



December 21, 2020

Governor Murphy,

We, the members of the United Black Agenda, write to express our grave concern with A4/S3295 (i.e., the "New Jersey Economic Recovery Act of 2020") as a matter of both substance and process. The sheer scope of the proposed outlay—a massive \$14 billion—reflects budgetary priorities that we fear will eclipse critical funding needs for Black people in this state. We are also concerned about the hasty, closed-door process that led to this bill.

We understand, of course, the importance of economic development. But what are the opportunity costs of spending such an enormous sum, given the significant investments that Black communities required even *before* the pandemic and which have worsened considerably in its wake? The United Black Agenda has pushed for investments in education, youth justice, health care coverage, voting, housing, reparations and other critical supports for Black New Jerseyans as a means to rectify centuries of discrimination and marginalization. Those priorities are necessarily harmed by this proposal because it will take over \$2 billion a year in funding off the table that could otherwise be used to build opportunities for our grossly underserved communities.

For example, if the state commits \$14 billion in funding for economic development subsidies—which research shows generates extremely limited economic returns<sup>1</sup>—will the state have revenue to commit to the following UBA priorities, including:

- A fully funded and progressive baby bonds program targeted to close New Jersey's racial wealth gap;
- A moratorium on new youth prison construction and a \$100 million commitment to youth programs and services;
- Full investment in public schools in communities of color and funds to integrate our schools;
- A comprehensive reparations program to repair the harms caused by generations of underinvestment in Black New Jersey communities;
- The cancellation of student loan debt and tuition-free college; and

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<sup>1</sup> [Economists across the political spectrum find that economic development subsidies don't have a notable impact on the relocation decisions of businesses and work, at best, just 10 percent of the time](#); meaning 90 percent of these dollars—or \$10.35 billion—will be entirely wasted. Given that the state has just borrowed \$4.5 billion to help balance the budget, forgoing this amount of revenue will clearly make it much more difficult to invest in our broader priorities and proven areas of economic growth.

- The establishment and full funding of same-day voter registration, and a comprehensive early voting program with e-poll books.

Finally, we are disturbed by the legislative process that produced this bill and the way it has marginalized the interests and voices of Black people. To negotiate this bill behind closed doors, and then rush it through in less than a week, denies Black leaders and other stakeholders the opportunity to appropriately weigh in on the state's budget priorities. A budgetary commitment of this magnitude demands a real process that allows public input, participation, and feedback and ongoing monitoring and review by a representative group.

**To restore confidence that this legislation will not have a massively harmful impact on our state and Black communities and reaffirm the state's commitment to the priorities and needs of Black people, we request a meeting with the Governor and senior staff to discuss our concerns and a path forward.**

Thank you for your attention and consideration. We await your response.

Sincerely,  
Members of the United Black Agenda

*Richard Smith (NAACP of NJ)*  
*Ryan Haygood (NJ Institute for Social Justice)*  
*Brandon McKoy (NJ Policy Perspective)*  
*Carolyn Chang (Association of Black Women Lawyers of NJ)*  
*Elise Boddie (The Inclusion Project at Rutgers University – Newark)*  
*Rev. Charles Boyer (Salvation and Social Justice NJ)*  
*Jerome Harris (NJ Black Issues Convention)*  
*Reva Foster (NJ Black Multifaith Alliance)*