do social justice.
NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
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Photo by Akintola Hanif
A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

We are facing a critical moment.

Over the last two years, we have seen residents of several communities across this nation—moved by long-simmering frustration and anger—take to the streets to protest the killings of unarmed people of color by members of law enforcement.

The protests in communities such as Baltimore, Ferguson, Staten Island, and Chicago were triggered by the enduring effects of poverty, racism, disinvestment, and violent encounters with law enforcement. They call to mind Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s powerful admonition, nearly 50 years ago, that “[a] riot is the language of the unheard.”

Today, notwithstanding remarkable progress, people in these communities and numerous cities across New Jersey still suffer under the weight of the conditions that precipitated these protests. The sobering reality of a devastating unemployment rate, limited affordable housing and transportation, police misconduct, and low levels of political participation collectively speak to a broader picture of the sense of dispossession that exists for people of color in far too many of our cities.

We need to heed the lessons of Baltimore, Ferguson, and our other sister communities because, in a very real sense, they are us.

At the same time, we have every reason to be hopeful about the opportunities that are available to us in this moment to do social justice.

The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (the “Institute”) is committed to destroying inequality and opening up opportunities for all of New Jersey’s citizens. I am proud to have become the third president and CEO of an organization with an ambitious agenda that recognizes the urgency of the challenges we face and advocates for solutions that are both transformative and achievable.

After nearly 20 years on the front lines of social justice, the Institute is as committed as ever to creating and empowering healthy urban communities where residents are connected to full-time, meaningful jobs, have access to affordable housing and the democratic process, and are treated fairly by the criminal justice system.

But we cannot do this work without you.

Today, we have reached a tipping point. In his last book, “Where Do We Go From Here?,“ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. posits that given the challenges that we face, we have only two options: embrace chaos or embrace community. At the Institute, we choose community. We invite you to join us as we work to bend our neighborhoods toward the beloved community. That’s what time it is!
“We cannot transform communities by sitting on the sidelines hoping that change will inevitably come. We must be the catalyst for the change we seek for our children, our families, our neighbors, and our communities. This change only comes through persistent and continuous struggle.

At the Institute, we are social engineers committed to the fight for racial justice and equality. We engage in that struggle every day to make a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable among us.”

LASHAWN Y. WARREN
Institute Vice President and General Counsel
do social justice.

The Institute’s mission is to empower urban residents of color to realize and achieve their full potential. Established in 1999 by Alan V. and Amy Lowenstein, the Institute’s dynamic and independent advocacy is aimed at toppling load-bearing walls of structural inequality to create just, vibrant, and healthy urban communities. We employ a broad range of advocacy tools to advance our ambitious urban agenda, including research, analysis and writing, public education, grassroots organizing, communications, the development of pilot programs, legislative strategies, and litigation.

Using a holistic approach to addressing the unique and critical issues facing New Jersey’s urban communities, the Institute advocates for systematic reform that is at once transformative, achievable in the state, and replicable in communities across the nation.
The Institute’s programmatic focus rests upon three interconnected pillars: (1) Economic Mobility; (2) Criminal Justice Reform; and (3) Civic Engagement.

**EMPLOYMENT**

Economic mobility remains the great unfinished business of the civil rights movement. Nearly 50 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about the existence of “two Americas” sharply divided by race.

In one “America,” children grow up in the “sunlight of opportunity.” But in the “other America,” people of color confront staggering rates of unemployment, poverty, and a lack of opportunity. Half a century after Dr. King made this famous speech, far too many urban residents in New Jersey live in the “other America.”

In Newark, New Jersey’s largest city, the poverty rate for Black people is a striking 33%—more than double the national average. As a result, it is common to see Newark residents on weekday mornings waiting in an unemployment line that spans nearly a city block, while on the other end of the same street the city is in the middle of a construction boom with over $1 billion of construction projects recently completed, underway, or in the pipeline.
Notwithstanding this major construction, new businesses coming to Newark, and the expansions of several industries, local residents hold just 18% of all jobs in Newark.

