

MAKE THE ROAD NEW JERSEY



RESPECT AND DIGNITY

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FEBRUARY 2021

Make the Road New Jersey Respect and Dignity Platform

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About Us: Make the Road New Jersey (MRNJ) builds the power of immigrant and working-class communities of color to achieve dignity and respect through community organizing, the provision of high quality legal and support services, transformative education and policy innovation. Founded in late 2014, MRNJ operates three community organizing and services hubs in Elizabeth, Passaic and Perth Amboy, serving thousands of families each year. Nearly 2,000 individuals have become dues paying members of the organization and have won nine state level policy campaigns since the organization began. This includes expanding access to financial aid, drivers licenses and occupational licenses to undocumented immigrants, winning the nation's first guaranteed paid severance law, landmark worker safety protections during the pandemic, anti-wage theft legislation and a \$15 minimum wage hike that includes youth workers, and the state's first sanctuary law and deportation defense legal representation program. MRNJ has also led campaigns to urge New Jersey members of Congress to defund ICE and protect the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, pressured 9 banks (and the state of New Jersey) to divest from private immigration detention and participated in successful litigation to remove the citizenship question from the US census and ensure undocumented residents were counted in the 2020 US census.

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Platform for Respect and Dignity

To put immigrant and working-class people of color on track to thrive and to rebuild a stronger Garden State where everyone can put down roots and succeed, Make the Road New Jersey sets forth the following platform of local, state and federal initiatives. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on our state and country, and nowhere has the loss of life and economic collapse been felt more acutely than with working-class and poor people of color and immigrants. The pandemic caps off a decade of worsening economic inequality nationwide and at home in New Jersey. Even before the pandemic, Black and Latinx New Jerseyans were three times more likely to live in poverty than their white neighbors and about half as likely to own a home.¹ In New Jersey before the pandemic, white families had the highest median net worth in the country -- \$352,000, while New Jersey's Black and Latinx families had a median net worth of \$6,100 and \$7,300 respectively.² During the pandemic, Black and Latinx New Jerseyans' hospitalization and mortality rates are twice as high as their white counterparts, and they have had the highest job loss.³ Our state has sheltered in place on the backs of essential workers, who have completed critical work under precarious and unsafe working conditions and substandard wages. Immigrant New Jerseyans that are out of status and their families have yet to receive a penny in unemployment or stimulus aid. At the same time, the state's ten billionaires' net worth increased a staggering \$1.77 billion during the first 5 months of the pandemic and many of the states' largest corporations are thriving.⁴ As the state recovers, bold and transformative measures are necessary to prevent the worst racial and economic inequality in a century.

At the same time, New Jersey Black and Latinx residents have been subject to attacks from local police and federal law enforcement leading to family separation, loss of life and liberty, and deep mistrust in government. New Jersey's nearly one million non-citizens and their family members have been threatened with raids, detention and permanent family separation over the past four years, causing deep fear and permanent damage to our communities.⁵ According to data from the Office of Civil Rights, Black youth are more likely than white classmates to be referred to the criminal justice system during the school day by school safety officers.⁶ As the federal government shifts to repair our broken immigration system, there is an opportunity to repair the harm of the past four plus years and build a system that prioritizes family unity over separation and provides a pathway to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented immigrants. At home in New Jersey, we can end detention, invest in access to counsel, and stop the school to prison pipeline by diverting funds from school-based police to student supportive services.

Governor Phil Murphy's first term brought about seismic change in how our state regards immigrants, people of color and workers. Under the Murphy administration, New Jersey has implemented at least seven pro-immigrant policies, including expanding access to drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants, creating the state's first – and nation's second - publicly funded legal representation program for immigrant detainees, severely limiting the relationship between ICE and local law enforcement, expanding financial aid and occupational licenses to Dreamers and

¹ <https://www.njpp.org/publications/blog-category/census-2019-poverty-in-new-jersey-remains-higher-than-pre-recession-levels/>; home ownership rates: <https://nahrep.org/downloads/2019-state-of-hispanic-homeownership-report.pdf>; <https://www.njfuture.org/research-reports/the-black-white-homeownership-gap-in-new-jersey/>

² https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/njsj/pages/689/attachments/original/1588358478/Erasing_New_Jersey's_Red_Lines_Final.pdf?1588358478

³ <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/unprecedented-and-unequal-racial-inequities-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>; <https://www.epi.org/indicators/state-unemployment-race-ethnicity/>

⁴ [For the Many - ATF - CPD NJ Pandemic Profiteers Brief August 2020 FINAL.pdf](#) (populardemocracy.org)

⁵ [More ICE arrests of immigrants coming to NJ](#) (northjersey.com)

⁶ [2017–18 Civil Rights Data Collection – School Form \(PDF\)](#) (ed.gov)

undocumented immigrants, divesting from private detention centers and establishing an Office of New Americans. Workers now can count on basic labor standards that were sorely lacking for generations: paid sick days, graduated increase to \$15 minimum wage, the first in the nation guaranteed severance pay, the strongest anti-wage theft laws in the country and an enforceable set of workplace safety protections for workers during the pandemic. New Jersey has also expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit for working families while increasing taxation on millionaires and corporations.

