

# First Lady Tammy Murphy Announces Appointment of Six Public Board Members of the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority

12/13/2023

*The Authority Will Ensure the Sustainability of the Work of Nurture NJ for Years to Come and Oversee the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center in Trenton*

**TRENTON** – First Lady Tammy Murphy today announced that six public members have been appointed by Governor Phil Murphy to serve on the Board of the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority. In July, Governor Murphy signed S3864, also known as the “New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center Act”, which created the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority (Authority). The Authority is tasked with overseeing the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center based in Trenton and will be the government entity that continues the vital work of Nurture NJ for years to come. Nurture NJ is the statewide program that was launched by First Lady Tammy Murphy in 2019 to reduce the maternal and infant mortality epidemic in New Jersey and ensure equitable care among women and children of all races and ethnicities.

The Governor appointed the public members with an emphasis on those with relevant experience in areas related to maternal, infant and childhood health care. Those members include:

- Shakira Abdul-Ali, MSOD, Principal Managing Consultant/Owner, Alchemy Consulting, LLC, former Director, Trenton Dept of Health & Human Services (a recommendation of Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora)
- Rosalee Boyer, the First Lady of the Greater Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and co-founder of Salvation and Social Justice
- Dr. Damali Campbell-Oparaji, Associate Professor, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Health, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and Physician in Obstetrics and Gynecology
- Dr. Barbara George Johnson, Vice President of External Affairs and Urban Policy and Research, Kean University
- Andrea Martinez-Mejia, Executive Director, Greater Newark Health Care Coalition
- Maritza Raimundi-Petroski, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, Prevention Programs, and Community Engagement, Children’s Home Society of New Jersey

“After careful consideration, I am pleased to appoint six public members to the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority Board,” **said Governor Murphy**. “These individuals have a wide-range of experience when it comes to maternal and infant health care and have been dedicated to the mothers and babies of our state for years. The Authority Board will be instrumental in moving us closer to the building of the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center in Trenton, which will have a lasting impact on our Capital City.”

“The Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority Board will have the enormous responsibility of overseeing the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center in Trenton from concept to completion and beyond, which is why we carefully selected each representative following a thorough and thoughtful review process,” **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. “I am so grateful to the public members who have agreed to join the board. Each individual as demonstrated by their dedicated body of work has inspired and impacted our Nurture NJ initiative, and I know firsthand they will continue to make valuable contributions to the task ahead.”



In addition to the five public members selected by the Governor, representatives from several state departments will also serve on the Authority's board. Those members include:

- Commissioner Sarah Adelman, Department of Human Services
- Acting Commissioner Kaitlan Baston, New Jersey Department of Health
- Dr. Brian Bridges, New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education
- Holly Low, Director of the Office of Strategic Outreach and Policy, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Katherine Stoehr, First Deputy Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Children and Families
- Tim Sullivan, CEO, Economic Development Authority
- Acting Commissioner Justin Zimmerman, New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance

The 15-member board will be responsible for employing an appointed President and Chief Executive Officer who will hire accompanying staff. The board will also adopt recommendations for actions created by the New Jersey Maternal Care Quality Collaborative (NJMCQC), over which the Authority will be the primary agency responsible for coordinating efforts and strategies to reduce maternal mortality, morbidity, and racial and ethnic disparities in the state. In addition, the board will be required to coordinate with an 11-member Community Advisory Committee representing diverse community groups with relevant experience as providers or recipients of maternal, infant and child health services to support and inform the work of the Authority.

"The public board members selected to serve on the Authority Board represent the diversity, expertise, and communities most critical to the work of the Innovation Center as New Jersey continues its work to eliminate racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality, and becomes the safest place to have a baby," **said Sarah Adelman, Commissioner of the Department of Human Services.**

"The Department of Health is thrilled to see the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation authority board moving forward," **said New Jersey Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Kaitlan Baston.** "This administration has continued to demonstrate its dedication to improving access and equity in maternal and infant health care. This new board will be a vital part of our work in improving health equity for all birthing people."

"Higher education plays a pivotal role in fostering cross-sector collaboration, empowering research, and driving innovation," **said Dr. Brian Bridges, New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education.** "As New Jersey embarks on this groundbreaking initiative with the establishment of the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority, I am honored to contribute and help strengthen ties with academic partners to advance equitable care for mothers and their infants statewide."

