

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Delivers 2022 State of the State Address

01/11/2022

January 11, 2022

Remarks as Delivered

“Resilient and Moving Forward”

My fellow New Jerseyans.

Our state Constitution deems today the day on which I come to report to you on the state of our state.

That accounting is clear. The state of our state is resilient and ready to keep moving forward.

Because this is who we are as New Jerseyans. We believe in ourselves and we believe in each other.

And we know nothing is beyond our reach because nothing is beyond our willingness to work hard.

Under our state Constitution, I will also have the privilege of returning here in one week’s time to reaffirm my oath, and to begin a second term as governor.

I am extraordinarily honored and humbled by the responsibility you have given me. And I am excited by the possibilities that lay ahead for our state.

And, if that’s not enough, I will be back six weeks after that to propose my budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

So, over the next two months, and, indeed, the next four years, we’re going to see a lot of each other. I will do my best to not wear out my welcome.

We begin 2022 just as we did 2021.

I’m once again addressing you from an empty theater.

And our state remains on a war footing against a virus that has now taken on a form that is overwhelming our collective psyche as it tests our state.

We’re all frustrated by this pandemic.

We’re all tired of it getting in the way of everything we do.

We’re all ready to get on with our lives. And I am committed to seeing us get there ...

... To schools where our kids’ smiles once again light up hallways and classrooms.

... To Main Street stores and restaurants where communities can once again come alive.

... To sports arenas where cheers are once again heard loudly and clearly.

... To living rooms where we can once again freely gather with family and friends, whether for a holiday, a birthday, or just on the spur of the moment.

... And to workplaces that are again fully safe and humming with the promise of a prosperous future.

It has, indeed, been an extraordinarily long two years.

Yet, as inconvenient as life is for so many of us, it pales in comparison to what some have been through.

We will never forget the loss that has hit so many of our neighbors.

And we will forever honor the tremendous hard work and dedication of all of the women and men working on the front lines – especially the doctors, nurses, and staff across our entire health-care system.

Hard work, even in the face of great challenge, does not deter us as New Jerseyans. Hard work, especially in the face of great challenge, defines us.

Just as we thought we had finally gotten ahead of COVID, the Omicron variant came along.

Omicron is doing its best to stop us in our tracks and push us back. We will not let it.

We are seeing new case counts that dwarf anything we'd seen to this point – upwards of four times as many New Jerseyans have COVID today than did one year ago. Thirty thousand new cases a day. More new cases day-to-day than even at the pandemic's start.

Even the knowledge that illness from Omicron can be less severe is of little solace, as these tremendous numbers of cases – even with the lower percentage chance of hospitalization that comes with them – mean that we have more people in our hospitals today than at any point since the spring of 2020.

And it means that more of our fellow New Jerseyans are leaving us all too soon.

In consultation with my partners in the Legislature, I have taken the necessary step of re-declaring a Public Health Emergency to ensure we keep moving forward – guided by facts and science – and that we keep doing everything we can to beat back Omicron and put COVID behind us.

In your day-to-day lives, this step won't bring any changes. But it is vital to ensuring our continued and coordinated response so we can move forward and put COVID behind us ...

... A response that keeps our schools, businesses, and economy open, and allows us to get back to a real and lasting sense of normal.

... A response that ensures critical testing supplies and vaccines can be distributed to communities where they are most needed and given to the residents who most need them.

... A response that protects the ability of our hospitals to care for the hundreds of New Jerseyans entering them because of COVID every day.

... A response that ensures we are getting the data we need from across our health-care system to make smart and forward-looking decisions.

... A response that keeps state, county, and local health authorities working together.

... And a response that ensures we keep following science and fact, and not politics, so we can keep moving forward.

We are all in this together. And we must keep moving forward together.

But try as it may to knock us back and further divide us, one thing is certain. Omicron has not knocked us down.

In fact, despite all the challenges, we continue to move New Jersey forward.

Across New Jersey, nearly 90 percent of all eligible residents have received at least a first vaccine dose. Let me say that again – nine out of every ten eligible residents have now raised up their sleeve at least once. And 75 percent of you have completed your primary vaccination course.

But we know that these initial courses – either the two-dose regimen of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, or the one-shot from J&J – weaken after several months. It is more important than ever that you get your booster shot.