Still, this progress towards building a state where everyone can thrive will be obliterated by the sharp racial and economic inequities exacerbated by the pandemic unless the Garden State takes significant action now. Similarly, our federal government must take swift action to reverse the Trump administration's evisceration of worker protections and immigrant rights.

In response, we propose the following federal, state, and local policy solutions to improve the lives of millions of New Jerseyans and put our state on a pathway to equity, recovery, and justice. These recommendations are based on extensive discussions, focus groups and participatory meetings with immigrant and working-class adult and youth members of Make the Road New Jersey. They represent the collective vision of our membership and a pathway forward for New Jersey.

Recovery for All: COVID Aid for Undocumented Immigrants and Excluded Workers

New Jersey's nearly half-million undocumented immigrants are left behind by virtually every form of COVID aid at the state and federal level, creating deep pain, economic insecurity, and health risks for themselves and the 264,000 U.S. citizens in New Jersey with an undocumented family member. Despite paying \$600 million in state and local taxes, \$1.2 billion in annual federal taxes and, over the past ten years over 1 billion into the state's unemployment coffers, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for unemployment, pandemic unemployment, stimulus payments, TANF, health care, food stamps and most other safety net aid. MRNJ's surveys of 225 immigrant families found that more than 80% were unable to pay for basic food, medicine or bills and more than one-quarter owed more than 4 months of rent. At the same time, the state's billionaires are wealthier now than in March 2020 and major corporations like Amazon have grown significantly in the Garden State while failing to provide health care for its workforce.

Proposals

- **Federal:** The Biden administration and Congress must: make COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccine free and available to everyone, regardless of immigration status; include immigrant families in all COVID-19 relief measures, including in cash payments and expanded, pandemic unemployment insurance and any other health and economic relief policies. The federal government should extend \$2,000 monthly pandemic relief stimulus payments to all families.
- **State:** New Jersey must create a pandemic relief fund for excluded workers and their families. This fund should provide \$600 weekly payments to unemployed workers that are excluded from unemployment insurance due to their immigration status and stimulus-like payments for those individuals and families left behind from the CARES Act and other stimulus aid. This fund should be financed through remaining federal aid dollars and through a tax on the wealthiest New Jerseyans and corporations that are thriving during the pandemic.
- **Local:** Every county in New Jersey should clarify that emergency rental assistance funds are available to all individuals regardless of immigration status and should create independent funds for workers and their families left behind by aid. Counties should also ensure equitable access to COVID tests and vaccines.

Respect & Dignity for Immigrants

After decades of a punishment-only approach to immigration and four years of aggressive, relentless attacks, immigrant communities need bold, transformative action from the incoming administration, a pathway to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants and an end to the ICE enforcement tactics that separate families and tear apart our communities, including an end to detention. At the state level, New Jersey must continue leading the way by providing legal representation for immigrants under deportation proceedings and ending the pipeline to deportation through our criminal justice system.

Proposals

➤ **Federal:**

- **Pass legislation that would provide an inclusive and swift pathway to citizenship for all (The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021):** An estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants live precariously in the United States, at constant risk of being separated from their families and communities and at a disproportionate risk of experiencing labor and other exploitation. The negative effects of this precarity reverberate throughout entire communities, whose economic and social fabric is torn by deportations. Congress must swiftly enact a comprehensive reform of our immigration laws to provide a pathway to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented immigrants without further militarizing our border. Senator Bob Menendez' US Citizenship Act of 2021 would provide this pathway. While we fight for the pathway to citizenship for all 11 million immigrants, Congress should not delay in legalizing essential workers, Dreamers and TPS holders through the reconciliation process.
- **End Cruel ICE Enforcement (the New Way Forward Act):** the Biden administration must take steps to end deportations and detentions and to dismantle ICE's inhumane and harmful approach to enforcement. Concretely, the Biden administration and Congress must end family detention and private detention, cut the ICE/CBP budget dramatically, investigate immigration enforcement abuses and reform our system from a punishment-based approach to a compliance-based approach. Congress should pass the New Way Forward Act to dismantle the prison-to-deportation pipeline and repeal anti-immigrant laws that have fueled the criminalization, detention, and deportation of immigrants for decades.

