

Why don't you turn around and face our teachers, our police officers, our firefighters, and tell all the hardworking people who serve our state that you want to defund their pensions and deny them their hard-earned retirement.

Or why don't you tell our state's parents that you want to defund our schools and deprive our children of the education they deserve, and at the same time, make our families pay more in property taxes.

Or tell commuters which road you won't fix. Or the train you won't upgrade.

Or tell all the women seeking essential health care — whether it's a mammogram or an ultrasound — that you're willing to defund Planned Parenthood, like the last Administration did.

You need to look the people of New Jersey in the eye and tell it to them straight.

Because while avoiding hard choices may win an election or two, it always fails New Jersey. It is a short-sighted strategy that costs more and solves nothing.

In our Administration, we don't raise tomorrow's costs by failing to meet today's challenges.

We pay our bills. We meet our obligations.

And we never abandon our families.

Because the last thing the people of New Jersey need is a deadbeat government.

And this is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue.

This is about paying what we promised, supporting our most vulnerable, and lifting up our families.

And when I talk about lifting up our state's families — I mean every family.

Because one of our most sacred responsibilities, as leaders, is protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of every New Jerseyan.

That means enacting laws that will ensure our rights are secure — no matter who is in the White House or who controls Congress.

Over the past seven years, we have taken enormous strides in guaranteeing equal rights to all of our neighbors — no matter who they love, where they came from, how they worship, or what kind of health care they need.

In just the past year, for instance, we have enacted new legislation to protect people from predatory medical debt collectors.

And, given the assault on health care freedoms we have seen across the country — especially, reproductive freedoms — we cannot slow down.

A couple of years ago, New Jersey worked proactively to protect abortion rights months before Roe was overturned.

And now, we must further secure our reputation as a safe haven for reproductive freedom.

First, I am once again calling on the Legislature to pass a law that will scrap out-of-pocket costs for abortion procedures. And I want to thank Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywomen Shanique Speight and Lisa Swain for their leadership on this proposal.

Additionally — and in light of the anti-choice policies supported by the current majorities in Congress — today, I am also announcing that New Jersey will begin stockpiling a supply of Mifepristone, so every woman can access this crucial form

of reproductive care.

When it comes to protecting fundamental rights, I will not give an inch.

And that same commitment also applies to the next generation – and the generations yet to come – all of whom are entitled to a safe, healthy and livable planet.

One of our Administration's proudest accomplishments has been making generational progress in protecting our environment.

But, despite how far we have come, we cannot escape the reality that climate change looms larger by the day.

Just a few months ago, New Jersey saw its driest fall season in recorded history, which fueled a series of life-threatening wildfires and pushed our supply of water to dangerously low levels.

And look at the drought-driven disaster that has befallen Los Angeles.

As you know, our Administration has already set one of the most ambitious clean energy goals in the country: running New Jersey on 100% clean energy by 2035.

And to make sure our state remains on track to reach that goal, I am calling on the Legislature to work with Senator Bob Smith and Assemblymen Wayne DeAngelo and Rob Karabinchak to codify our clean energy standard into law.

And taking this step is not merely about reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

This is also about securing our state's energy independence – and creating good-paying, union jobs in the clean-energy industries that will power our future.

And just as the people of New Jersey are entitled to a safe, livable planet – they are also entitled to the most fundamental right we have as Americans: the right to vote.

Thanks to the leadership of Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of State Tahesha Way, voting rights in New Jersey are more secure than ever before.

But even so, we have more work to do to expand access to the ballot box.

First, it is time to pass legislation – introduced by Senator Raj Mukherji and Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson – that will make same-day voter registration a reality in the Garden State.

Let's get this done before the end of the year, because nobody should be disenfranchised because they missed an arbitrary deadline.

Additionally, today, I am also reiterating my support for a proposal sponsored by Senator Mukherji and Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker to expand voting rights, in local school board elections, to 16- and 17-year-olds.

Cities like Newark are already doing this. And it's time to do it statewide.

As I said – during my last State of the State Address – this proposal is an investment in the long-term health of our democracy. Because empowering our youth to participate in local elections will encourage them to become lifelong voters.

And, of course, if we want to live up to our nation's foundational promise of liberty and justice for all, we must do more than protect our fundamental freedoms.

Living up to the American promise also demands that we reform a criminal justice system that has failed generations of families.

In recent years, we have done just that.

And we have proven – together – that we can build a fairer justice system and strengthen public safety at the same time.

Just days ago, we received word that — last year — New Jersey saw its lowest number of shootings in recorded history.

