



The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice is monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic closely, including its impact on the communities we advocate for every day.

We recognize that as the current pandemic impacts all of us as a public health crisis, it is also a social and racial justice one.

That public health crises always expose the cracks in society's foundation.

And that those cracks cause earthquakes in Black and Brown communities, already lacking in adequate investments.

Already during the current crisis, communities of color have disproportionately become ill and died from COVID-19 due to pre-existing health conditions, jobs that don't permit social distancing and inadequate healthcare.

People of color have lost jobs at disproportionate rates and are disproportionately vulnerable to future eviction and foreclosure.

Kids of color and other vulnerable children have been required to learn from home, but many don't have laptops or Internet access.

Many in our youth and adult prisons, who are overwhelmingly Black and Brown and living in close quarters, are at great risk of or have come down with COVID – but have not been released.

And we face the threat that participating in the Census and upcoming elections will be more difficult for the most vulnerable among us.

The continuation of this pandemic has overlapped with a renewed awakening in America – and New Jersey – that Black Lives Matter.

In this both tragic and hopeful moment, the Institute is working double time to address these issues in real time.

After we wrote to Gov. Murphy urging the reporting and release of racial data on the impact of COVID-19, he signed legislation to mandate that. This data will be crucial for getting necessary support to communities of color during and after this public health crisis.

After we urged New Jersey to expand vote-by-mail, the Governor did just that for the 2020 primary and General Election. Because the signature match process for verifying mail-in and provisional ballots has been deeply flawed, we filed litigation demanding voters be notified if their ballot is rejected due to signature issues

and given an opportunity to cure the problem in time for their vote to count. The lawsuit succeeded in correcting the problem for the July 7 primary, and, as a result of collective advocacy, legislation (the Ballot Cure Act) was subsequently passed codifying an agreement in the lawsuit so that such notice and cure opportunity is available going forward, including for the 2020 General Election.

The state also implemented many of our recommendations for making the General Election as safe and robust as possible. We continue to advocate for same day registration – including on Election Day – for future elections.

When the Trump campaign filed a lawsuit challenging New Jersey's voting procedures for the 2020 General Election, we intervened in the lawsuit on behalf of all New Jersey voters arguing that changing the plan will cause widespread voter confusion and possibly disenfranchisement.

After our advocacy with partners on behalf of New Jersey's incarcerated youth, the state has started testing all kids in JJC facilities for COVID-19. We are now advocating for passage of public health emergency credits legislation (S2519|A4235) to expedite the release of youth – and adults – who are due to complete their sentences with the year.

We're also conducting robust community engagement and advocacy to urge everyone to fill out the Census so that communities get the congressional representation and federal funding they need more than ever right now.

And we've advocated with partners to protect the rights of New Jersey tenants and ensure that landlords abide by federal protections to help residents during the pandemic.

Especially in this difficult moment, our work to fill these cracks and build reparative systems, policies and practices that create access to work and wealth, transform justice and harness democratic power for people of color in New Jersey is more important than ever.

The Institute is committed to standing with New Jersey, including its Black and Brown communities, to fight for this change – to build a new foundation not weakened by structural racism.

The power of community is endless. If we come together as a community, even as we physically distance, we will summon our best collective selves and get through this together.

Please stand with us by taking action [here](#), and donating [here](#).

We wish everyone good health and safety, and encourage our communities to follow the guidelines and keep abreast of the latest information at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NJ's COVID-19 Information Hub and the NJ Department of Health.