➤ **State/Local:**

- **End Immigration Detention:** Here in New Jersey, there are four facilities that hold ICE detainees and ICE is currently seeking to expand capacity in New Jersey. Counties currently contracting with ICE to detain immigrants, including Bergen, Essex and Hudson County, should cut their contracts immediately. In addition, the state of New Jersey should take steps to end detention contracts by passing **legislation A5207/S3361** to end new public and private detention agreements and the renewal or expansion of current detention agreements in New Jersey.
- **End the harsh consequences of convictions on immigrants by reforming the state penal code, removing carveouts from the Immigrant Trust Directive and setting up a Pardon Panel.** Because of the way the New Jersey criminal code is written, even minor state convictions can trigger automatic deportation. For example, for some low-level crimes, like shoplifting, even a green card holder could be deported simply because the charge carries a

possible sentence of more than one year. The Legislature should set up a commission to review the criminal code and make minor changes that would serve law enforcement objectives while minimizing the unintended, harsh consequences of minor criminal convictions. The Governor should also direct the Attorney General to eliminate criminal carve-outs in the Immigrant Trust Directive that continue to enmesh local law enforcement with ICE. The Governor can also use his or her Constitutional authority to set up a pardon board to pardon the state criminal convictions of individuals facing serious immigration consequences due to their criminal record. Former Maryland Governor Robert Erlich and former New York Governor David Paterson made frequent use of their pardon power to vacate old or minor criminal convictions for lawfully residing immigrants.

- **Fully Fund the Universal Legal Representation Program:** In 2018 New Jersey took the groundbreaking step of creating the Detention and Deportation Defense Initiative (DDDI), a legal representation program that offers free and expert counsel to low-income individuals who are detained and facing deportation in New Jersey. In its first year, the program provided assistance and conducted interviews with 1,532 detainees and opened 857 new cases. More than half (52 percent) of immigrants who were represented by a DDDI attorney were released from detention. In comparison, only 17.6 percent of all immigrants facing deportation without representation in New Jersey were released from detention.⁷ In FY2022, New Jersey should fully fund the DDDI to provide assistance to every individual detained and facing deportation. Previous estimates find that the program costs \$15 million to provide representation to all detainees with an immigration case appearing before a New Jersey immigration court. As detainee numbers decline, the state is poised to provide aid to every individual detained, thereby increasing due process for all and maintaining family unity.
- **Ensure Limited English Proficient Individuals have access to an interpreter and adequate translation** in every government office, hospital, pharmacy, clinic and school by passing legislation to require interpretation in every major language in public facilities, pharmacies and health care providers.
- **DACA Legal Assistance and Fee Fund:** in New Jersey, 53,000 individuals are eligible for DACA but the majority do not currently have status due to barriers, including the high cost of the fee (\$495 to apply and to renew every two years), lack of legal representation and fears about interacting with federal immigration services. Once a DACA recipient renews and is deemed eligible, they may access employment authorization for two years and obtain relief from deportation during that time. As the program reopens, New Jersey state government and municipalities should start a DACA legal assistance program through trusted non-profit providers and should create a DACA fee fund to ensure every low-income DACA-eligible individual in the Garden State is able to apply for or renew their status. The current legal service providers cannot meet the overwhelming need for assistance for individuals in DACA applications and renewals. In addition, New Jersey's Office of New Americans (ONA) should create a program to train DACA navigators and legal service providers to aid individuals in applying and collecting the thirteen plus years of documentation required to apply.

⁷ [Report: Findings from New Jersey's Detention and Deportation Defense Initiative Year 1 - Make the Road New Jersey \(maketheroadnj.org\)](https://maketheroadnj.org)