Science and reality tell us that what we once called “full” vaccination is no longer that. A booster is not a bonus – it is a necessity.

So, if you have not yet gotten your booster shot, here is what I ask of you – go get it. The booster is proven to lessen the impact of illness to keep you out of the hospital.

And every vaccine dose is a ray of light through the dark cloud that has hung over our families. Every dose gets us one step closer to regaining the life we knew prior to COVID.

To each and every one of you who have done the right things – worn your masks even when you didn't want to, found or made time to get your boosters, and taken precautions even when it meant postponing precious family celebrations – Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver and I thank you from the very bottom of our hearts.

And so do so many millions of your fellow New Jerseyans who have done the very same.

Across the nation, we've seen some of the worst that crises can bring out in people. The selfishness and self-centeredness. The public shaming and finger-pointing. The deliberate misinformation.

We've seen some of this in New Jersey. But, to be sure, it's a small minority.

There are far, far many more of you who have done the hard work and proven our state's overwhelming selflessness and community spirit. You've proven our collective faith in science and facts and medicine – and in each other.

Our state has become a beacon of what's possible when we rise to face a challenge together with fearless optimism, and not use it to cynically drive people apart.

And if we hold together to shine bright just a little longer, we will disperse the dark cloud of COVID.

We may not have yet fully conquered the virus. But we will never let the virus conquer us.

We must get to the point where we stay in front of it and don't fall back again. And we will.

And even with the pandemic hanging over our work across the past two years, working together over the past four we have accomplished much – and there is much for us to take pride in and talk about.

We inherited a state that worked for too few and which was at a crossroads. We chose to move the state in a new direction. We are moving New Jersey forward.

Today, New Jersey is working again for the many, not the few.

We have greater tax fairness. We've cut taxes for our middle-class and working families, and our seniors, fourteen times. And I commit to you now that the state budget I propose in a few weeks won't raise taxes.

We have more accessible and affordable health care and child care, stronger public schools, and more affordable higher education.

Our economy is growing again. Across the nine years before I took office, New Jersey's economic growth ranked 47th among all states. Today, we rank fourth. From 47th to fourth. That's real progress despite all we've been through and all we still face.

Our state is growing again. For years, we were fed a line that no one wanted to be part of our New Jersey family. But the truth is the exact opposite. Our population is growing. Our real estate market is strong.

And we're making more progress against property taxes than any administration before us. Through the policies we've put in place, and the community investments we've made, our administration has slowed the rate of property tax growth more than any of the previous four administrations – a record that includes four of the lowest year-over-year increases in property taxes on record.

The reality is this – we're making New Jersey the place where businesses want to locate and families want to live. The Census counts it in black-and-white – while some states in our region lost population, New Jersey grew.

The moving vans are driving into New Jersey.

In any number of issues which are national in scope ...

... Combating senseless gun violence ...

... Protecting the fundamental right to reproductive freedom ...

... Facing the existential crisis of climate change ...

... Ensuring that every newborn and every new family have a healthy start ...

... Repairing a broken criminal justice system ...

... Standing firm for the rights of organized labor ...

... And securing the dignity of our LGBTQIA+ communities, to name but a few ...

... New Jersey is now an unparalleled leader.

And New Jersey – yes, New Jersey – is ranked as the best state in which to live for our safe communities, education system, health care, and quality of life. We are the number one state in America to raise a family.

We are a model that others now seek to emulate.

We have achieved these accomplishments during the most difficult of times and against some of the darkest of backdrops. And because we all know that these times are not yet over, neither is the work we are prepared to undertake in this new year.

Over the course of the past two years, nothing has been as important to our state than the health of our families and friends. But we know the cost of health care remains a critical worry for many – and too many families are one illness away, or one high-cost prescription away, from financial insecurity.

But we are making high-quality health care both more affordable and more accessible.

Since our administration took office, health insurance rates in the individual marketplace are 22 percent lower than they would've been without our actions.

And for 2022, enrollment in health insurance through our individual marketplace is up 25 percent over last year.

So, here's what this means – more people have insurance and they're paying less for it.

And this upcoming year we will continue to directly take on increasing costs to make health care more affordable and accessible.

A few weeks ago, I initiated a new program to help us in this effort.

It started by working with hospitals and insurers to secure a commitment to limit the growth in health care costs across the next five years.

