

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Commemorates Juneteenth By Signing the "Fair Chance in Housing Act"

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*Legislation will make it illegal for landlords to ask about criminal history on rental applications*

**TRENTON** – During New Jersey’s first commemoration of Juneteenth as an official state and federal holiday, Governor Murphy today signed legislation (S250/A1919) barring landlords from asking about criminal history on housing applications in most instances. By signing the legislation – known as the “Fair Chance in Housing Act” – Governor Murphy is furthering his commitment to taking action to dismantle systemic racial disparities that have been allowed to exist for too long in New Jersey.

“As we commemorate Juneteenth, we must commit to both remembering the past and continuing to take action to ensure communities of color, especially Black Americans, achieve the full equity they deserve,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Today, I am proud to sign the Fair Chance in Housing Act into law and work to level what has been for too long an uneven playing field when it comes to access to housing. I thank the sponsors and advocates for their tireless commitment to making this bill a reality and ensuring that New Jersey is a fairer place to live.”

“Finding housing after being court-involved can be a daunting and often prohibitive process when it comes to securing a safe, decent and affordable place to live,” **said Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, who serves as Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs**. “Fair access to housing is a fundamental right for all citizens. This bill will help to ensure that those who have been court-involved are permitted to move on with their lives and become law-abiding and productive members of society.”

Housing instability is a known driver of recidivism. The legislation aims to eliminate this barrier for those with criminal records and break an ongoing cycle exacerbated by previously existing policy. The Fair Chance at Housing Act will not apply in instances where federal law allows landlords to ask about certain criminal convictions.

The legislation was sponsored by Senator Troy Singleton, Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, and Assemblywoman Angela McKnight.

“There is a staggering amount of data that shows difficulty in securing housing is a key obstacle to reducing recidivism,” **said Senator Troy Singleton**. “The Fair Chance in Housing Act will allow those who have paid their debt to society to move forward with their lives in a productive manner. Shelter is a basic human right and our public policy decisions must recognize that. This new law helps to create a reparative culture that recognizes human worth, fairness under the law, and restorative justice.”

“Many times, it is before an applicant even has a chance to explain themselves or discuss the application that they have already been denied housing,” **said Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly**. “Under this law, landlords are implored to take an honest look at the application process and not paint every individual with a conviction with the same broad stroke. We’re fighting generational poverty, homelessness, and hopelessness through social justice reform measures such as this one.”

“Many individuals with criminal records struggle to find housing after prison and, as a result, end up homeless. A fair second chance after incarceration depends on a person’s ability to find a job and a place to call home,” **said Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson**. “It is the stability they need to help them rebuild their lives.”

“As hard as some may try, many never seem to overcome the stigma of a criminal record. It affects finding employment, securing housing among many other essential needs key to getting their lives on the right track,” **said Assemblywoman Angela McKnight**. “This law aims to provide a fair chance for residents in these situations.”



"Paterson's historic Calvary Baptist Church is hallowed ground. It is exactly the right place for us to mark Juneteenth with the signing of Governor Murphy's groundbreaking fair housing bill," **said U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr.**, a staunch supporter of fair housing in the Congress. "A nation can only achieve greatness if it looks at its past with unswerving honesty. America's failure to provide equal housing opportunities to every American is a stain on our nation that we must confront head-on. Today New Jersey leads with needed reform, and I commend Governor Murphy for his steadfast commitment to equal housing opportunities for all."

"Today is a historic day for civil rights and criminal justice reform in New Jersey. The Fair Chance in Housing Act will significantly impact Black and brown communities who have been devastated by our broken criminal justice and housing systems for generations," **said Richard T. Smith, NAACP New Jersey State Conference President**. "We appreciate the significant bipartisan support for this landmark legislation, and recognize the broad and diverse coalition of civil rights leaders, rabbis, pastors, imams, congregational leaders and more who have spoken up for this critical moral issue. We thank Governor Murphy for his strong support, and for signing this essential step towards equity into law."

"The Fair Chance in Housing Act reflects our Jewish value of *t'shuvah* – returning to the right path – by ensuring that potential tenants are not denied housing as they work to rebuild their lives," **said Sarah Blaine, Lead Organizer of the New Jersey Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC-NJ)**. "RAC-NJ is proud that hundreds of our leaders from more than 30 of our congregations from all parts of the state organized together – and in partnership with Fair Share Housing Center's coalition – to get this bill to the Governor's desk in time for Juneteenth. The Fair Chance in Housing Act is one step towards meaningfully addressing New Jersey's shameful racial disparities in incarceration rates by increasing returning citizens' access to safe and secure housing."

"With today's action, Governor Murphy has put New Jersey at the forefront of criminal justice reform by helping to dismantle the impacts of a criminal justice system plagued by systemic racism," **said Fair Share Housing Deputy Director Eric Dobson**. "Every person in our state deserves a home. The Fair Chance in Housing Act sits at the intersection of housing, civil rights and criminal justice reform and will make it easier for returning citizens to rebuild their lives by removing discriminatory barriers to housing that drive up recidivism. We would like to thank Governor Murphy, the bill sponsors and legislative leaders for championing this important reform."

"Today's bill signing is the culmination of years of work. It was born of the notion that everyone deserves a second chance and that redemption is possible," **said Frank Argote-Freyre, Chair Latino Action Network Housing Committee**. "Mistakes need not reverberate over time when it comes to finding safe and secure housing. Housing is an important element on the road back to a meaningful and successful life. This legislation makes it harder to discriminate against those who want a second chance."

"Eliminating barriers to housing for those with criminal records is a critical step toward righting the wrongs that have unfairly impacted Black and brown communities for far too long," **said Marc Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League**. "Housing discrimination has long-lasting impacts on individuals and communities, and today's action will help break the cycle. I thank Governor Murphy for signing this historic legislation."

## Governor Phil Murphy

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