- **Putting New Jersey Residents on a Pathway to Citizenship:** Approximately 346,000 Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) are eligible for citizenship in New Jersey but have not yet naturalized. Naturalization provides better access to jobs, benefits and increased political participation for immigrants. Increasing the number of citizens in our state also benefits our economy and our democracy. Many of the residents who have not yet naturalized are eligible to be naturalized but do not have the means or time to navigate this complicated process. Cities, counties and ONA should create a citizenship program to fund citizenship services statewide to ensure that more New Jerseyans are able to naturalize. To start, New Jersey's ONA should invest \$2 million dollars in citizenship services to meet the needs of 10% of the eligible population.
- **Invest in Adult Education:** in New Jersey, historic lack of State funding for adult education, in particular ESOL, and job training that is not tied to immigration status or work authorization, means that New Jersey's vast immigrant population has not received sufficient services to support their ability to thrive in the Garden State. According to the State Council for Adult Literacy and Educational Services, 14% (1,231,000) of adults in New Jersey report speaking English less than very well. State funding has dramatically decreased over the past ten years for adult education, and as a result, adult education programs through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II programs served 35,374 in FY 2007 and only 16,702 in FY2017. In FY2018, the New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning calculated that it would have required \$649 million in funding to return to serving adult learners at FY2007 levels, but since that time there have been additional cuts. New Jersey must restore full funding to the WIOA program and provide State dollars for ESOL programs to ensure that individuals without work authorization are eligible to obtain these critical services.
- **Expand Professional and Job Training Opportunities for Immigrants:** Changes in state law have removed key immigration status requirements from professional licensure in New Jersey, expanding opportunities for hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans to pursue a profession and contribute to the state. In order to ensure more individuals are able to obtain licensure and support our state, New Jersey's ONA, in partnership with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, should create a fellowship to permit noncitizens to obtain training through alternative arrangements to employment, including apprenticeship programs, community college, and certificate training programs for different licenses. Many noncitizens lack employment authorization documents (EAD), but are still capable of completing licensing requirements and are legally able to work in many professions as independent contractors or by starting their own limited liability companies, which do not require EADs once they complete their training.

Worker Safety and Workplace Justice

More than 50 million workers have risked their lives across the country working in public-facing essential jobs during the pandemic. The majority earn less than \$15 per hour, according to a study by the Congressional Budget Office. Black and Brown workers are disproportionately represented in frontline jobs. A recent National Employment Law Project study found that these workers are more likely to be in dangerous conditions, less likely to be listened to, and more likely to be retaliated against.

New Jersey is home to a substantial essential workforce employed in the logistics and staffing sectors. In New Jersey, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that there are approximately 127,000 workers employed by staffing agencies. These temp agencies serve the logistics industry corridor up and down I-95, unpacking goods shipped to the ports and repackaging them to be sent to consumers up and down the east coast. They are notoriously rife with unsafe working conditions and exploitative labor practices. During the pandemic, temp workers have been essential -- making sure that New Jerseyans sheltering at home could receive necessary goods and food. Yet these workers have been disproportionately impacted by the virus and lack health insurance, decent wages or a voice on the job. Despite thousands of complaints, OSHA only investigated and cited a handful of NJ private-sector employers ([most of which were nursing homes or hospitals](#)) for unsafe working conditions. Since Gov. Murphy's EO 192 went into effect on November 5, the New Jersey Department of Labor [has received more than two thousand complaints from workers, 60% of which were submitted anonymously](#), highlighting the lack of job protections and dangerous health and safety working conditions many workers face. Working conditions across the state have undoubtedly improved for most since the enactment of this executive order; however, the most vulnerable, particularly temp agency workers and undocumented workers, face retaliation for speaking up.

Proposals

➤ **Federal:**

- **Pass the Raise the Wage Act of 2020:** It's been over 11 years since the United States has raised the minimum wage – the longest period our country has gone without raising the minimum wage since the minimum wage was created in 1938. The Raise the Wage Act would raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025 and eliminate the racist tipped minimum wage. Congress should pass this immediately as an essential piece of recovering from the pandemic.
- **Pass the Essential Workers Bill of Rights:** The pandemic has meant that our society has finally recognized that tens of millions of low-paid workers are essential to the nation but refuses to protect them, pay them, or give them a voice in our economy. To remedy this, Congress must pass the Essential Workers Bill of Rights (Warren/Khanna) to provide essential pay for essential workers, expand OSHA safety protections, protect collective bargaining rights and enhance whistleblower protections and provide universal paid leave and childcare for essential workers.
- **Pass the PRO Act:** As wealth becomes even more highly concentrated among a handful of uberwealthy CEOs and corporations and unionization rates fall to historic lows, workers need a voice and opportunity to build power on the job to rectify the worst income inequality in generations. H. R. 2474 would make significant changes to the NLRA to protect workers' rights to organize and help rebuild an economy where all can thrive.