That is to say, 82% of those who work in Newark—from corporate employees to first responders, educators, and hospital employees, as well as workers at the airport and the Newark Port—do not live in the city. We simply cannot empower residents of Newark (or residents of any of our other cities) when so few are employed in their own city. Just as local residents share in the challenges associated with living in Newark, so too should they share in its prosperity.

To help realize Dr. King’s vision for economic equality, the Institute is launching an ambitious jobs initiative in partnership with the City of Newark and Rutgers University-Newark, with the goal of reducing the unemployment rate in Newark by connecting unemployed local residents to jobs. This jobs initiative is part of the Institute’s Economic Mobility Initiative, designed to proceed in phases, beginning with the most urgent issues facing people living in poverty—unemployment and a lack of access to jobs in the local community.

The Institute’s initial goal is to eliminate the unemployment gap between Newark, one of the poorest cities in the state, and New Jersey, one of the wealthiest states in America, by 2020.

Our ultimate charge is to ensure that the maximum possible number of Newark residents are competitive candidates and receive due consideration for positions in each industry.

While Newark is central to our work, the Institute is also creating a footprint for social justice in urban communities throughout New Jersey. The future economic viability of the state is dependent upon strengthening communities by adopting standards of equity and justice that will allow all residents to secure the resources necessary to make meaningful contributions to the civic well-being of the state and nation.
In addition to addressing poverty by connecting urban residents to full-time, meaningful work, the Institute also focuses on criminal justice system reform—from policing to reentry. Our work here seeks to end excessively harsh criminal justice policies that result in the criminalization of communities of color, racial injustice, and mass incarceration.

PUBLIC SAFETY FORUMS

In the wake of the multiple killings of unarmed people of color across the nation, the Institute launched New Jersey Communities Forward (NJCF), a cutting-edge initiative that seeks to build stronger, safer communities through community forums and trainings with law enforcement.

By drawing upon lessons learned from effective policing models in New Jersey and across the country, and creating a safe space for honest and difficult discussions between community stakeholders and law enforcement, NJCF encourages a much-needed paradigm shift in the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Since 2015, NJCF has hosted public safety forums and facilitated conversations with nearly 1,000 residents across several cities in New Jersey—including Atlantic City, Jersey City, Montclair, Newark, and Trenton. Over 125 residents attended the Institute’s community forum in Newark, which featured presentations from Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, United States Attorney Paul Fishman, and former Acting Attorney General John Hoffman.

In a significant development, NJCF led former Acting Attorney General Hoffman to require every state trooper (currently numbering over 1,000) to wear body-worn cameras. New Jersey is leading the nation on this issue, becoming one of the first states to make this commitment to police reform. In addition, Hoffman issued directives to police agencies statewide addressing procedures and best practices for conducting use-of-force investigations.

Law enforcement must respect and honor the humanity of the people they serve. We believe police service must seek first to build community. Law enforcement must join with the communities they serve to be both peacemakers and peacekeepers.
CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world.

The prison population has more than quintupled in the last 40 years, growing from 300,000 people in 1972 to 2.2 million people today, with people of color representing the overwhelming majority of the total prison population. Tragically, one out of every three Black men born today in our country will go to jail or prison if current incarceration trends continue.

Here in New Jersey, while Black and Latino people together comprise just 30% of the overall population, they represent 80% of the prison population. And although the crime rate in New Jersey is over 20% lower than the national average, the state’s prisons have a higher portion of drug offenders than any other state.

The sobering reality is that, for reasons largely unrelated to actual crime trends, the American criminal justice system has emerged as a system of
racial oppression and social control that is without equal in our history. Indeed, in certain counties in New Jersey, Black people are as much as five times more likely than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession, despite similar rates of use by both races.

Through our criminal justice reform pillar, the Institute is working to create a rational and effective criminal justice system that strengthens communities by treating people, particularly the most vulnerable among us, fairly and equally; provides alternatives to incarceration; protects constitutional rights; ensures racial equality; and increases law enforcement responsiveness, accountability, and transparency.