And it will continue by, for the first time, giving us the comprehensive data we need to break down the individual drivers of higher costs, so we can take concrete action to lower them.

I will also send the Legislature a plan to address prescription-drug affordability – from life-saving medications to the pills millions of residents take every day to maintain their health. This effort will be centered on making pricing across the entire supply chain more transparent, so we can see what drives drug prices higher, and so we can lower them.

Lower costs will save families hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars a year. But, across the programs our state administers – from Medicaid and FamilyCare for low-income families, to PAAD and Senior Gold for older residents – lower costs can save us, and you, untold millions in tax dollars.

Containing and lowering health care and prescription drug costs isn't just good for your family's health and bottom line, it's also good for our state's.

And this is the year where we will see one of our most innovative plans for economic growth take hold. Our groundbreaking new public-private partnership – the Innovation Evergreen Fund – will get to work pairing both public and private investment to support the next generation of leading-edge technology startup businesses.

In 2021, leading businesses from throughout the innovation economy announced their decision to move or grow in New Jersey, decisions that will create thousands of good jobs. But we don't want New Jersey to just be a place where businesses move to, we want to be the place where they are born and grow. The Innovation Evergreen Fund will be critical to making this goal our reality.

As I noted, we moved from 47th to fourth in the nation in economic growth. Our smart and focused effort to reclaim our historic place as the world's most innovative economy is one of the major drivers of this, and will continue to be.

And while we take on these new initiatives, we also have some unfinished business from 2021 to attend to.

I thank and congratulate the Legislature on passing and sending to my desk a bill that will secure a woman's access to reproductive care and her right to choose into state law. These decisions must be kept between a woman and her doctor, period.

I will sign this into law this week. And I am especially proud that we are getting this done before the United States Supreme Court renders its ruling challenging Roe v Wade, which it is poised to overturn.

And I urge the Legislature to once again take up the next phase of commonsense and comprehensive gun-safety reforms. We cannot go another year without closing dangerous loopholes, requiring safety education for would-be gun buyers, giving law enforcement new tools to go after criminals, and banning super-high-caliber weapons which have no place in the woods for hunting, let alone on our streets.

Over the next six-or-so weeks, our administration will continue undertaking the work of crafting our proposal for the Fiscal 2023 state budget. That document is where the vision we set today is brought not just into relief but brought to life.

We will continue to focus on a broad-based economic recovery that works for everyone, not just a lucky few.

We will continue to focus on making New Jersey more affordable for everyone.

We will continue seeking fairness for our middle-class taxpayers and working families and seniors to deliver for them with concrete benefits that make their lives and those of their communities better. As I mentioned, the budget I put forward won't come with any tax increases.

And we will continue our work taking on the one issue that has stood in the way of too many New Jersey families for far too long – property taxes.

Getting these things done will require hard work but is not insurmountable. I know it isn't because we just completed a four-year cycle where we made possible what so many, for so long, had said was impossible in Trenton.

The very first day I took the oath of office, we undertook the hard work to strengthen and grow our middle class ...

... to make New Jersey more affordable ...

... to create opportunity for our middle-class and our working families ...

... and to ensure fairness for our seniors and the next up-and-coming generation looking for their toehold in the American Dream.

And, of course, over the past two years, in particular, we've undertaken the hard work to pull our state back from under the cloud of a global pandemic.

And because of the hard work we've already put in to build a more resilient and more affordable New Jersey, we start the next four years of our journey together in a better place.

For example, before the pandemic, we saw our state achieve the lowest sustained levels of unemployment since the state began keeping records of unemployment. The pandemic put some of this progress on pause but, every day, more New Jerseyans are now getting back to work in jobs that pay better, have better benefits, and can lead them to a better career.

Many of our residents are getting back to work because of our direct and critical investments in tens of thousands of small businesses – \$800 million for retail stores, restaurants, arts and cultural institutions, child care providers, and more – to ensure their survival through some very dark times.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and we're keeping that backbone strong.

Many others are getting jobs in the new high-tech and innovative industries we have brought to our state and those which are taking root here.

They're finding work in the burgeoning green energy industry ... in the growing fintech sector, where we've added more than 3,000 jobs in the last year alone ... on movie and television production sets ... in the online gaming and sports-betting space we now dominate ... and in the life sciences.