➤ **State/Local:**

- **Pass the Worker Pandemic Protections Plan:** To keep our economy moving forward and the pandemic at bay, every worker must be safe. The state must have proper enforcement mechanisms for workers to report unsafe workplace conditions or violations of their rights, without risk of retaliation. Workers who are unable to work safely or who become sick or exposed must also be able to stop working and have access to paid leave or unemployment. Make the Road New Jersey endorses the following legislation:
 - **Emergency Paid Sick Days (S2453/A4209):** New Jersey workers are only guaranteed 5 paid sick days despite the fact that CDC recommends at least 14 days quarantine after COVID exposure. S2453/A4209 provides essential workers with 15 emergency paid sick days available immediately during a declared state of emergency and further expands paid sick law.
 - **Right to Refuse Unsafe Work (A4268):** Currently, workers lack basic job protections if they refuse unsafe working conditions. A4268 would permit essential workers, during any public health emergency, to refuse to work if an employer has not met specific baseline measures to prevent exposure to a communicable disease or other health or safety hazards. An employee's reasonable refusal to work will continue to be paid by the employer for the hours that they would have been working until conditions are remedied.
 - **Good Cause/Right to First Refusal (S2454/A4153):** Workers are often barred from Unemployment Insurance benefits if they voluntarily leave work unless for reasons defined as good cause attributable to the work. In some cases, a worker can quit because working conditions are unsafe, unhealthful, or dangerous and attempt to receive unemployment, but that process can be very difficult and burdensome. This bill provides important clarification around good cause when a worker has high vulnerability to adverse health impacts, and includes when the health of a loved one is at risk because of hazardous workplace conditions. Furthermore, this bill would also require that laid off employees during the current state of emergency are given the right of first refusal for any positions for which they are qualified.
 - **Farm Worker Epidemic Health and Safety Act (S2602/A4404):** The NJ Department of Health has classified farmworkers in New Jersey as a highly vulnerable population that makes COVID-19 testing and other health services a high priority. Yet many farms have stopped medical care workers from coming in to test workers. This bill will help ensure that employers cooperate with the recommended pandemic health and safety guidelines and require testing and health education for farm workers.
- **Fair Scheduling- Pass the New Jersey Fair Work Week Act (S921/A2458):** Today's workweek is a source of economic instability for New Jersey's workers, in particular workers of color, mothers, and workers in the logistics, retail and hospitality industries. Enabled by workforce management technologies, employers change shifts at the last minute or send workers home early without compensation. Legislation (S921/A2458) proposed by Senator Weinberg and Assemblywoman Timberlake would protect working families by ensuring stable and predictable work hours, opportunities to work more, healthier workweeks with adequate rest, and a greater voice in when and how much they work.
- **Just Cause:** As essential workers risk their lives to keep our economy moving and permit millions to shelter in place during the worst months of the pandemic, they still risk being

fired for speaking up on workplace rights. Our current at-will form of employment permits employers to fire workers for almost any reason. Current laws on the books do not provide sufficient protection for workers to feel safe exercising their rights to employment that is safe and with dignity. Moving from an at-will employment regime to a just-cause framework would help better protect workers from retaliation for exercising their rights, would ensure that layoffs for bona fide economic reasons are well documented to prevent abuse and would provide strong remedies and a mechanism for quick reinstatement in the event of retaliation. Philadelphia and New York City recently passed measures to instate just cause employment for sectors rife with retaliation, including fast food and parking lot attendants.

- **Increasing Sectoral Wages Beyond \$15 through Wage Boards and Sectoral Bargaining Rights:** as unionization rates decline in New Jersey and wealth inequality heightens throughout the pandemic, we need a new approach to organizing and bargaining. Workplace by workplace (or firm based) negotiating does not allow workers sufficient power across an industry to negotiate standards that will provide them with respect, dignity, and safety on the job. Instead, employers undercut each other in a race to the bottom that results in low-wages and benefits. Sectoral bargaining would permit workers to engage in collective bargaining across entire industries, not just within individual firms. New Jersey should create a state commission, subject to oversight by the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development, to bargain enforceable standards that would apply across sectors in those states or localities. The commission should start in industries rife with workplace exploitation such as the logistics sector. One step towards building sectoral bargaining rights is for the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development to establish wage boards, permitted under New Jersey state law to set wages for specific industries or sectors where a substantial number of employees are receiving less than a fair rate. The wage boards convene representatives from labor, the state and employers in the sector and hold public hearings to hear testimony. Wage boards could be convened for sectors with essential workers that are earning substandard wages, or in the logistics sector, where temp workers earn subminimum wages. The wage board process in New Jersey's wage and hour regulations provides a mechanism for sector-based tri-partied collective bargaining, bringing together labor representatives, employers and the state to agree upon fair wage standards in a given occupation.

Stop Amazon's Abuses

Amazon is now the largest employer in New Jersey. Throughout the pandemic, Amazon's profits have skyrocketed, while workers report unsafe conditions. A majority of frontline workers at Amazon in New Jersey receive public health insurance because the employer – one of the richest corporations in the world – does not provide health insurance. As of last Fall, more than 19,000 Amazon workers have tested positive for COVID across the country. Workers have been fired after raising concerns about healthy workplaces. At the same time, more Amazon facilities in New Jersey means more trucks in our neighborhoods, more pollution, more health harms (e.g. asthma) for both workers and local residents.