In particular, the Institute’s work focuses on transforming our criminal justice system outcomes from policing through reentry. As part of this important work, we are reforming policing in New Jersey by fundamentally changing the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve through our NJCF Initiative. The Institute is also working to end the excessively harsh criminal justice policies that result in the disproportionate stops and arrests, charging, sentencing, and incarceration of communities of color—including reforming drug policies which have not only failed to achieve public safety, but have resulted in an unprecedented number of people of color behind bars for nonviolent offenses. Our work also seeks to reduce New Jersey’s reliance on prisons, increase the use of alternative treatments as a means of solving social and health problems, and advance successful reentry initiatives.

**JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM**

On any given day, more than 50,000 young people are incarcerated and confined in juvenile justice systems across the country. Instead of getting the support they need in their local communities, these young people are funneled through a system that is too often unsafe, costly, and infected with striking racial and ethnic disparities.

In New Jersey, even though youth of all races commit non-violent crime at about the same rate, Black youth are more than 10 times as likely as white youth to be committed to secure facilities.

Just 20 years ago, criminologists John J. Dilulio and James Fox championed a pernicious and wildly inaccurate “super-predator” narrative about youth violence that landed hundreds of thousands of kids in youth prisons around the country, even as crime among youth dropped precipitously.

This “super-predator” designation for kids has had devastating consequences, particularly for kids of color. Nearly every state responded to it, including by lowering the minimum age to try children as adults and ultimately incarcerating 250,000 young people.

- 90% of kids incarcerated in New Jersey are Black and Latino.
- New Jersey has made substantial progress in reducing the inappropriate and unnecessary detention of youth in the juvenile justice system through the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and is poised to be a national model for juvenile justice reform.
- Just last year, New Jersey became the 21st state to ban punitive solitary confinement in juvenile facilities.
- It costs $200,000 each year to incarcerate each young person in New Jersey.
In New Jersey, though the number of incarcerated kids has decreased significantly in the last 10 years—in part through the powerful advocacy of the Institute and its partners—nearly 90% of kids incarcerated in New Jersey are Black and Latino.

To further this work, and to combat these racial disparities, the Institute leads a statewide coalition, Youth Justice New Jersey (YJNJ, formerly the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Reform Coalition). YJNJ seeks to ensure fair outcomes for youth involved in the justice system through a multi-pronged approach that aims to (1) promote racial equality and fair treatment for all youth at all points of contact with the criminal justice system; (2) reduce the number of youth involved in the juvenile justice and adult corrections systems; (3) divert more youth into rehabilitative, community-oriented alternatives to incarceration; (4) improve the conditions of confinement for those youth who are incarcerated in the current system; and (5) end school disciplinary policies and practices that push youth out of classrooms and into the criminal justice system.

Taking the next step after New Jersey’s many successes with the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, YJNJ is launching a Youth Decarceration Campaign to further reduce the number of youth incarcerated in New Jersey, decrease racial and ethnic disparities, and invest in community-based alternatives to incarceration for youth.

The importance of this work is underscored by the tragic story of Kalief Browder. In 2010, 16-year-old Kalief was accused of stealing a backpack. Based on nothing more than the vague recollections of a single witness, Kalief spent the next three years of his young life incarcerated in the notorious adult penitentiary, Riker’s Island, enduring unspeakable violence at the hands of other inmates and guards.

An estimated two of Kalief’s three years in Riker’s were spent in solitary confinement.

When his case was finally dismissed three years after he was imprisoned—with no trial, no conviction, and no apologies—Kalief was sent home to attempt to reassemble his life as best as he could. Although he would never recapture his teenage years, he worked to earn his GED and enrolled in community college classes. Indeed, for a little while, Kalief seemed to be doing well.

But Kalief ultimately could not escape the trauma that he endured while incarcerated, particularly those two years that he spent hungry and alone in a 12 x 7 foot cell in Riker’s Central Punitive Segregation Unit. After several failed suicide attempts and weeks spent in mental health facilities, Kalief hung himself at the age of 22.