They are going to work in the construction trades ... from the South Jersey Wind Port rising in Salem County to the Paulsboro Marine Terminal, where we will create more than 1,500 new jobs to secure our place as a global leader in offshore-wind component manufacturing and logistics ... to The Hub in New Brunswick, where doctors and researchers will work side-by-side on the next generation of lifesaving treatments.

Many jobs await in the cannabis industry ready to take off.

New businesses and jobs are being created because we restored common sense and fairness to our system of tax incentives. Some are coming because we're not afraid to run with new ideas for attracting businesses, like the Innovation Evergreen Fund.

Some are coming from a long-overdue sense of fairness and justice – values we know resonate around corporate board tables just as they do around kitchen tables.

Others, however, are coming to New Jersey because they know that right here is where they will find the best-trained workforce in the most-advantageous location, with the best public schools in America for their employees.

Education is a critical piece of this puzzle. Our best-in-the-nation public education system and world-class colleges and universities turn out the best-trained and best-educated workforce in America. Businesses that come here do so because they know we have a nearly bottomless well of talent from which they can draw.

We are not just restoring, but creating, real opportunity for our young people to stay here and start a career to support a family ...

... Opportunity for those currently in the workforce to build a new career ...

... Opportunities for entrepreneurs to maximize their investment and prosper ...

... And opportunity to make New Jersey the launchpad for the next great idea and the home of the next generation.

We have shown you can make economic progress and social progress at the same time. In fact one helps the other.

The proof? As I have mentioned, we've jumped 43 spots in economic growth among states – from 47th when I took office to fourth today.

This is exactly what stronger and fairer looks like. This is what creating opportunity looks like. This is what building an economy that works for every family looks like.

So many of you across the state – state legislators, county and local officials, advocates, and ordinary residents, alike – have contributed greatly to this progress.

For that I say, “thank you.” And, I also say, “let’s keep it up.”

But we also know there are many who do not yet feel your place is secure in this progress. And it is you to whom I recommit my efforts.

Your place is set. Your seat is here.

When we began our work in January 2018, our state was stagnant and seemingly broken. The status quo worked for a few but left out the broad majority of New Jerseyans – hardworking New Jerseyans who didn’t want special treatment, just a fair shot at a better future for themselves and their families.

We leveled the playing field by embracing true tax fairness and asking the wealthiest New Jerseyans – those with incomes in excess of \$1 million – to pay a little more in income taxes so we could do more for everyone across our state ... to do more to open opportunities for more New Jerseyans to gain the tools they need to have their own prosperous future.

And let me make one thing very clear. I do not begrudge, for one second, anyone their success. I do not begrudge anyone the realization of their American Dream.

However, the price for having an unlimited upside cannot be an unlimited downside. New Jersey will never move forward if we cling to the outdated and selfish notion of, “I got mine and the rest be damned.”

The pandemic is an example of how we are in this together. Millions of New Jerseyans, working selflessly, have done the right things for themselves and their families, their friends and colleagues, and, in the process, for all of us.

Four years ago, today, New Jersey’s minimum wage was \$8.65 an hour – a wage that locked countless hard-working New Jersey families into a cycle of poverty. Today, our minimum wage is \$13 an hour and on a path to \$15 an hour, with hundreds of thousands of families now starting to reach up and pull themselves into the middle class.

Here is an obvious truth some still try to deny – one meaningful way to make New Jersey more affordable is to make sure more New Jerseyans have a living wage. And we are on that path.

Moreover, we are seeing wages increasing across the state and are now trending higher than before the pandemic. This means that as our people get back to work, they are getting back to jobs that pay better. That is yet another way we are building opportunity for more New Jersey families.

Four years ago, our schools and property taxpayers were reeling after eight years of diminished investment. We got to work investing in our communities by investing in our public schools, from pre-K all the way through to graduation.

Today, New Jersey’s public education system is ranked the very best in the nation and we continue to bring more and more students and communities under that banner.

We invested \$3 billion more in our public schools across our first four years than the prior administration did across its last four. This year alone, we are investing \$1.5 billion more in pre-K-through-12 education than in the year I took office.

We are doing this not just because our kids deserve it but because our property taxpayers do, too. School funding is property tax relief.