Amazon is also one of the world's most dangerous monopolies. Their control over markets and technology threaten our democracy. More than half of all online retail spending is captured by Amazon's platform, and 55% of all product searches online start on Amazon. It is the third-largest digital advertising platform in the United States. Amazon leverages its dominance in search, advertising, and online retail to act as a gatekeeper for anyone hoping to bring their goods to market online. Nearly accounting for one out of every two dollars spent online, Amazon's Marketplace has become an essential middleman between buyers and sellers that few companies can afford to anger or avoid.

Amazon is building a surveillance state. Amazon Ring has partnership agreements with 400 police departments around the country – **including 75 municipalities in New Jersey** - that give law enforcement agencies special access to Ring camera locations and request surveillance camera video through Ring and its Neighbors app. Ring doorbells provide police departments with massive amounts of video surveillance footage. In response, we urge the following measures to stop Amazon's abuses.

Proposals

➤ **Federal:**

- **Pass anti-monopoly legislation based on the House Judiciary Anti-Trust Committee recommendations** to break up big tech, strengthen current anti-trust laws and enhance enforcement of anti-trust laws.

➤ **State:**

- The New Jersey Attorney General can take action now to protect workers, investigate Amazon's potential violations of anti-trust laws and maintain customer and workers' privacy. Potential investigations include: Amazon's competition against its own merchants: An investigation could provide important details on the anticompetitive impacts of Amazon's vertical integration. Investigate Partnerships between Ring and local police departments to ensure civil rights, evaluating potentially deceptive advertising on public safety benefits of Ring and Rekognition. Investigate Amazon's consumer privacy practices, including the scraping of consumer biometric data for use in AI development.

➤ **Local:**

- The 75 localities across New Jersey that contract with Ring put their residents' privacy and liberty at risk. These localities should immediately cut ties with Ring.

Ending the School to Prison Pipeline

In New Jersey, students of color, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families attend schools with excessive, highly-paid guard forces but inadequate support staff. Analysis completed for Make the Road New Jersey by New York University Wagner School of recently-released federal Civil Rights Data Collection reports reveal 4,517 Latinx students, 3,209 Black students, and only 1,596 white students in New Jersey attend a school with guard(s), but no nurse. Meanwhile, New Jersey approved [\\$286,961,178 in categorical security school aid](#) to districts across the state in FY2021—the bulk of which is poured into security-guard salaries that far outweigh districts’ spending on nurses, social workers, counselors, or even kindergarten teachers.

Overpolicing in the schools results in racially disparate outcomes and creates a school to prison pipeline in New Jersey. While the data is incomplete, of the cases New Jersey reported to the federal government last year, the state reported 664 school-related arrests to the Office of Civil Rights. Of these, 31% were of Latinx students (several points above their 27% proportion of overall enrollment), and 29% were of Black students (despite the fact that Black students comprise only 15% of New Jersey’s student body). Black students, and particularly Black boys, were referred to law enforcement at significantly higher rates than white students. Nearly one-third of all reported referrals in New Jersey were of Black youth, who account for only 15% of the student population.

Proposals

➤ **Federal:**

- **Repeal the '94 Crime Bill and close the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program:** this program funds school resource officers (SROs) - placing law enforcement in schools makes it more likely that students of color will be arrested for low-level offenses.
- **Pass the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act** to prohibit the use of federal funds for maintaining and growing police presence in schools and establish a \$2.5 billion grant program to support schools that choose to invest in counselors, nurses, mental health professionals and trauma-informed staff.
- **Fully fund Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA)** and provide state and local governments with sufficient funding for K-12 public education to prevent education budget cuts and address the state and local funding shortfalls caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

➤ **State:**

- **The state legislature should pass a law to redefine New Jersey’s hundreds of millions of dollars in annual “categorical security aid” to prioritize student supports instead of guard salaries.** Threat prevention, abuse prevention, counseling, after-school enrichment programs, nutrition support, college access — all of these resources increase student security and decrease school threat level by building better outcomes for students themselves.
- **The New Jersey state legislature should strengthen public reporting requirements, particularly regarding security spending and use of force on students.** New Jersey must protect *all students*, not just by encouraging more detailed and publicly-accessible school data collection, but also through creating real and consistently enforced consequences for *failure* to report mandatory disciplinary and financial information.

➤ **Local:**

- **End contracts with school security guards/SROs and arrests, referrals to law enforcement, and exclusionary or violent disciplinary practices** for common youth and adolescent behaviors, while providing staff and teacher training in evidence-based alternative methodology.
- **Encourage schools to implement restorative, trauma-informed approaches to student discipline.** Evidence from across the nation shows that schools who institute peer mediation, trauma training for staff, access to counseling for at-risk students, and non-exclusionary consequences for misbehavior consistently see an increase in student safety along physical, mental, and emotional measures.

