



## NEW JERSEY CHAPTER

145 West Hanover St., Trenton, NJ 08618  
TEL: [609] 656-7612 | FAX: [609] 656-7618

[www.SierraClub.org/NJ](http://www.SierraClub.org/NJ)

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Governor Murphy's Restart and Recovery Commission  
Office of Governor  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000

June 15, 2020

Dear Commissioners,

Over 1 million people in New Jersey are unemployed while businesses are in shutter. This is the reality of the economic crisis spurred by COVID-19. As we slowly transition to re-open our state, it is important for Governor Murphy and his Restart and Recovery Commission to push for a green agenda. We have seen the benefits of people driving less and cleaner air. Murphy's road back plan needs to be green and include mass transit, renewable energy, electric vehicles, energy efficiency, green jobs, and rebuilding solar. We also need to do a much better job on reducing pollution, cleaning up our water, and adapting to climate change.

We are not just coming out of the coronavirus pandemic; we are also dealing with a legacy of institutional racism and issues around equity. This state has a long history of putting polluting facilities that no one wants in low income and minority communities. This has had major public health and environmental impacts in these areas. That needs to change, now. We cannot cut corners. As New Jersey reopens, we need to have a very strong equity component and target Environmental Justice communities for pollution reductions.

While New Jersey transitions out of lock-down to get our economy re-opened, the Murphy Administration should not be fast tracking permits or getting around rules or standards. We should not let special interest groups be able to shortcut environment regulations, cut timelines, and limit public oversight and input. The Murphy Administration cannot allow that to happen especially because of the impacts of pollution. The coronavirus pandemic shows why we need stricter rules, stricter regulations, and reduce pollution, especially in overburdened communities.

We need to use this pandemic as a way for major changes on dealing with how we do business and how we protect our environment even more. New Jersey needs an economic blueprint that needs to be green. New Jersey needs to expand mass transit, expand renewable energy like wind and solar, create green jobs, and reduce pollution.

Since the COVID-19 shutdown, air quality had improved and March was the cleanest month in over 10 years. Despite the silver lining of the pandemic, New Jersey has some of the worst air quality in the nation. According to the 2020 State of the Air report by the American Lung Association, New Jersey has nine counties with 'F' designations for ground-level ozone. North Jersey is ranked the 12th worst metropolitan area in the U.S. for ozone levels, which is slightly improved from last year. We need to do a much better job on reducing air pollution in Environmentally Justice communities that have been overburdened by a disproportionate amount of pollution. During the current health emergency this is



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even more important because several studies, including a Harvard study has linked coronavirus risks to air pollution.

### **Electrifying our Transportation System**

- The biggest source of air pollution and greenhouse gases in our state comes from automobiles, so it is critical to move quickly to electrify our transit system including buses, rails, electric heavy-duty garbage trucks, school buses, and port-related vehicles.
- NJ Transit needs to change their capital plan to start buying electric buses this year, and all of the buses they buy by 2025 should be electric. They are still investing in gas-guzzling trains and buses that will remain in the fleet for another 20 years. Electric buses and trains are 70% cheaper to operate, and it would help New Jersey reach 100% clean energy by 2050
- Instead of spending billions of dollars for widening our turnpikes and parkways, we should invest it in mass transit. Investing in mass transit will reduce traffic, air pollution, and create more jobs for our economy. We can expand the Bergen Light Rail into Bergen County. Instead of widening the Garden State Parkway, we can finally build the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex line. Instead of widening the NJ Turnpike in South Jersey, we can build the South Jersey Light Rail System. These are alternatives that will create more jobs, help the economy, and create spinoff development and housing around transit stations. Investing in projects like the Gateway Tunnel will help get people out of their cars. Every train takes at least 500 cars off the road. Therefore, expanding mass transit will not only help commuters by rail but commuters in cars too.

### **Renewable Energy**

We must implement offshore wind, solar power, geothermal, and energy efficiency projects. We can promote new technologies such as fuel cells, wave technology, smart-metering, microgrids, green building codes, battery storage, and energy storage. Micro-grids can provide efficient clean energy and local resiliency and stability for New Jersey. We need to move forward on cleaner energy so that we can achieve 100% renewable energy and zero carbon.

