

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Holds Roundtable Discussion on Expanding Access to Public Contracting Opportunities for Historically Marginalized Businesses

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Discussion Seeks to Address Findings of Statewide Disparity Study

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today held a roundtable discussion where he met with legislators and stakeholders to gather input on potential legislative remedies and ongoing administrative initiatives to eliminate disparities in the public procurement process and create a more equitable business environment for Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs) in New Jersey.

The discussion follows the release of a comprehensive [statewide disparity study](https://www.nj.gov/treasury/pdf/New%20Jersey%20Study%20on%20Disparity%20in%20State%20Procurement%20January%202024.pdf) (<https://www.nj.gov/treasury/pdf/New%20Jersey%20Study%20on%20Disparity%20in%20State%20Procurement%20January%202024.pdf>), earlier this year – the first since 2005 – which reviewed statewide procurement data relating to goods and services, professional services, and construction between 2015 and 2020, and found statistically significant disparities in the awarding of public contracts to MWBEs. The study was necessary so that the State had a legal basis for addressing these gaps. This discussion also follows a series of meetings over the past months led by the Governor’s Office and the Department of Treasury with community partners, faith leaders, labor, and diverse business chambers across the state.

“One of New Jersey’s best attributes has always been its vast diversity. Our state is home to people of so many different backgrounds, who all deserve the opportunity to succeed in their chosen field; however, lingering inequities continue to create barriers to entry for our minority and women-owned businesses that want to contract with our state government. This is unacceptable and, with the help of our lawmakers and business community, we will take action,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Today’s meeting underscores our steadfast commitment to building a stronger, fairer, more equitable, and more inclusive New Jersey. I look forward to continuing this conversation and working with our partners in the Legislature and our state’s business community to create a system where all businesses can thrive.”

The Governor was joined by Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus; Senator Nellie Pou, Chair of the Legislative Latino Caucus; Assemblyman Sterley Stanley, Chair of the Asian American Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus; and Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity and Member of the Legislative Black Caucus.

The African American Chamber of Commerce, the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Women’s Chamber of Commerce, the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce, the Veteran’s Chamber of Commerce, and the NJ Diverse Business Advisory Council – a coalition representing small and diverse businesses in New Jersey, such as LGBTQ+ and veteran-owned businesses – were also in attendance, in addition to Senior Pastor of Saint James AME Church Reverend Ronald Slaughter, Jo-Ann Povia, Chief of Staff to the Department of the Treasury and Associate Deputy State Treasurer, Michelle Bodden, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at the Economic Development Authority, and Jayné Johnson, Director of the Governor’s Office of Equity.

“I want to commend Governor Murphy for his courageous leadership in commissioning the public contracting disparity study that equips us to make long-needed reforms. I also want to thank the Treasurer and the Treasury team for their work in overseeing the disparity study and Chief Diversity Officer Candice Alfonso for getting it over the finish line, as well as our partners in the Legislature and the business community who joined us at the table today to discuss legislative reforms. The study— as an assessment tool— equips us to tailor remedies specific to the study’s findings and the nuances of New Jersey law,” **said Jayné Johnson, Director, Governor’s Office of Equity**. “Our office has convened the Cabinet and the authorities across state government in support of efforts to accelerate capacity-building through initiatives that engage historically marginalized businesses. We are also leading statewide efforts to advance people-centered workplace initiatives—recognizing that when our colleagues have a better awareness of their neighbors, the outcomes of our policies and systems are more equitable and responsive.”

“From day one, Treasury has been committed to advancing the Murphy Administration’s goal of building a more equitable landscape for New Jersey businesses,” **said State Treasurer Elizabeth Maher Muoio**. “The recent disparity study overseen by Treasury’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion, led by Chief Diversity Officer Candice Alfonso, shone a light on inequities faced by diverse businesses in the public contracting system. This years-long effort will serve as a roadmap as the State plans responsive action to promote a more equitable procurement process.”

“Under Governor Murphy’s leadership, New Jersey has made tremendous strides to increase transparency and create a more equitable economy, especially across state contracting opportunities for diverse entrepreneurs. I am proud of the investments we are making to bolster diverse-owned businesses and ensure they have the capacity to secure larger-scale contracts,” **said NJEDA Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan**. “But undoing decades of unfair treatment and unequal outcomes is a work in progress, and conversations like the one today are critical to guaranteeing our work to improve the procurement process is bold, meaningful, and transparent.”

Throughout the Murphy Administration, the State has instituted a number of initiatives designed to promote equitable contracting practices and

uplift small businesses across all sectors. This has ranged from bonding readiness assistance to matchmaking and outreach events, complementing a whole-of-government approach to create new opportunities for New Jersey's MWBEs.

Today's discussion served as a valuable working session for representatives from the Executive and Legislative Branches to hear directly from industry stakeholders, fostering a collaborative foundation as the State works to establish concrete legislative solutions to make the public bidding process more accessible and resolve disparities in procurement processes.

"We have a moral obligation to ensure economic opportunities for every New Jerseyan," **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin**. "Equity in the contracting process for minority- and women-owned businesses will benefit every corner of our state. We have demonstrated that when every community has the chance to thrive, it grows the entire economy. I commend the work of my colleagues in the Legislature, the Administration, and the business community to find solutions to the challenges outlined in the Disparity Study and look forward to our next steps."

"Today's discussion will serve as an important foundation as we work on viable, long-term solutions to make New Jersey's business community more equitable," **said Senator Nellie Pou, Chair of the Legislative Latino Caucus**. "We must ensure our minority and women-owned businesses are able to succeed in New Jersey, especially when it comes to doing business with the State. I was pleased to see so many come together in collaboration this morning and look forward to continuing our work in this space."