Kalief’s tragic story of profound neglect and injustice begs the question: What time is it? The answer is that it is time to ensure that no other child is subjected to the abuse that Kalief endured. It is time to do what must be done to advance juvenile justice reform and protect our kids.
In 2015, recognizing the devastating psychological effects of solitary confinement, New Jersey became the 21st state to ban the practice in juvenile facilities as part of a historic reform bill advanced by the Institute and its YJNJ partners. This important new law will help New Jersey protect children against the shameful set of circumstances that led Kalief Browder to take his life.

The historic reform bill also includes a number of other significant changes:

- reduces the number of youth prosecuted as adults by raising the minimum age and narrowing the list of offenses that can lead to an adult prosecution;
- makes juvenile facilities the standard placement for youth who are tried and sentenced as adults until they turn 21, and sometimes even beyond that age; and
- requires due process, including representation by counsel, before youth can be involuntarily transferred from a juvenile facility to an adult prison for behavioral reasons.

Building on this important juvenile justice reform work, the Institute and its YJNJ partners are positioning the state to be a model for the nation—with the goal of shifting New Jersey’s overreliance on juvenile correctional facilities to a more holistic rehabilitative approach that provides age-appropriate treatment and access to rehabilitation.

We are focused on ensuring that our children stay where they belong—in school and in the community—not behind bars.

Her Life Matters.

REENTRY

Similar to the way in which hospitals begin preparing patients to be discharged on the day of admission, so too should correctional facilities begin preparing people with criminal convictions for release on the first day of incarceration. But too often, people with criminal convictions leave jail or prison without meaningful access to work, a place to live, government assistance, or access to the ballot box. It is not surprising that with no way to support or house themselves or their families, and being excluded from participating in the government process, more than two-thirds of incarcerated people return to prison within three years after being released.

At the Institute, we believe that once released, jail or prison should remain in the past and that a permanent pathway home should be available.
But in New Jersey, even after serving time, state law imposes an incredible 1,000 collateral consequences on individuals with a record of arrest or conviction. Even though employment is the single most important influence on decreasing recidivism, more than 600 of these consequences affect eligibility for employment and access to professional licenses. Indeed, criminal records decrease employer call-backs by almost two-thirds for Black male applicants. The harsh reality is that only 8% of employment positions are open to people with criminal records.

To facilitate a permanent return home for people with criminal convictions, the Institute and its partners championed three historic pieces of legislation designed to, among other things, lift the felony drug ban on public assistance; require the Department of Corrections (DOC) to issue valid identification; and call for the DOC to provide additional educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals.

The Institute and its partners also successfully championed the historic passage of the New Jersey Opportunity to Compete Act (OCA or “ban the box”). The significant measure defers the point at which employers can ask job applicants about their criminal background until after the first interview, giving applicants an opportunity to meet potential employers face to face and present their skills and qualifications without criminal convictions clouding the employer’s first impression.

In a recent significant speech during his visit to Newark, President Barack Obama announced that he would direct federal agencies through an executive action to “ban the box”—eliminating criminal history questions on some government job applications. President Obama’s announcement builds on the pioneering work of the Institute and its partners in banning the box in New Jersey with the passage of the OCA. President Obama’s executive action also follows Senator Cory Booker and Representative Elijah Cummings’ introduction of the Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act of 2015, federal legislation similar to New Jersey’s OCA.
The Institute’s reentry work is focused on ensuring that when laws like the OCA are passed, they are also enforced and, where required, strengthened. The Institute also works to guarantee that formerly incarcerated people receive adequate resources upon release, including information on driver’s license restoration and expungement of criminal records, and have access to meaningful employment opportunities and the ballot box.

We will not stop until all citizens are welcomed home to their communities with a pathway to success, rather than being met with unlimited roadblocks that lead to recidivism.
VOTING

Full, equal, and active access to the ballot box is essential to empowering healthy urban communities throughout New Jersey and our nation.

The Institute staff joined thousands of people in the 51st anniversary commemoration of the “Bloody Sunday” Selma to Montgomery march, which led to the passage of landmark legislation—the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA).

On Bloody Sunday, John Lewis and Reverend Hosea Williams led almost 600 men, women, and children in a peaceful march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge to dramatize to the nation their desire to participate in the political process.

