



NEW JERSEY SENATE

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COMMUNITY AND URBAN AFFAIRS
CO-CHAIRMAN
JOINT COMMITTEE ON
THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
MEMBER
HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND
SENIOR SERVICES

Honorable Phil Murphy – Governor
State of New Jersey
225 W. State Street
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear Governor:

As we commemorate 400 years since the first black slaves arrived in Jamestown, VA in 1619, I write today with great concern that black elected officials, civil rights and faith-based leaders in New Jersey continue to be taken for granted in a manner not dissimilar to the way black voters, and black and brown people in general, are often dismissed out of hand on a daily basis.

It's possible that you are oblivious to the treatment that I and other leaders of color have repeatedly experienced time after time. In the interest of finding common ground for progress, I want to alert you to our perspective. To wit, whenever we meet with white elected state officials and staff to effect positive change in the areas of social justice reform, criminal justice reform, equal employment opportunity and *the quality of life for people of color*, we are met with *patronizing conversations, a smile, the pretense of understanding and empty promises* for cooperation. Our perception is that there is an entrenched pattern of behavior based on the expectation that we leaders will *go home, be silent and simply wait until the next meeting* to have the *same conversation*. It is as though we are expected to be grateful for simply having face time with you, the Senate President and/or the Assembly Speaker. I can assure you it is not simply face time that we seek. We want action.

We are frustrated and impatient with what appears to be procrastination by your administration to expeditiously assemble staff members to work collectively with members of the NJLBC, NJLLC and our coalition partners to craft legislation for the decriminalization of recreational marijuana and resolve the other social and criminal justice reform issues discussed previously.

This is but one example of why black and brown leaders, organizations and our constituents are infuriated by the rhetoric concerning "social and economic justice."

We who are witnesses to the ongoing living history of the black struggle in America, and who are products of the civil rights movement, know full well to trust our perceptions. We've been down this road before. As leaders, we refuse to continue down the same path that yields so little so late.

Governor, unfortunately in New Jersey, **400 years** after the arrival of the first black slave in Jamestown, VA; **215 years** after our state's gradual abolition of slavery; **55 years** since the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; **54 years** after "*Bloody Sunday*" and "*Turn-Around Tuesday*" in Selma, Alabama and the passing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and **65 years** after *Brown vs Board of Education Topeka Kansas*, *social justice, economic justice, equal opportunity and a better quality of life for black and brown people in New Jersey* has been slow at best and in so many instances denied.

Governor, black and brown elected officials, faith-based and civil rights leaders, tax-payers, voters and residents in general placed our hope and faith in you for justice, believing that the days of modern day bondage in New Jersey would end for people of color, women and other marginalized citizens. We believed and still pray that a better quality of life would become a reality for people of color victimized by a system of government that historically has promoted social injustice and economic injustice.

Once again, I am respectfully, requesting on behalf of the members of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus, the New Jersey Legislative Latino Caucus and our civil rights and faith-based leaders and partners that a date, time and location be set to for us to meet and to commence working with your staff to address and resolve the concerns we raised with you when we met at NJIT in Newark.

As black and brown leaders in this state, our legal and moral responsibility to people of color and others is to make certain that justice is not denied. New Jersey was one of the last states to free slaves. It's time we accelerated our timeline for right action.

I will call your Chief of Staff in a few days to set up the meeting. Time is of the essence for justice!

Thanking you for your understanding and anticipated cooperation, I remain

~~Sincerely,~~

Senator Ronald L. Rice-Chair
New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus

Cc:

Hon. Sheila Y. Oliver – Lt. Governor
Mr. George Helmy – Chief of Staff to the Governor
NJLBC members
Hon. Nellie Pou, President – NJ Latino Legislative Caucus
NJ Statewide Black Elected Officials Policy Alliance members
Mr. Richard Smith, President – NJ Conference of NAACP
Hon. Carolyn Chang, Esq., Chair of Social Justice Committee – ABWLNJ
Mr. William Rogers, Esq., President – NJ Garden State Bar Association
Ms. Reva Foster, Chairwoman of NJ Black Issues Convention
Rev. Charles Boyers, Founder – Salvation and Social Justice

Rev. Eric Dobson, Director of Community Engagement – Fair Share Housing Center
Mr. Ryan Haygood, Pres/CEO – NJ Institute for Social Justice
NJLBC Statewide Faith-Based Partners
Mr. John Harmon, Pres/CEO – NJ African American Chamber of Commerce