Preserve Our Democracy

Allow All New Jersey Residents to Vote in Local and State Elections: Approximately 800,000 - or one in every eight - New Jersey residents are ineligible to vote due to their immigration status. This significant disenfranchisement impacts fair representation in our state. Cities across the country have passed or proposed laws allowing non-citizen voting in local elections. Nine municipalities in Maryland permit non-citizen voting in local elections; Tacoma Park, MD has allowed non-citizens to vote in local elections since 1992. An amendment to allow non-citizens to vote in school board elections passed in San Francisco, CA in 2016. New Jersey's constitution does not bar localities from creating their own voting requirements and expanding voting to non-citizens. Home rule permits localities broad discretion to create their own voting rights. New Jersey should take steps to allow any resident over the age of eighteen to vote in state elections, and should encourage localities to expand voting in local elections. All New Jersey residents should be granted the opportunity to vote for the leaders and policies that will most affect them, regardless of citizenship. New Jersey would benefit through increased political participation and activism.

Access to Health Care

Despite significant gains, the Census Bureau estimates that around 7.9% of individuals in New Jersey were uninsured in 2019. Racial disparities have increased, with about 343,000 Latinx residents uninsured in 2019, an increase of 7.5 percent in the uninsured rate from 2018. Immigrants make up a significant portion of the uninsured: undocumented immigrants are barred from public health insurance and individuals with Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) status are excluded from public health insurance for their first five years of status in New Jersey. By expanding health care for undocumented immigrants and Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) who do not qualify for Medicaid, New Jersey could improve the health and safety of its residents and decrease costly emergency room visits.

Proposals

➤ **Federal:**

- **End Exclusions of Immigrants from Public Health Insurance and the Affordable Care Act:** Congress must end deliberate and cruel exclusions of immigrants from Medicaid, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act by removing the five-year bar under PWRORA for lawfully residing immigrants and lifting additional exclusions of undocumented immigrants from obtaining Medicaid or purchasing insurance on state exchanges through the Affordable Care Act.
- **Pass the Medicare for All Act of 2021:** the Medicare for All Act of 2021 bills in the House and Senate would provide: comprehensive benefits and freedom of choice of doctors and hospitals for everyone residing in the United States, no private insurance premiums, co-pays, or deductibles, long-term services and supports for people with disabilities and older Americans, reduction of health care spending while improving care, reduction of the costs of prescription drugs, healthcare for veterans and Native Americans and a just transition for workers.

➤ **State:**

- **Expand Health Care Coverage to All Immigrants:** New Jersey should provide coverage to undocumented immigrants by passing legislation to cover all kids (S876) and expanding NJ FamilyCare to cover undocumented immigrants and all non-citizens.
- **Lift the Five Year Bar** to restore coverage so that LPRs – including children – do not have to wait five years to be eligible for Medicaid. Until 2010, New Jersey provided Medicaid coverage to all qualified LPRs.

Affordable Housing:

At a time of global health, climate, and housing affordability crisis, our country needs a visionary housing policy that will protect families from threatening displacement. We must also halt Wall Street speculation and corporate landlords' growing influence over the housing market; create truly affordable housing; and redress our federal government's history of institutionalized bias, putting us on a path towards greater racial, economic, and gender equity.

In New Jersey, more than a million renters are at risk of eviction. New Jersey must protect and expand its affordable housing stock. As housing prices skyrocket for renters in the cities where Make the Road New Jersey members reside, the state must step in to stabilize rents and expand the affordable housing stock. In addition, because federal and many state housing programs will continue to restrict access on the basis of immigration status, New Jersey must ensure that it creates housing programs that are funded directly by the state or other entities to ensure that immigrants do not face increased risks of eviction or homelessness. State and federal government should protect all low-income residents by taking these steps:

Proposals

➤ **Federal:**

- **Increase permanently affordable housing:** to truly meet our housing needs, the Biden administration must allocate \$3 trillion over ten years to build 12 million permanently affordable and green homes to fully meet our housing needs. On the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly as many renter households were already extremely cost-burdened, forced to spend the majority of their income on rent. Affordable housing must be targeted at extremely low-income households, and towards this end, affordability guidelines for low-income areas should be reformed to be based on neighborhood median income rather than AMI.
- **Rein in Wall Street landlords and speculation.** Since the 2008 foreclosure crisis, the largest corporate landlords and private equity have increased their holdings in the rental market, abetted by FHA policy. For too long, they have wreaked havoc on American families, fueling mass housing insecurity and driving up rents, stoking the affordability crisis that preceded and has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We call on the Biden-Harris administration to limit the power of the largest private equity landlords and curb increasing real estate speculation by creating transparency requirements for large corporate landlords; strengthening financial regulations against speculation; preventing the FHA from supporting predatory landlords; resourcing public banking as an alternative to for-profit Wall Street financing and establishing national anti-speculation and vacancy taxes.

