

Governor Phil Murphy

# Special Guests to Join First Lady Tammy Murphy at Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Address

03/8/2022

**TRENTON** – Today, Governor Phil Murphy will present his budget for Fiscal Year 2023 – a budget that is rooted in a renewed commitment to moving New Jersey forward, creating opportunity for every family, and making our state more affordable. This year, several New Jerseyans will join First Lady Tammy Murphy in the Assembly Chambers as special guests. These guests embody the values and spirit that Governor Murphy highlights in his speech. Importantly, a number of Ukrainian American community leaders from New Jersey will be in attendance.

“This budget builds on our progress to make New Jersey stronger, fairer, and more affordable,” said **Governor Murphy**. “As we gather together in the Assembly Chambers for the first time since 2020, it is my honor to be joined by these outstanding individuals who personify all that New Jersey has overcome and achieved over the past two years. At this time especially, as we seek ways to support Ukrainians fighting against tyranny, I am especially proud to be joined by members of New Jersey’s Ukrainian American community.”

“The individuals joining us today reflect the very same values that guided the creation of this year’s budget,” said **First Lady Tammy Murphy**. “As we continue our work to make New Jersey stronger, fairer, and more affordable, we are grateful for their leadership and influence in the state of New Jersey.”

The following New Jerseyans, listed in alphabetical order by last name, will be in attendance:

## Donnel Baird

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Donnel Baird is the Founder and CEO of BlocPower. BlocPower is a climate technology company rapidly greening American cities. Since its founding in 2014, the company has completed energy projects in 1,200+ buildings and delivers results ahead of schedule and under budget. BlocPower utilizes its proprietary software for analysis, leasing, project management, and monitoring of urban clean energy projects and its customers are saving 20-40% on their energy bills each year. The company is backed by the world’s top investors, including Kapor Capital, one of Uber’s first investors; Andressen Horowitz, an early investor in Facebook, Twitter, AirBnB and Lyft; the former Chairman of Google; and American Family Insurance Institute for Corporate and Social Impact. Baird has degrees from Duke University in Political Science and Government and African American/Black Studies. Baird also has an MBA from the Columbia Business School. Donnel Baird was appointed to the New Jersey Council on the Green Economy by Governor Murphy in February 2021.

## Vera Csizmadia

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Vera is an educator and has been working in the Palisades Park School District for five years as an integrated preschool teacher. She earned her master’s degree in Early Childhood Education and Teacher of Students with Disabilities at Montclair State University. After receiving the Preschool Extension Grant in September, she was appointed as the Master Teacher at the Dr. Charles R. Smith Early Childhood Center to support the teachers who work with the youngest learners. Vera introduced Governor Murphy at an event highlighting his vision for universal pre-K expansion in Palisades Park on September 16, 2021.

## Michael DeSimone

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Mike grew up working at his late father’s restaurant on the Upper West Side of Manhattan starting at the age of 15. After a ten-year career in hospitality running restaurants and bars in New York City, he took a job on the Jersey Shore in 2005. One year later, Mike founded the Jr’s brand, originating in Long Branch. Mike found success in Long Branch and continued to fall in the love with the Jersey Shore. He opened Jr’s Red Bank in 2012 and Jr’s Providence Rhode Island in 2015. His appreciation for Monmouth County extends beyond home and work with a strong passion for boating and wildlife on the Navesink River and Atlantic Ocean. Governor Murphy visited Jr’s West End in Long Branch to highlight small business recovery and the Sustain and Serve program on February 2, 2022.

## Leslie Felner

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Leslie Felner has been a Fair Lawn resident for the past 25 years. She and her late husband, Richard and their three children wanted to live in a suburban setting and raise their children in a place that has good schools and great neighborhoods. They moved to Fair Lawn in 1997 after living in Chicago and Forest Hills, NY. She has worked at reducing infant mortality in Chicago and has specialized and developed public health policy aimed at increasing health care services to the elderly, medically underserved and those who are uninsured or disenfranchised. She was an administrator for 14 schools-based pediatric clinics in Queens, NJ and she has provided technical consulting to community agencies and not-for profit organizations. She has a BS in Biology from SUNY- Brockport, an MS in Health and Safety Education from the Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a Master of Public Health (MPH) specializing in Maternal and Child Health/Administration from the University of Illinois - School of Public Health at Chicago. Leslie is one of the five million New Jerseyans that would benefit from Governor Murphy’s ANCHOR Property Tax Relief Program.

## Vu-An Foster

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Vu-An Foster is a preeclampsia survivor and a loss mama, committed and dedicated to making a difference and improving maternal child health outcomes. Before celebrating the birth of healthy baby boy King Kyro in July 2021, she experienced two painful pregnancy losses. It was after her losses that she founded Life After 2 Losses. The mission of Life After 2 Losses is to support, inform, and empower other women and moms to prevent them from similar losses by providing advocacy through education. She serves as the Count the Kicks ambassador for New Jersey, and she serves multiple committees surrounding perinatal health and infant mortality, including the New Jersey Maternal Care Quality Collaborative with the NJ Department of Health. She studied at William Paterson University where she received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Public Health. She is currently studying at Montclair State University, completing a Master of Public Health Degree concentrating in Health Systems Administration and Policy, and plans to obtain her Ph.D. Vu-An and her eight-month-old son King Kyro participated in First Lady Tammy Murphy’s Maternal Health Awareness Day 2022 panel discussion “Amplifying the Voices of Our Mothers.”

## Adam Gordon

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Adam Gordon is the Executive Director at Fair Share Housing Center. He joined the organization as an Equal Justice Works Fellow in 2006. He has litigated at the New Jersey Supreme Court and Appellate Division and worked on state and federal policy issues including very-low-income housing in high opportunity communities, Low Income Housing Tax Credit allocation, and statewide fair share allocation. He is also a co-founder of the magazine Next City and a non-resident fellow at the NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy. He holds a bachelor’s and juris doctorate from Yale University. Governor Murphy’s budget prioritizes affordable housing.

## Kaylie Lam

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Kaylie Lam is currently a Sophomore at Rutgers University. A first-generation college student, Kaylie is majoring in biological science, with a pre-medicine focus. This fall, Kaylie will be taking advantage of the Garden State Guarantee program, which allows tens of thousands of eligible students to receive free tuition at New Jersey's public four-year colleges. The Governor's proposed budget increases support for the Educational Opportunity Fund, establishes a higher income threshold for Community College Opportunity Grants to match the Garden State Guarantee's limits, and includes a new initiative to encourage college completion, with the goal of expanding access to degrees as widely as possible.

Metropolitan Antony of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA will provide the opening prayer. Additionally, several members of the Ukrainian American community will also attend, including His Eminence Archbishop Daniel Zelinsky of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA; Tamara Gallo-Olexy, President Emeritus of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America; Anya Tershakovec Tomko, Administrative Director for the School of Ukrainian Studies at the Ukrainian American Cultural Center of New Jersey; Leonard Mazur; and Ihor Zwarycz.

Additional information about Governor Murphy's Budget Address, including the livestream, is available here ([https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zw5rog/fd1rrbm/3n11bv\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!f8e6tthHQzFWV6FuXT\\_Viird01LelurcM266l5gKvZInSwLYxQz2Iyi7WWT6S](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zw5rog/fd1rrbm/3n11bv_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!f8e6tthHQzFWV6FuXT_Viird01LelurcM266l5gKvZInSwLYxQz2Iyi7WWT6S))

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