Every single one of these dollars we as a state have invested is a dollar kept in the pockets of property taxpayers – whether it be state aid supporting our students and educators in their classrooms or construction aid to build or renovate schools to serve a 21st century education.

Strong public schools make communities more attractive for families looking to move to New Jersey.

For so many of you, your home is your single greatest investment. Few public investments will protect the value of your home more than strong and properly funded public schools.

But tackling property taxes goes far beyond just properly funding our schools. And here, too, we've made real progress.

When the federal government cut your state and local tax deduction, which I continue to work to restore, we expanded the property tax deduction allowed in your state income tax filing.

We expanded eligibility of older homeowners for the Senior Freeze program to protect you against any property tax increases.

We modernized the Homestead Property Tax Rebate and, this past year, we delivered tax rebates of up to \$500 to nearly 700,000 middle-class families.

We extended property tax deductions for veterans and service-members.

We have also made in-state tuition payments and investments in college savings plans tax deductible.

We put into law the state's first child and dependent care tax credit, and made every family making up to \$150,000 a year eligible.

Each of these steps is making our state more affordable and giving middle-class and working families, and seniors, the tax breaks you all deserve.

I'll repeat our record on this ...

... The slowest rate of property tax growth than during any of the previous four administrations and four of the lowest year-over-year increases in property taxes on record ...

... And fourteen middle-class tax cuts, made possible only through a commitment to fairness.

And we've done so much more. I've noted our work to lower health care costs, particularly for those with children.

We've put a college education within reach with our tuition-free community college program.

And we invested in our child-care providers to make this critical service more accessible for families getting back to work.

This is the progress we can make together by putting our focus in the right places.

And this is the progress that results from restoring responsible leadership to our state's finances.

For example, four years ago, no one thought we'd ever pull ourselves up and out of the hole prior administrations and legislatures had dug our pension system into. This not only hurt our hardworking public employees, but it threatened our very financial health as a state.

Working together, we made living up to our obligation a priority and in this fiscal year we are making the first full payment into our public pension funds in 25 years. With these investments, along with a strong stock market and a new and more responsible investment strategy, our pension funds are performing better than ever.

And we've saved tomorrow's taxpayers billions of dollars by living up to our obligation today.

We also reined-in the cost of public employee and retiree health benefits while preserving high-quality care. For example, we've cut more than \$36 billion from the projected long-term costs of providing health care to our retired public employees alone. That's good for them and for you.

And the size of state government itself is smaller today than it was when we took office.

Four years ago, NJ TRANSIT was a national model of how not to run a mass-transit system. Today, it stands as a model of how to turn around a mass-transit system.

When we took office, NJ TRANSIT riders had suffered through eight years that saw them paying 36 percent more in fares but receiving less reliable services in return.

Rider safety, once a backburner issue, has been restored to the forefront. New locomotives and passenger cars, and newer and cleaner-running buses, are not only finally on order but being delivered and put into service.

The shortages of train engineers and bus operators that led to canceled routes have been back-filled, giving NJ TRANSIT the roster it needs to keep lines running – and on-time performance is up and cancellations and delays are down.

And we did it without asking customers to pay one penny more in fares for four straight years.

Over the past four years, we've also restored a basic sense of social and environmental justice, including enacting the nation's strongest environmental justice law.

We've expanded and protected voting rights, and we've started down the long path of true criminal justice reform that will ultimately lead us to safer communities and stronger bonds of trust and goodwill between law enforcement and the residents they serve.

We took on a focused and data-driven effort to combat the ongoing opioid use-epidemic, even as we fought the coronavirus pandemic.

In that, we replaced stigma with compassion to close gaps in treatment, to expand access and use of life-saving medicines like Naloxone, and to support and expand the work of harm reduction centers, among so much more.

While we are proud of the progress we are making, the critical work is far from done and will continue. We continue to lose too many residents to the grip of opioid misuse.

Four years ago, we set out to build a stronger and fairer New Jersey that would work for every family and in every community. We set out to make a more affordable and more responsive New Jersey.

Well, we are who we said we'd be – boldly progressive, but also pragmatic.

And because of this, we are accomplishing both.

Note that I say “accomplishing,” not “accomplished.” We still have much work to do. We are still clearing away the long-fallen brush that has blocked the path to opportunity for too many New Jerseyans.