During the reenactment of the march, we reflected on the way in which the activism that gave birth to the VRA led to the election of a Black President and more than 10,000 other Black elected officials—including federal and state representatives, mayors, school board members, and city council members—within a generation of its passage.

- Joe Loya, pastor, author, and formerly incarcerated person

“Without a vote, a voice, I am a ghost inhabiting a citizen’s space.”
Like Selma, New Jersey has a unique role in the long struggle to expand the franchise. Indeed, Atlantic City served as the site of the 1964 Democratic National Convention at which Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights heroine, powerfully delivered her famous speech in support of Black voting rights on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

And yet, on the 51st anniversary of Bloody Sunday and the VRA, we, along with thousands of marchers, confronted the harsh reality that we have yet to achieve a fully participatory democracy. Indeed, New Jersey law prevents more than 100,000 individuals with criminal convictions from exercising the fundamental right to vote, the right that is preservative of all other rights. Further significant work remains to ensure that all registered voters who have access to the ballot box use their votes. Recent important school board elections in Newark, for example, have seen approximately 10,000 voters out of more than 152,000 registered voters cast their ballots.

This reality inspired Institute staff to think boldly and creatively about the work of making democracy real for people of color across New Jersey for the 2016 presidential election and the 2017 New Jersey gubernatorial election. Toward that end, the Institute is working to increase participation and access to the ballot box for urban residents by launching a voter engagement campaign for the upcoming 2016 presidential election and beyond. This initiative will include advocacy both before and on Election Day, with the goal of ensuring that every eligible urban resident who casts a ballot in the 2016 presidential election has that vote counted.

During the pre-Election Day initiative, the Institute will use two primary methods of getting information to its target communities: (1) creating and distributing state and context-specific informational palm cards useful for canvassing and outreach; and (2) carrying out live voter preparedness presentations and trainings at such locations as college campuses, community centers, and places of worship.

On Election Day, the Institute’s advocacy efforts will focus on election protection in connection with local and national legal and grassroots partners. Institute staff and its partners will distribute voter empowerment materials outside of the polls in select urban communities, observe the voting process, work with voters and election officials to remedy problems at polling places, and report any irregularities to election officials and national election protection programs.

After assessing the impact of the Institute’s voter empowerment campaign, the Institute plans to replicate this initiative for future elections. Until the right to vote is exercised by all of New Jersey residents, our work will not be done.

At the same time, the Institute staff is exploring new frontiers for the expansion of voting rights, including universal voter registration and freeing the vote for people with criminal convictions.
IN REMEMBRANCE
The Institute’s current work would not be possible without the foresight, vision, and generous support of its founding leadership—including attorneys, staff, board members, trustees, community partners, and others who laid the foundation for the Institute’s work today. This sentiment is especially resonant in this season, when our community has experienced such profound losses with the passing of social justice giants and Institute founding trustees Judge Dickinson R. Debevoise and Dr. Robert Curvin.

JUDGE DICKINSON R. DEBEVOISE

“Our court has lost one of its greatest judges ever.”
- Jerome B. Simandle, Chief Judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey

A beloved member of the New Jersey community, Judge Dickinson R. Debevoise served with unparallelled distinction on the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey for more than 35 years. A brilliant jurist, Judge Debevoise dedicated his life to pursuing justice, equality, and opportunity until his passing at the age of 91 on August 14, 2015.

Judge Debevoise began his lifelong public service in the United States Army during World War II, for which he earned a Bronze Star Medal. He also became active in the civil rights movement, representing, and recruiting attorneys to represent civil rights workers in Mississippi during the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer.

Consistent with his commitment to public service and social justice, Judge Debevoise served as the Institute’s founding board vice president, trustee, and trustee emeritus. Through these various roles, Judge Debevoise helped to create and advance the Institute’s mission, leaving his unique imprint on the spirit of the organization.

