Dear New Jersey Urban Mayors Association Members,

As Mayor of the City of Bridgeton and President of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA), I would like to thank you for being a dedicated member of the NJUMA. We realize the importance of utilizing our ability to collectively convene around urban issues and how it eases our charge as mayors to meet the needs of our residents. I applaud all of your efforts within the Association and in your respective municipalities.

As Mayors of urban centers across the state we have been faced with the challenges of reopening in already densely-populated communities, and given that many of our residents are at risk of contracting COVID-19, and facing many subsequent health challenges as a result we must be diligent when considering the unique needs of our constituents. In efforts to address our concerns, on page 11 of this publication includes the op-ed that the NJUMA recently released regarding this issue.

These are unprecedented times that we are facing as we watch the world as we know it is drastically shifting. Public health has become the forefront of our daily operations and we continue to seek the best possible solutions in the areas of public health and public safety. During these challenging times, we are keenly focused on the tragic impact of police brutality and its impact on our community. We have seen the nation change and many residents have taken to the streets to demand justice surrounding the brute force that resulted in the police killings of unarmed citizens including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. We also await additional information regarding the tragic loss of life of New Jersey’s own Maurice Gordon while in police custody. As the NJUMA continues to work towards solutions to address the aforementioned issues we must employ a united front and the best possible public policy measures to improve our urban centers.

In this edition of the Urban Mayors Press, I am pleased to share articles that showcase the great work that three of our fellow NJUMA Mayors are championing in their municipalities. Additionally, in this issue you will find articles on COVID-19 related resources for residents, and other aspects of public health that have taken a backseat since the pandemic’s onset such as improving water infrastructure, the environment, and resources pertaining to urban agriculture—all of which are important topics that require our attention. It is my hope that you find this information useful to aid your efforts in your respective communities.

Regards,

The Honorable Albert Kelly
Mayor of Bridgeton
President of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association
There are those rare moments in history where one event, or course of events, is life altering for all those who experience it. Living in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic has made almost all of us pause, reflect, adapt, and in many instances, reset. It has revealed our resiliency to push beyond individual and collective boundaries not only to survive, but to achieve.

What began for many as a period of great anxiety and uncertainty has evolved into a daily grind of performing tasks and services with a tenacity to overcome physical obstacles and barriers with innovation, imagination and creativity. I am extremely proud and humbled by the work of our administration, in partnership with our East Orange City Council, to progress in the face of adversity.

Our current reality is probably not one that any of us would or could have ever imagined, yet here we are. No one could have predicted that social gatherings, once the glue that bound us to each other, would be deemed life-threatening. Who could have known that schools, houses of worship, public parks, barber shops and salons, gyms and anything else not deemed an essential service would one day be ordered to close to contain a virus that most of us had never even heard of? There are even fewer that would have forecasted the massive blow to our economy. In the blink of an eye, life as we knew it had changed.

At the onset, my administration understood the necessity of keeping our residents informed. In this new world, we knew that effective communications quite literally could be a matter of life or death. Consistency and transparency have been key to managing our response to this virus.

One week after Governor Phil Murphy ordered his Executive “Stay at Home” Order, we began hosting weekly Virtual Town Hall Meetings, which have been vital to our overall communications strategy. With options to listen in via a group telephone call or watch live on our city’s official Facebook Page, viewers have had the opportunity to ask questions and share ideas with many of the most respected leaders in the state, including: Governor Phil Murphy, Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, Congressman Donald Payne, Jr., Assemblyman Tom Giblin, Assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake, Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo, Jr., Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo, Essex County Clerk Christopher Durkin, Council Chairman Christopher James, Director of Rutgers Newark Counseling Center Dr. Anice Thomas, and East Orange School District Assistant Superintendent Dr. Deborah Harvest. Our regular guests include our own Dr. Monique Griffith, Director of Health and Human Services, Health Officer Victor Kuteyi, and Dr. Anuj Mehta, Chief Medical Officer at East Orange General Hospital.

During these town halls, we’ve been able to reach hundreds of thousands of constituents to address many of the challenges of the pandemic such as unemployment, mortgage and rental assistance, access to COVID-19 testing, remote learning, mental health, small business relief, workman’s compensation, voting by mail and more.

Like so many communities across the world, East Orange has been profoundly affected by this pandemic in more ways than one. With unemployment numbers at an all-time high, many families are struggling to put food on the table. With our Emergency Food Relief Distribution and Grab N’ Go Hot and Cold Lunches, our Division of Senior Services, Department of Recreation and Cultural Affairs and our Office of Emergency Management go above and beyond, week after week, to make sure that no resident goes hungry during COVID-19. To date, thousands of tons of groceries and food items have been provided to households throughout East Orange. We will continue to do everything in our power to make sure that every family is fed. We are in this together.