➤ **State:**

- **Pass the People's Bill (A-4034/S-2340)** to prevent a tsunami of evictions in New Jersey once the pandemic ends and the eviction moratorium is lifted. The legislation would provide renters 6 months to repay each month of unpaid rent and require all arrears to be paid within 30 months.
- **Encourage the construction of new affordable housing** that can be accessible to all residents, including those that are undocumented and cannot apply for federal assistance programs.

- **Set up community land trusts** that will allow New Jersey localities to purchase foreclosed houses and turn them into affordable housing units that can be made available to all New Jersey residents.

➤ **Local:**

- **Strengthen rent-control laws** across New Jersey to ensure that all residents can find affordable housing options. As gentrification spreads across the cities where MRNJ members reside, it is critical for municipalities to step up their protections for renters.

Tax Justice

New Jersey has made significant strides towards tax equity in recent years. Taxes on the state's wealthiest residents and the renewed corporate tax surcharge on corporations that are thriving bring in significant income to the state. At the same time, New Jersey has put money back in the pockets of working families by expanding those eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the amount of the credit. Recent legislation expanded EITC eligibility to an additional 60,000 New Jersey residents by changing the minimum qualifying age for workers without qualifying children from 25 to 21 years of age. Additionally, the FY 2021 budget boosts the amount of the NJEITC to 40 percent of the federal credit, which will put an average of \$882 back into the pockets of qualifying taxpayers.

But more work is needed to stem unprecedented income inequality. As the state's wealthiest residents become even richer during the pandemic and the poorest residents experience extreme hardship, the tax code is one place that can support a more equitable recovery. Working families continue to pay more than their fair share in taxes. Undocumented immigrant tax filers pay \$1.2 billion in federal taxes and \$600 million in state and local taxes annually without receiving EITC or any public assistance. On the flip side, New Jersey just passed a controversial \$14.5 billion six-year corporate subsidies program to give corporations tax write offs. In order to ensure a just recovery, state and federal governments must prioritize tax fairness.

Proposals

➤ **Federal:**

- **Pass the Warren Wealth Tax:** As more and more Americans face devastating economic hardship during the pandemic, the American billionaires have instead increased their wealth by more than a trillion dollars. Legislation to be introduced in late February by Senator Elizabeth Warren would levy a two-cent tax on every dollar of individual wealth over \$50 million, with an additional tax on every dollar over \$1 billion. This commonsense solution will restore tax fairness in our country and ensure an equitable recovery.

➤ **State:**

- **Generate Robust Revenue by Taxing the Rich and Corporations that are Thriving:** New Jersey should pass inheritance and estate tax reform to ensure wealthiest New Jerseyans

are paying their fair share. New Jersey should also reform taxation of high-end goods and purchases, including creating additional thresholds for the “mansion” tax on high-cost property sales and ending the yacht sales tax cap. In addition, New Jersey must continue to tax corporations that are thriving in our state by closing additional corporate tax loopholes that allow large, multinational corporations to avoid taxation while benefitting from conducting business in the Garden State.

- **Expand and Strengthen the EITC and Create a Child Tax Credit:** pass A4229/S2194 to expand eligibility under New Jersey earned income tax credit program to allow taxpayers with Individual Tax Identification Numbers to qualify. The state should also increase the amount of the EITC, make it available to more adults by removing the age limits and lowering the threshold to 18 years old. New Jersey should also create a parallel state child tax credit to provide additional tax relief to working poor families.

Comprehensive Sex Education

Under current New Jersey state law, all sex education programs must stress abstinence, and any discussion of birth control and contraception must include failure rates. However, sexual health is broader than pregnancy and disease. A full discussion of sexual health needs to encompass subjects such as bonding and consent, what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships, and gender and sexual identity. And, while sex education is mandatory in New Jersey, the curriculum varies from district-to-district & teacher-to-teacher. Lastly, according to New Jersey’s Sex Education Report Card, many teachers report feeling underprepared to administer a comprehensive sex education curriculum.

Proposals

➤ **State:**

- **New Jersey state legislature must pass legislation to create a statewide comprehensive sex education curriculum** that goes beyond abstinence and disease prevention and provides education on consent, healthy relationships and gender and sexual identity. The state must also establish criteria for outside groups to provide sex education in schools, create a mechanism for monitoring and enforcing the implementation of standards and allocate funding for educator training and professional development.

➤ **Local:**

- Local Boards of Education in New Jersey should voice support for comprehensive sex education at the state level.