

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Announces Zakiya Smith Ellis as Chief Policy Advisor

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TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today announced that Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis, current New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education, will serve as Chief Policy Advisor to the Governor. The Chief Policy Advisor oversees wide-ranging policies of the Governor’s Office and Executive Branch.

“It has been an honor to have Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis serve as our Secretary of Higher Education for the past two and a half years, and I’m thrilled to announce that she’ll soon join the Governor’s Office as Chief Policy Advisor,” **said Governor Murphy**. “In her time as Secretary, Dr. Smith Ellis has spearheaded our Administration’s efforts to make a college education more affordable and accessible, including our Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) program to provide tuition-free community college. She has been an invaluable member of our team and I know her wealth of policy experience will serve us well in this senior role.”

“For more than two years, it has been my honor to lead the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) and implement Governor Murphy’s vision for expanded educational opportunity,” **said incoming Chief Policy Advisor Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis**. “I am confident that the team at OSHE will continue to build on the work we have accomplished together, and I will continue to be a fierce advocate for our state’s students. My new position in the Governor’s Office will allow me to continue doing critical work to build a stronger and fairer New Jersey and I thank Governor Murphy for the vote of confidence and for the opportunity to fulfill such an important role during this time in our state’s history.”

Dr. Smith Ellis currently serves as New Jersey’s Secretary of Higher Education, where she is responsible for the policy development and coordination of higher education activities for the state. As Secretary of Higher Education, Dr. Smith Ellis has lead efforts to assist institutions of higher education in navigating the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including reviewing institutions’ Emergency Operations Plans to ensure readiness, issuing OSHE guidance, reviewing waiver requests to allow in-person instruction to continue as appropriate, and advocating for federal funding for higher education, among other efforts. She previously led work at the Lumina Foundation, the nation’s largest foundation focused solely on higher education, to advance federal policy to increase attainment and to develop new postsecondary finance models, focusing on issues of affordability. Prior to her work in philanthropy, Dr. Smith Ellis served as a Senior Advisor for Education on the White House Domestic Policy Council, where she was tasked with developing, informing, and promoting President Obama’s higher education policy. She also served in the Obama Administration as a Senior Advisor at the U. S. Department of Education, where she developed programmatic, policy, and budgetary solutions to pressing challenges in college access, affordability, and completion.

Dr. Smith Ellis holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and secondary education from Vanderbilt University, a master’s degree in education policy and management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a doctorate in higher education management from the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Smith Ellis will assume responsibilities as Chief Policy Advisor on July 6, 2020.

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