"The Department of Labor, within its mission of protecting workers and their families, is excited to be part of this important maternal health initiative. We have been working with community-based groups across the state to increase equitable access to New Jersey's generous paid family and medical leave laws, which we know will help improve outcomes for mothers and babies. I'm proud to be our Department's designee to this board, and see the board's goals as a natural extension of our ongoing strategic initiatives," **said Holly Low, Director of the Office of Strategic Outreach and Policy, New Jersey Department of Labor.**

"On behalf of DCF, we're excited to work with these amazing leaders, as well as our partners across state government, to advance the cutting edge of maternal and infant health, and continue the progress of First Lady Murphy's Nurture NJ initiative," **said NJ DCF First Deputy Commissioner Katherine Stoehr.** "In a short amount of time, we have made significant strides in making New Jersey a safer place to give birth, for everyone. I look forward to continuing this vital work, to make New Jersey a national and global leader in creating the conditions for birthing people and their babies to thrive."

"Under Governor Murphy and First Lady Murphy's leadership, New Jersey is working to become the safest and most equitable state in the nation to deliver and raise a baby," **said NJEDA Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan.** "I'm honored to serve as a Board member and look forward to helping develop the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center, which will offer quality health care and social services to Trenton's families and critical perinatal workforce training. The Center will also serve as an innovation hub, helping eradicate racial disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes."

"I am excited to join this distinguished board and to build upon the work of the First Lady's Nurture NJ initiative. The Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center will be able to harness our state's resources to help develop unique solutions to the complex issues that impact maternal and child health," **said New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance Acting Commissioner Justin Zimmerman.** "The department looks forward to furthering our work with sister agencies and with stakeholders to support the First Lady's goal of making New Jersey the safest and most equitable place to give birth and raise a child."

"It is my privilege to serve in this role. I feel particularly honored to support services that will be available to Black women and babies, given that African American women die four times more frequently in childbirth than any other group of women in the U.S. It is a crisis. And I look forward to working with others who seek to solve this problem. Not "address" it, but solve it," **said Shakira Abdul-Ali, MSOD, Principal Managing Consultant/Owner, Alchemy Consulting, LLC, former Director, Trenton Dept of Health & Human Services.**

"I supported the legislation that enabled this Authority board to move forward, as I have spent years working on issues related to maternal health. I am honored to be invited to the table and use my voice as a representative of the Black community, specifically the Black Maternal Health and Black Church community in order to make a significant impact," **said Rosalee Boyer, the First Lady of the Greater Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and co-founder of Salvation and Social Justice.**

"The work of making moms feel genuinely seen and heard has been very personal to me for the past 2 decades. At times it can seem be exciting yet a little overwhelming. I dream of a day where your maternal health outcomes are not heavily determined on your zip code or shortened telomeres from stress and weathering. The truth is that policy level change and dismantling systemic barriers will be needed and we have to start somewhere. This Board and this center are where we get started and how we navigate this massive task," **Dr. Damali Campbell-Oparaji, Associate Professor, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Health, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and Physician in Obstetrics and Gynecology.**

"This is a significant step towards making New Jersey the safest and most equitable place in the nation to deliver and raise a baby," **said Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora.** "I am also proud to have selected Shakira Abdul Ali, our former Health Director, to the board. Her experience and expertise will be invaluable in ensuring that Trenton's mothers and babies receive the best possible care. We look forward to working with the Authority to improve maternal and infant health outcomes across the state."

"I am honored to join the Board of MIHI, where I will continue my lifelong commitment to enhancing women's and children's well-being," **said Dr. Barbara George Johnson, Vice President of External Affairs and Urban Policy and Research, Kean University.** "Throughout my career, I have dedicated myself to improving healthcare access and outcomes, specifically focusing on Maternal Child Health. It is imperative that our state and country prioritize and ensure health equity for black women, fostering positive pregnancy outcomes that ultimately contribute to the health of both infants and families."

"I am grateful to Governor Murphy and his administration for the opportunity to continue to serve the residents of NJ, particularly our marginalized and high-risk communities," **said Andrea Martinez-Mejia, Executive Director, Greater Newark Health Care Coalition.** "As a mother, a woman of color, and a public health professional, it is important to me that all birthing individuals in the State and their families have access to the care and the resources needed to have and raise healthy families in the Garden State."

"I recognize the hard work and commitment of this administration, particularly the Office of the First Lady in making sure that as a state, we increase awareness and reduce racial disparities for both maternal and infant mortality," **said Maritza Raimundi-Petroski, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, Prevention Programs, and Community Engagement, Children's Home Society of New Jersey.** "Having the opportunity to serve in this capacity allows me to advocate for the needs of minority women all across the state. Collectively we can be intentional about being inclusive and equitable in the way we address birth outcomes for all women and the way we create pathways for a better continuum of maternal child health services."

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