"The findings of the New Jersey Disparity Study serve as a stark reminder of the long road we still must travel to ensure true equity for minority- and women-owned businesses in our state," **said Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter, Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus**. "This study sheds light on critical gaps that continue to limit fair access to government contracts and the essential resources needed to allow these businesses not only to compete but to thrive. Armed with this data, we're seizing this opportunity to enact real change. After hearing from our communities and stakeholders earlier this year, we introduced a bold package of a dozen bills that will help shape a more inclusive New Jersey. One where every business owner has a fair shot at success. Roundtable discussions like today's are vital steps forward, bringing us closer to a more equitable economy that benefits all New Jerseyans."

"The New Jersey Disparity Study authored an undeniable truth: minority and women-owned businesses are not being afforded the public contract opportunities that align with their product. This disparity does not reflect their ability to deliver quality services. Instead, it highlights systemic barriers that have gone unaddressed, barriers that allow state agencies to be relaxed about diversifying vendors and broadening business opportunities, and this demands immediate, decisive action," **said Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity**. "Since this report was released, I have collaborated with many stakeholders like the African American Chamber of Commerce NJ and the New Jersey State Women's Chamber of Commerce to launch a targeted legislative agenda focused on eliminating these obstacles and creating a more fair approach to market competition. But our commitment needs to go beyond legislation; it's about real, actionable solutions for business owners and the government agencies responsible for contracting. By deepening our work with stakeholders and business leaders, we're positioning New Jersey as a model of economic fairness and inclusion driving lasting impact for diverse business owners and strengthening our state economy."

"The recently released disparity study highlighted the urgent need for change, and this roundtable was an important step in ensuring that New Jersey's public contracting opportunities reflect the diversity of our communities," **said Assemblyman Sterley Stanley, Chair of the Asian American Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus**. "Minority- and women-owned businesses have faced significant marginalization, but by working with stakeholders, our fellow legislators, and government representatives, we can create pathways for all businesses to succeed in today's marketplace."

"I am grateful to Governor Murphy for his invitation to discuss how we move forward with policies and systems that will yield more equitable outcomes for the 1.2 million black residents and over 88,000 black owned businesses. Blacks have demonstrated tremendous patience, sacrifice, and support to help so many New Jerseyans to achieve their goals; now it's time for the leadership within all sectors of our state to apply that same level of vigor and intentionality in partnership with the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey to enable our constituency to achieve their dreams and aspirations," **said John Harmon, Founder, President, and CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey**.

"Since the Disparity Study results were presented, the Governor's Office has been highly engaged in keeping us informed. We've been part of roughly a dozen meetings, working closely together. While the findings are stark, the Governor's Office has shown unwavering partnership from day one, committing to meaningful collaboration and sustained efforts. This joint approach aims to create a level playing field, drive increased competition, and ultimately secure greater savings for the state," **said Carlos Medina, Chair of the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey**.

"Governor Murphy's proactive approach in addressing the findings of the disparity study is paving the way for a more inclusive economy in New Jersey," **said Robin Tabakin, Public Policy Leader and President Elect of New Jersey State Women's Chamber of Commerce**. "I appreciate that Governor Murphy has taken the initiative to sign legislation directing the Department of the Treasury to establish procurement goals that prioritize women, minority, veteran, and LGBTQ owned businesses. Additionally, by increasing delegated purchasing authority for state agencies from \$46,000 to \$250,000, he has empowered these agencies to create real opportunities for diverse businesses in state contracting. His commitment to working with state chambers is critical to building a stronger, more equitable economic future for all New Jerseyans."

"I want to applaud Governor Murphy and his Administration for the groundbreaking step they have taken toward remedying the stark economic injustices uncovered in this disparity study. As one of the founders of, and today's representative of, the New Jersey Diverse Business Advisory Council—a coalition of diverse business chambers across the state, including the Veteran's Chamber—I urge us all to continue to be reminded of the stark findings in this study and to ensure the remedies are inclusive of all the impacted communities outlined in the study, and even those not in the study, including our veteran, minority, and LGBTQ+ business owners. I look forward to working with the members of this roundtable and the community at large in the coming months to deliver on this critical initiative," **said Francisco Cortes, Founder of the NJ Diverse Business Advisory Council & President of the NJ State Veteran's Chamber of Commerce**.

"The Punjabi Chamber of Commerce along with our fellow Asian Americans commends Governor Murphy for directing attention and resources to addressing disparity in public contracting opportunities for Minority and Women Business Enterprises. New Jersey is fortunate to have a Governor who not only recognizes the disparity but is willing to assert leadership in remedying this serious issue," **said Gurpreet "Gary" Pasricha, Founder of the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce**.

“By being the first Governor to conduct a disparity study in our state’s history, Governor Murphy has taken a measurable step towards fostering equity and inclusivity in our State’s multi-billion dollar contracting sphere. This conversation today to address these disparities not only highlights the commitment to achieving economic justice for all, but also sets a precedent for leadership in creating a more just society. As a faith leader, I will work to see that the state accomplishes this tall task and that the effects trickle down to every member of my community. I look forward to sharing this much-needed information with the various houses of worship and community groups throughout the state, as it all flows through us. This is a pivotal step by the Governor that will indeed pave the way for meaningful change,” **said Senior Pastor of Saint James AME Church Reverend Ronald Slaughter.**

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