And, a month before that, our Administration reached another historic milestone in building a stronger, fairer justice system as I announced the first of many rounds of pardons and commutations as part of our groundbreaking clemency initiative.

With this initiative, we have created a process for granting clemency — not based on whether an individual is connected to those in power — but based on fairness and impartiality.

Every single one of the 33 people I pardoned last month has earned their second chance.

One of them is Abdur Azim, a reentry specialist in the Department of Corrections, who is with us today.

Like many, Abdur made some mistakes early in his life. But he did his time, and he then dedicated himself to giving back to his fellow New Jerseyans.

And Abdur's story is just one example of how we are working to live up to New Jersey's reputation as the state for second chances.

But we have more to do.

Right now, roughly 10 percent of our state's entire prison population consists of people who are being held behind bars for committing a technical parole violation, like missing a scheduled meeting or forgetting to report a move to a new town.

Nobody should lose their freedom because of a technicality.

For that reason, I am asking you all to send to my desk a bill — led by Assemblywoman Speight — that will reform penalties for technical parole violations. Just as many other states — including deep red states like Louisiana and South Carolina — have already done.

By enacting these reforms, we can uphold our responsibility to restore trust in our criminal justice system — and our system of government, more broadly.

And is that not what public service is all about?

Though each one of us, in this chamber, occupy different positions of power, we are all united in a common mission:

Proving to the people of New Jersey that our government works — not just for the wealthy and well-connected — but for the working people who keep our state moving.

But our time together, in advancing this mission, is limited.

I am well aware I have 371 days — to be exact — until I leave office and a new Governor takes the baton.

To some, that may be welcome news.

But to all of us who have the privilege of calling the Garden State home, I say this: I will dedicate every minute we have left to working for you.

In New Jersey, we do not move backwards, we do not stand still — we march onward, no matter what obstacles stand in our way.

And if the past seven years have taught us anything, it is that nobody can predict what new obstacles may present themselves.

Some are terrible — and tragic.

Who would have thought — seven years ago — that we would soon be hit by a once-in-a-century pandemic.

Or that we would see two full-on wars break out on the other side of the globe, each with deep and personal ties to so

many here in New Jersey.

Or that we would see the highest rate of inflation in over 40 years.

But, in the midst of these unforeseen challenges, we have also scored victories that few could have ever predicted.

I mean, who would have thought — seven years ago — that New Jersey would soon become the entertainment capital of America, with the help of household names like Netflix.

Or that we would re-emerge as the medicine chest to the world, with more engineers and scientists per capita than anywhere else on the planet.

Or that we would be selected as the host for the biggest sporting event in human history, the 2026 FIFA World Cup Final.

It all goes to show that, from the good to the bad, you can never predict the future.

Instead, to borrow an old phrase, “the best way to predict the future is to create it.”

And it is thanks to everyone in this chamber today, and to the members of our Administration, and — most importantly — the people of New Jersey that, together, we have created a state that is better than the one we inherited seven years ago.

And it is not because we have solved all of our problems, or that we have even had all of the right answers.

It is because we’ve remained devoted to our Jersey values, we have worked our tails off, and we have dared to dream big.

We have demonstrated the value of having cooler heads at the helm.

Because in a world where uncertainty is the new norm, clear thinking, fact-based leadership, and good-faith collaboration will be our salvation.

And that is how we will keep leading, during our final year — with an unshakeable determination to better the lives of the people we serve.

So, over the next 12 months, I challenge all of us to live and breathe a simple yet bold mission:

To fight to ensure every one of our neighbors is economically secure enough to make their future in the Garden State.

To fight for every parent struggling to afford the cost of groceries, gas, housing, and a college education.

To fight for every child’s fundamental right to a bright, prosperous future — and every worker’s right to a dignified retirement.

And to fight relentlessly to ensure that our laws protect our most vulnerable just as well as they protect our most powerful.

Because the vision has always been a stronger and fairer New Jersey — nothing less.

In seven years as your Governor, I have come to understand so much about our state.

We don’t try — we triumph.

We don’t waiver — we win.

And we don’t settle — we soar.

So again, I say: I’m not done yet. We’re not done yet. And New Jersey is just getting started.

And together, we are going to show the world what it means to be the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

We are going to show the world that New Jersey is THE state where big dreams come true.

We're from Jersey baby!

We never slow down.

And together, we are going to run through the tape!

Thank you all so much.

May God bless you and your families. And may God continue to bless the great State of New Jersey and the United States of America.

Governor Phil Murphy

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