Our task now is to take the next giant leap forward – to turn the positive changes we've made in our laws into long-lasting and tangible progress for our working families and seniors.

A few hours ago, my partners in the Legislature swore their oaths as the representatives of the residents they now serve.

Lieutenant Governor Oliver and I congratulate the new Senate leaders – Senate President Nick Scutari and Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz – as well as the returning Assembly leadership of Speaker Craig Coughlin and Majority Leader Louis Greenwald.

And we hold out our hands in partnership and goodwill to the new Republican leaders, Senator Steve Oroho and Assemblyman John DiMaio.

The people of New Jersey elected each of us in public office for a single purpose – to get things done.

Up until November 2nd we wore either a letter “D” or “R” after our name. And we all take pride in that letter. That letter speaks to a sense of our core beliefs and our personal ideals.

But now is the time to take these letters off. Now is the time to seek, in the words of John F. Kennedy, “not the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer.”

You are sick and tired of the hyper-partisanship, the bickering, the inaction, the division, and the endless finger-pointing we see in Washington. So am I.

And we don't want that political stagnation to creep into our work here in Trenton. Not in our very backyard. Not when there is still too much uncertainty in our lives and our communities, and too many challenges ahead.

From today forward, for all of us, the politicking ends and the governing begins. That's true patriotism.

We must continue to prove that the promise of a stronger and fairer New Jersey is real and open to every resident, every family, and every community.

Opportunity, affordability, and fairness must be linked. One without the others is hollow. But all of them together are an unstoppable force for a brighter future and proof that the American Dream lives in New Jersey.

And no state represents both the glorious history and awesome future of the American Dream more than ours.

So, this is our shared task for the year ahead ...

A stronger New Jersey where we create opportunity and increase affordability because you want New Jersey to be more affordable ...

A fairer New Jersey where we work for tax fairness, and economic and social justice because you want a fair shot at a more prosperous future and at your American Dream.

And a New Jersey where we continue down the path of recovery from the pandemic together.

This is what you expect. Moreover, this is what you deserve.

Let's work together in good faith and with common purpose. This doesn't mean we won't or even can't disagree. But it should mean that “compromise” and “common sense” are not dirty words.

The response to an idea with which we disagree shouldn't be “no, period,” but rather, “no, but,” meaning an openness to cooperation and negotiation ... to a give-and-take, not a take-it-or-leave-it.

Let's also be mindful of the words of the late John Lewis, “We're one people, we're one family. We all live in the same house.”

With everything going on across our nation, and as we work to bring our state out from under the cloud of COVID, these words ring true in New Jersey.

Let's pledge to put the needs of every New Jerseyan before the wants of our party or any single person in it.

Let's stop shouting down each other and get back to talking with each other.

Let's prove that our words have actual value and meaning.

And let's prove that our best days aren't in our rear-view mirror.

Let's grab that more affordable New Jersey, a New Jersey rich with opportunity for all willing to work hard, which is just ahead of us.

Thank you, all. May God bless you and your families with a healthy and prosperous new year.

May God continue to bless the Great State of New Jersey and the United States of America.

## Governor Phil Murphy

[Home \(/governor/\)](/governor/)

### Administration

[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about/\)](/governor/admin/about/)

[Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver \(/governor/admin/lt/\)](/governor/admin/lt/)

[First Lady Tammy Snyder Murphy \(/governor/admin/fl/\)](/governor/admin/fl/)

[Cabinet \(/governor/admin/cabinet/\)](/governor/admin/cabinet/)

[Office of Health Care Affordability and Transparency \(/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml\)](/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml)

[Boards, Commissions & Authorities \(/governor/admin/bca/\)](/governor/admin/bca/)

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

[Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket \(http://drumthwacket.org/\)](http://drumthwacket.org/)

### Key Initiatives

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

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

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

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

[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Justice)

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

### News & Events

[Press Releases \(/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news_archive.shtml)

[Photos \(https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy\)](https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy)

[Public Addresses \(/governor/news/addresses\)](/governor/news/addresses)

[Executive Orders \(/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo\\_archive.html\)](/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

[Administrative Orders \(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

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

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

[Statements on Legislation \(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

[Administration Reports \(/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

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

[Press Kits \(/governor/news/press\)](/governor/news/press)

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Office of Governor PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
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