

Governor Phil Murphy

On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Governor Murphy Signs Criminal Justice Reform Legislation

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ELIZABETH – On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Governor Phil Murphy today signed three pieces of legislation to reform New Jersey’s criminal justice system. The bills will streamline New Jersey’s parole system, reform requirements for civil asset forfeiture, and fund violence reduction initiatives.

“In New Jersey, we are proud to continue Martin Luther King, Jr.’s fight for justice,” **said Governor Murphy**. “We are deeply committed to ensuring fairness and justice in our criminal justice system, and today we are taking critical steps to ensure the scales of justice work equally for all New Jerseyans. I am proud to sign legislation streamlining our parole system and reforming requirements for civil asset forfeiture, two historic steps to give New Jerseyans the second chance they deserve and ensure accountability and transparency within our system. I am also proud to enact legislation that will fund gun violence prevention programs in our hardest hit-neighborhoods, helping stem the cycle of violence and rebuild communities. Today we honor MLK’s legacy not just by celebrating his achievements in the fight for equality and justice, but by continuing the difficult work he left us to do.”

S761, also known as the “Earn Your Way Out Act,” requires the Department of Corrections to develop a re-entry plan for each inmate and streamlines New Jersey’s parole system. The bill creates “administrative parole,” which will streamline the parole process by allowing certain inmates convicted of nonviolent offenses to be released on parole after a review by a hearing officer and certification for release by a member of the State Parole Board. This process will permit eligible inmates to forgo a full parole consideration hearing thereby moving them through the complicated parole process faster.

S761 also requires the Department of Corrections and the State Parole Board to coordinate reentry preparation efforts and other rehabilitative services for inmates in State correctional facilities. The Departments must engage inmates to develop and implement their individualized, comprehensive reentry plans.

The bill was sponsored by Senators Sandra Cunningham and M. Teresa Ruiz, and Assemblymembers Shavonda Sumter, Jamel Holley, Patricia Egan Jones, and Benjie Wimberly.

A4970 reforms requirements for civil asset forfeiture. Currently, an individual subject to civil asset forfeiture does not have to be found guilty in order for property and cash to be confiscated by authorities, as the current system only requires a preponderance of evidence to make a seizure. With limited exceptions, A4970 bans asset forfeiture if there are no criminal charges related to the seized asset or if the prosecution related to the seized assets ends without a conviction. The exceptions apply only when there is no known owner of the seized asset or the State proves by a preponderance of the evidence that the seized asset is cash worth more than \$1,000 or non-cash property worth more than \$10,000. This law will make it easier for individuals with dismissed or acquitted cases to recover seized money and valuables.

 Back to top

Today's signing builds upon Governor Murphy's signing last week of S1963, which will require comprehensive disclosure and transparency requirements for civil asset forfeitures.

The bill was sponsored by Assemblymembers Nicholas Chiaravalloti, Shavonda Sumter, and Nancy Pinkin, and Senators Joe Cryan, Declan O'Scanlon, and Linda Greenstein.

S3309 establishes the New Jersey Violence Intervention Program in the Office of the Attorney General to fund violence reduction initiatives. The New Jersey Violence Intervention Program will award grants to municipalities, health agencies, law enforcement agencies, and non-profit organizations that implement effective, evidence-based violence intervention initiatives in communities with disproportionately high rates of gun violence.

The bill was sponsored by Senators Joe Vitale and Linda Greenstein, and Assemblymembers Lou Greenwald, Eliana Pintor Marin, and Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.

"The bills signed by Governor Murphy today will not only ensure fairness and equity in our criminal justice system, but will also help make our communities safer," **said Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal**. "In particular, I want to thank Governor Murphy and the legislature for recognizing the groundbreaking gun violence prevention work we are doing at the Attorney General's office by codifying it with the 'New Jersey Violence Intervention Program.' With today's legislation, we honor Dr. King by continuing to bend that long arc of the moral universe further towards justice."