- **Solar:** New Jersey can achieve 600 MW solar per year and get 1/3 of its power from solar. We need to ensure that we can get BPU's interim solar program in place quickly to help create more jobs. Currently, New Jersey has around 7,000 solar jobs but at one time we had over 11,000. If we move forward on a new strong program, we can create even more jobs than that. It is important on moving forward with a sustainable program, especially if we want to meet the energy goals under the EMP. Solar energy in the state would make our environment cleaner, fight climate change, and increase green jobs.
- **Wind:** New Jersey can achieve 12,500MW off offshore wind of our coast. This provide half of the state's energy. Offshore wind could feasibly power 1.2 million homes with clean energy. Offshore wind will help us create over 4,000 jobs in a variety of fields including construction and



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operation. More importantly, building our wind infrastructure will help prevent unnecessary dirty fossil fuel plants and pipelines from being built.

- **Energy Efficiency:** Energy efficiency and weatherization are some of the most cost-effective ways to reduce greenhouse gasses and air pollution.
  - New Jersey can achieve over 2% a year in reductions.
- For every dollar invested by a homeowner they save \$4 and for every dollar invested by a business they save \$16. These important standards could save consumers \$11 billion dollars and prevent 25 million metric tons of climate pollution.
- Energy efficiency also reduces peak power needs and therefore saves people money because it could double and triple normal power.
- New Jersey needs to be building smarter and greener if we want to reduce our energy consumption. There are only LEED certifications for buildings, New Jersey extend a certification program for residential units too. Our buildings, schools, homes, and neighborhoods should be at the platinum level for LEED certification. BPU must also mandate all buildings, their appliances, lighting, and equipment to be Energy Star Certified at the Zero Energy Ready Home Tier 3 level.
- We need to help weatherize people's homes by air sealing, improving ventilation, or adding insulation.

### **Smart Growth**

- We oppose expansion of highways, including new roads and additional lanes to existing roads, which research has shown leads to increased vehicle travel rather than reducing congestion. Instead, we support transit-oriented development, with expansion of public transportation options, and improved access to pedestrian walkways and bike lanes. The only way to reduce road congestion is to provide attractive non-automobile options for many trips.
- Smart Growth transportation policies and practices concentrate growth around Metro stations and other transportation hubs, promote public transport, and provide the infrastructure that makes biking and walking convenient and safe. When appropriately enacted, Smart Growth policies can create more livable neighborhoods, reduce air and water pollution, preserve open space, foster economic growth, and mitigate climate change.
- **Expanding Trails & Parks**
  - Our parks have reached capacity during this pandemic which shows how much people love our parks, but the need for funding, fixing, and expanding.
  - The shortage of park capacity shows that we need to create more parks, we need to invest in urban parks and fix current state parks in urban places.
  - We need to have more facilities for people in New Jersey that the state has cut back on.
  - New Jersey has not built a new park in decades or a new swimming area since 1981
- **Agriculture | Addressing Food Insecurity**



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- According to the USDA, almost 298,000 New Jersey residents have limited access to a supermarket or grocery store live within what are considered the state's 134 food deserts. 21 of those are in Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland counties combined.
  - It is important that we move forward on eliminating these food deserts by growing local crops and hydroponic farms in urban areas.
  - New Jersey must enhance protections for farmworkers, such as providing them health care, proper running water, sanitary conditions for food processors during coronavirus, and more.

**Addressing Toxic Homes and Communities:**

- New Jersey needs to make sure that hazardous sites are still being cleaned up, lead in our water is being removed, and sewage waste is properly managed.
- We need to get the lead out of schools, upgrade water treatment plants, upgrade our sewer plants, and deal with Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO).
- We need funding for programs that protect our food, our air, our water, and help clean up toxic sites across the state.
- DEP need to get rid of former Governor Christie's rollbacks and strengthen their enforcement to make sure our environment and our public health is protected. This is especially important because EPA's memorandum to suspend enforcement of environmental laws is still in place.
- **Lead:**
  - We have a serious problem with lead in New Jersey that we have been dealing with this problem for far too long. Some places in the state are at crisis level, especially in areas that are poorer and urban. Our children are being poisoned by lead in the water. It is important for the public to know what's happening when it comes to lead in our drinking water systems. We need to protect our most precious resources – our families
  - We need to move forward on solutions to find lead in homes and stop children from being exposed to it in the first place.
  - We need a long-term solution that will help remove lead from our schools and especially the older homes.