DR. ROBERT CURVIN

“Though every city would have treasured his residence and expertise in urban politics, Dr. Curvin chose to dedicate both to Newark. This city, New Jersey, and the country are immeasurably better for it.”
- Ryan P. Haygood, Institute President and CEO

In the city of Newark and beyond, Dr. Robert Curvin was known as a social justice giant, a passionate advocate for the urban poor, and a champion of Newark. During his tenure as president of the Newark chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Dr. Curvin earned national recognition for his critical role during the 1967 Newark rebellion. In addition, Dr. Curvin served in a number of positions, including as the director of the Ford Foundation’s Urban Poverty Program and as Chairman of the Fund for the City of New York, before passing away at the age of 81 on September 29, 2015.

The year before his death, Dr. Curvin authored “Inside Newark: Decline, Rebellion, and the Search for Transformation,” a powerful analysis that chronicled how one of America’s greatest cities dealt with a convergence of challenges and opportunities during the past half century.

In addition to these numerous accomplishments, Dr. Curvin served as one of the first board members of the Institute, developing and shaping the organization’s mission and ambitious agenda.

The Institute is deeply thankful for the lives and legacies of Judge Debevoise, Dr. Curvin, and all of its members and supporters over the years whom we have lost, for their deep commitment to the Institute’s mission.
The Institute’s current staff continues the march toward justice that our founders began.

RYAN P. HAYGOOD, ESQ.
Ryan P. Haygood, one of the nation’s leading civil rights lawyers, is the third President and CEO of the Institute. Ryan previously served as the Deputy Director of Litigation at the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc., where he litigated some of the most important civil rights issues facing our nation. Ryan has been a proud Newark resident for the past fifteen years.

LASHAWN Y. WARREN, ESQ.
LaShawn Y. Warren is the Vice President and General Counsel of the Institute and has worked as a public interest attorney for two decades. LaShawn previously served as Vice President of Policy Development and Programming at the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy and as Oversight Counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary. LaShawn was also Legislative Counsel for Civil Rights in the Washington Legislative Office of the American Civil Liberties Union.

DEMELZA BAER, ESQ.
Demelza Baer is a Policy Counsel at the Institute, joining the organization after clerking for Judge Maria M. Cabret of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands. She previously worked as a Policy Counsel for the Washington Legislative Office of the American Civil Liberties Union and on civil rights as an Assistant Counsel for the U.S. House Judiciary Committee.

ANDREA McCHRISTIAN, ESQ.
Andrea McChristian is an Associate Counsel at the Institute. Prior to joining the Institute, Andrea was a litigation associate at the New York office of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson and clerked for Chief Judge Petrese B. Tucker of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

RETHA ONITIRI
Retha Onitiri is currently the Project Management Consultant and Statewide Coordinator for New Jersey Communities Forward. She is leading an effort to establish local steering committees in major cities across New Jersey, launch community forums, identify issues and solutions, create project and implementation plans, and report progress.

ASHLEY OKWUOSA
Ashley Okwuosa is a Communications Associate for the Institute and is responsible for the Institute’s social media presence, email strategy, and digital engagement. Ashley graduated from Rutgers-Newark University cum laude with a B.A in Journalism and Women’s and Gender Studies in 2015.

TERESA BROWN
Teresa Brown is the Administrative Director for the Institute. Prior to joining the Institute, Teresa worked at a number of major global law firms, managing legal support services, information technology, and project management. Teresa currently is a fellow with Leadership Newark, a two-year fellowship program for qualified professionals committed to the greater Newark community.

KRISTINE VILLANUEVA
Kristine Villanueva is a Communications Associate for the Institute. Kristine is a 2015 graduate from Rutgers-Newark with a B.A in Journalism and English. Prior to working at the Institute, Kristine covered the greater Newark area as a reporter and was Editor-in-Chief of Rutgers-Newark’s Scarlet Magazine.
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HELP US do social justice!

Join us in fighting for economic justice, criminal justice reform, and democracy.

The Institute needs your support to usher in a new era of social justice—one that upholds our highest ideals of racial justice, equity, opportunity, and full participation for all. Please join us by volunteering with us and/or making your tax-deductible contribution today.

To learn more about the work of the Institute and to donate to our cause, visit us online at www.njisj.org or call us at 973.624.9400.
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