"Governor Murphy has made criminal justice reform a key objective of his since the day he took office," **said New Jersey State Parole Board Chairman Samuel J. Plumeri, Jr.** "Such reform is also widely recognized as important—evidenced by the successful passage of the Earn Your Way Out Act. As the New Jersey State Parole Board continues to meet its dual missions of ensuring public safety and creating sustainable reentry practices and programs for offenders seeking to re-assimilate into society, our agency also welcomes fair and meaningful support that will assist these individuals as they transition out of prison and back into the community."

"By establishing this office under the Attorney General, New Jersey can begin to harness federal funds to target communities hardest hit by violence," **said Senator Vitale**. "Grant funding passed on to those doing the work on the ground every day will help these communities begin to heal with evidence-based prevention measures and assistance to those experiencing trauma."

"This will help bring balance and fairness to the legal process," **said Senator Cryan, a former Union County Sheriff**. "I want to thank all the groups and organizations that participated in making this legislation law, including the law enforcement community."

"For too long our criminal justice system has focused on punishment, rather than rehabilitation," **said Senator Ruiz**. "This law will place a greater focus on reentry allowing us to reduce recidivism and improve individuals ability to integrate back into their communities."

"The majority of the more than 10,000 inmates who are released from prison each year in New Jersey will be rearrested, and two in five will return to prison. In addition to the direct impact this has on their own lives, it also affects their families, their communities and the entire state," **said Assemblywoman Sumter**. "It's critical that we stop this woeful pattern by making sure that these men and women have the education, job skills and other resources they need in order to be productive members of society after leaving prison."

"For far too long, we have allowed the school-to-prison pipeline to remain intact," **said Assemblyman Holley**. "Now, we have a law that will finally allow us to break this pipeline, and help make incarcerated New Jerseyans truly gain a second chance."

"The Earn Your Way Out Act is supportive of second chances," **said Assemblywoman Egan Jones**. "Preparing a pathway to reentry and providing access to needed resources is the only way to help these individuals during their next steps in life."

"This is where our emphasis should be when it comes to reforming the system, reducing crime and shutting the revolving door on prisons," **said Assemblyman Wimberly**. "Comprehensive and effective rehabilitation programs will restore hope, dignity, and provide former inmates the second chance they deserve to do better

once released. There's a lot more to be done; however, this is a critical step to stabilizing families, reforming a broken system that has burdened our state and society with unquantifiable costs."

"Far too often, individuals involved in cases of this nature face the onerous task of reclaiming their property in a system that can make doing so more expensive than the property itself," **said Assemblymembers Chiaravalloti, Sumter, and Pinkin.** "This new statute is designed to ensure that barring a criminal conviction, an owner can reclaim their property more readily and fairly."

"We've seen acts of mass gun violence in two major U.S. cities, Virginia Beach and our own state capitol claim too many lives and left numerous injured," **said Assembly Majority Leader Greenwald.** "If we're going to address this gun violence epidemic we have to turn our attention to the violence that rarely makes the headline yet it's impact is the same. We know that evidence-based violence intervention programs, like the one at University Hospital in Newark, can be an effective tool to combat gun violence. By investing in the New Jersey Violence Intervention Program, we can support victims and help those most at risk to break the cycles of gun violence."

"Increasing access to services and supporting program initiatives for victims of gun violence will help those affected by it right in their own communities," **said Assemblywoman Pintor Marin.** "Funding is a critical part of encouraging gun violence reduction initiatives throughout the state."

"In Trenton, we understand the impact that gun violence has on a community every day. We see permanent effects of retaliatory behavior and the need to help hospitals close the revolving door of gunshot victims as a result," **said Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.** "The New Jersey Violence Intervention Program will help statewide and community initiatives make an impact on reducing gun violence in New Jersey."

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[Internship Opportunities \(/governor/admin/internship.shtml\)](#)

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[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](#)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](#)

[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](#)

[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](/governor/initiatives/#Health)

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[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

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[Direct Appointments \(/governor/news/appointments\)](/governor/news/appointments)

[Advice and Consent Appointments \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

[Statements on Legislation](#)

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[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

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