**Jobs**

Rebuilding our economy can be done in an equitable way that supports public health and our environment. Sierra Club came out with a national report showing how the U.S. can create jobs while promoting clean air and water, healthier communities, and greater equity. We can do this in NJ too. We can create jobs and stimulate the economy by encouraging research and development, manufacturing, and installation of renewable energy and electric vehicles



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**According to Sierra Club's report**, the 9 million jobs per year can be created nationwide. NJ can get a substantial share of these jobs:

- 4.6 million jobs per year to upgrade our infrastructure for clean water, clean transportation, and clean energy;
- 3.2 million jobs per year to expand renewable energy;
- Over 700,000 jobs per year to increase energy efficiency; and
- Over 500,000 jobs per year to restore our lands and invest in regenerative agriculture.

While putting people back to work, this plan also would put the U.S. on a path to climate sanity by enabling a 45 percent reduction in our climate pollution by 2030.

- To bolster our transition to a **100% clean energy economy**, stimulus investments could help many of the [600,000 unemployed clean energy workers](#) get their jobs back, while [over 190,000 unemployed oil and gas workers](#) could be employed each year to close orphaned oil and gas wells.
- A program to exchange gas guzzlers for **affordable, clean electric vehicles** would yield [over 635,000 jobs](#) each year – nearly the entire population of Detroit – including [over 77,000 good manufacturing jobs](#) to produce the vehicles and components.
- [Nearly 400,000 workers](#) could be employed annually to **upgrade every public housing unit, school, hospital, and municipal building** in the nation to support healthier living conditions, lower energy bills, and reduced pollution.
- [Over 350,000 workers](#) could be employed each year to replace lead pipes and secure **clean drinking water**.
- [Over 225,000 people](#) could be employed each year to **protect our wetlands and forests and shield communities from toxic pollution** by restoring depleted ecosystems and polluted Superfund, Brownfield, and coal mine sites

Sierra Club came out with a [national report](#) showing how the U.S. can create jobs while promoting clean air and water, healthier communities, and greater equity. A new economic analysis from the Political Economy Research Institute reveals the path forward – with a bold stimulus plan, we could provide family-sustaining jobs on a national level for over 9 million people every year for the next 10 years while building an economy that fosters cleaner air and water, higher wages, healthier communities, greater equity, and a more stable climate. That includes supporting over 1 million manufacturing jobs each year. New Jersey can generate a part of that job growth based on our population. New Jersey used to have over 11,000 clean energy jobs but is now at 6,000. We need to move forward in investing in renewable energy, energy efficiency and clean transportation.

We need to support the clean energy industry (Labor Department data show 106,000 clean energy workers lost their jobs in March alone; other projections estimate 500,000 more jobs lost in the coming months) by providing: refundability of existing tax credits (direct pay or 1603 grants) for renewable energy; extensions of the commence construction and safe harbor deadlines by 18 months; and \$41.5



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billion over five years to fund extensions of clean energy tax credits for solar, on and offshore wind, storage, electric vehicles, and energy efficiency.

The Sierra Club has already [conveyed our priorities](#) for a CARES 2.0 package to bridge outstanding gaps in critical, immediate relief and to equitably protect workers, communities, and our democracy.

### **Cross-cutting Environmental, Labor, and Equity Standards**

All infrastructure investments should uphold these core environmental, labor, and equity standards:

- **Climate and Environment:**
  - Investments in infrastructure should meet a baseline climate and environmental test. To qualify for funding, projects should demonstrate that their use will support reduced greenhouse gases, reduced toxic pollution, and/or increased climate resilience.
  - The materials and parts used should be subject to Buy Clean standards that reduce industrial pollution, climate resilience standards, and energy efficiency standards (as applicable).
  - All construction and related contracts should include requirements to use climate-resilient designs for infrastructure and low-emissions operations.
- **Labor:**
  - All construction and related contracts should include requirements for Davis Bacon prevailing wages, project labor agreements, a neutrality policy on collective bargaining, and use of registered apprenticeship programs; in addition to preferences for local hire, community-based businesses, and worker cooperatives.
  - The materials and parts used should be subject to Buy America and other domestic content policies to support manufacturing job creation.
- **Equity:**
  - At least 40 percent of infrastructure spending should be invested in low-income communities, communities of color, and communities facing disproportionate impacts from the COVID-19 crisis and/or climate change.
  - The share of infrastructure funding that goes to the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and all U.S. territories should be at least proportional to the population of these jurisdictions.
  - All construction and related contracts should require community benefit agreements; a mandatory “ban the box” policy to ensure fair employment opportunities for all; hiring preferences for low-income workers, people of color, people with disabilities, and returning citizens; and contracting preferences for businesses led by women and people of color.
  - All jobs created should be accessible to undocumented immigrants and paired with a moratorium on deportations and a path to citizenship for those workers.
  - On the manufacturing side, we need jobs and job training for workers who have lost their jobs. There needs to be a just transition from fossil fuels to a green economy. We



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need to bring manufacturing in renewable energy for solar panels, wind, and other energy efficiency forms of renewable, as well as medical and supply chains.

- More people are going outside to bike, walk, and enjoy nature. We should build on this sense of community by creating more public green spaces like urban parks and bike trails. During the pandemic people have become more involved in community and helping others. We can expand upon that with community service programs, especially if we get federal funds. Programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps Camps, AmeriCorps and VISTA would help get young people involved in healthcare, education, and helping the less fortunate.
  - **Affordable Housing-** The state should also **address affordable housing**. New Jersey has a need for about .5 million use for affordable housing
- **Addressing racial disparities:** Collect and publish demographic data to accurately determine the level of coronavirus impacts on under-served communities and communities of color, and direct needed resources to them immediately. In Michigan and Illinois — two of the earliest states to produce such data — African Americans account for about a third of coronavirus cases and about 40 percent of deaths, even though that demographic only makes up 15 and 14 percent, respectively, of the states' total populations. In addition, vaccine research should take into account the virus's reportedly disproportionate impact on men.

#### **Appropriate Permitting and Environmental Review**

- We are against fast tracking permits and taking advantage of virtual electronic procedures. There are major projects that can have devastating impacts to wetland and environmentally sensitive areas, such as the Turnpike Widening project.
- In 2004, The Fast Track Law has been pushed through the same entities now and before. It violates the Clean Water Act and Memorandum of Agreement and should not be used to recover from the pandemic and turn New Jersey's environmental reviews to the Trump Administration.
- There have always been ways to weaken standards without proper environmental review, public input or public scrutiny even more so now since New Jersey has not updated rules dealing with pollution, especially in Environmental Justice and overburdened communities.
- There are ways of the permitting process to make things more transparent in a timely fashion. Moving to electronic permitting is good as long as the public has access to portals and information.
- We need to modernize the permitting system to include real environmental analysis on projects and avoid impacts. We also need our permits to deal with climate change, sea level rise, chronic flooding, and communities who are overburdened with a disproportionate amount of pollution.



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### Getting Rid of Governor Murphy's EO's

- New Jersey's blueprint for re-opening should get rid of Murphy's EO's that block public participation for major state and local projects.
- EO 136 pauses or delays timeframes governing the DEP's provision of public notice, review, and decisions on permits and other approvals for the duration of the public health emergency, including those which would deem applications approved without conditions deemed necessary by DEP to ensure protection of public health, safety, and the environment.
  - DEP has evoked a Grace Period for reporting on enforcement for air, water, land use, and solid waste pollution.
  - This means that they don't have to report how much pollution they're emitting, and there is no penalty if they violate environmental standards.
  - Without enforcement and oversight, there will be more pollution. This is like removing the environmental cop from the beat, resulting in more accidents, spills, and environmental violations

As the Murphy Administration the Restart and Recovery Commission move forward on re-opening from lockdown, we need to make sure that it is in the best interest of the public and the environment. We need to make sure our water is clean to drink, our air is clean to breathe in, and our food is safe to eat. These are the necessities of making sure our environment and our health is maintained safe for now and for the future. After we get through this pandemic and health emergency, we need to prepare for climate change. If we can act now, we still have time to help reduce impacts of climate change and help New Jersey become fairer, equitable, and greener for all.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (609) 558-9100.

Sincerely,

Jeff Tittel, Director  
NJ Sierra Club