The safety of East Orange residents has always been a daily priority for me, but this pandemic has required us to take our efforts to a whole new level. In our city, we took Governor Murphy’s Executive Order to shelter in place one step further and created the Tough Love Saturday and Sunday Shutdown to lower our spread rate. During this period, residents were asked to remain at home unless performing essential duties or needs over the weekend. Naturally, there was resistance by many, but we remained steadfast in our resolve knowing that we were doing what was best for our densely populated community. In fact, I joined my fellow urban mayors — Ras Baraka of Newark, Tony Vauss of Irvington, and Dwayne Warren of Orange — in beffing up our cities’ safety efforts and we collectively executed “Operation Lockdown,” “Operation Wipedown,” “Operation Clean Business” and “Operation Mobile Wellness Checks” to ensure the safety of our respective municipalities. As we all now know, there has not been anything normal about these lockdowns. Being alone, disconnected and confined will impact even the strongest among us. To heighten our connectivity and ease some of the stress we had been enduring, I dusted off my 1s and 2s and decided to host a Friday “Mayor Stay in the House” Dance Party on Facebook Live. The name was a spin-off of “Mayor on the Block,” one of my administration’s inaugural community outreach and code enforcement initiatives where my team and I travel every few weeks on foot to different neighborhoods cleaning up the city and talking to our constituents. What began as a one-time opportunity to connect has now become a highly-anticipated Friday night event viewed by residents, former residents and friends from all over the world. Honestly, this has been a little music therapy for me, and based on demand, I am wondering if I will ever be able to take off my DJ hat again!

We also realized that with change occurring at an unprecedented and unusually rapid rate, we needed to give immediate attention and support to our youth as schools transitioned to virtual learning. It was extremely important for me to make sure that I
continued my dialogue with our students, especially now. That’s why I decided to host a Virtual L.U.N.C.H. (Leaders Understand Nurturing Creates Harmony) with student leaders and school administrators that allowed us to connect to thousands of viewers, allay fears and address upcoming changes in traditional activities and milestone events such as grading, graduation ceremonies and prom.

Once we learned that graduations and proms were cancelled for health and safety reasons, we decided to organize the first Citywide Graduation Caravan. In conjunction with the East Orange City Council and the East Orange School District, we rode through nearly every block in the city to recognize and honor our 2020 graduates!

We have been fortunate to have amazing community partners donating supplies, time, money, food and so much more to ensure the safety of our front line workers and to assist all of those facing challenges at this time. The outreach to and from our small business community has been remarkable. Our EOSHOPSLOCAL.COM website was created to facilitate a direct connection between small businesses and residents during the pandemic. Working hand-in-hand with our business community, we developed this portal to give local business owners and entrepreneurs a platform to share updates and modifications as we all continue to adapt to COVID-19 guidelines. It also gave us the opportunity to connect local businesses to resources and funding from the state and federal government to provide relief during COVID-19.

Guaranteed Basic Income Can Help Alleviate Racial and Economic Inequality

By: Mayor Ras J. Baraka, City of Newark

Over the past few months, and especially the past two weeks, government investment or disinvestment has dominated the national conversation: Will the government invest in getting masks and medical supplies out where they’re needed? Will people see recurring payments as tens of thousands are furloughed or lose their jobs? Are cities and states giving too much to police budgets, and too little for social services?

Last March in my State of the City Address, I announced that I was creating Newark’s Guaranteed Income Task Force to explore how a guaranteed income — regular, unrestricted infusions of cash — might prove an effective investment in improving our residents’ financial security. Now, upon the release of the Task Force’s report over a year later, the COVID-19 health crisis has revealed on the national stage what was well understood among those of us with a street-level perspective—people don’t have enough cash to weather emergencies, pandemic or otherwise. Moreover, communities of color face a pattern of disinvestment in favor of “public safety” at odds with public welfare.

As we hear growing calls to reinvest in people, I have been heartened to see growing support for cash transfers come from across the political and ideological divide, culminating in the $1,200 stimulus checks disbursed to millions of households through the CARES Act. States, philanthropic organizations, and nonprofits have established their own funds to provide additional support to those left out of the federal response, including the undocumented members of our communities who make up much of our “essential” workforce.

Now, in the midst of this now organized chaos, and just as we were beginning to see a flattening of the curve and the reopening of our state, we were hit with the resurgence of an existing virus — systemic racism. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery to name a few, ignited a new generation of activists to change the status quo across our nation. East Orange is no different. Our “Peace, But Not Patience” Walk and Rally was a show of solidarity to every victim of police brutality. We stand with the families seeking justice for their loved ones and are ready to take action to create policies and legislation that are long overdue.

As we move forward, I want us to be inspired by the fact that 2020 has shown us that faith will overshadow fear, community is above any one individual and that triumph belongs to those who decidedly persevere.

While these efforts are encouraging, they are ultimately insufficient. Here in Newark, as in so many of our cities, there is an epidemic of families, as one respondent told us, “living life on a month-to-month basis,” one unexpected bill or drop in wages away from a crisis. Even as our city undergoes an unprecedented renaissance in entrepreneurship and the arts, many live in precarity. For the 78% of residents renting their homes, median rent has risen 20% while median income is down 10% since 2000. Our median income is less than $40,000 a year, well short of the $63,000 United Way estimates a family must earn to meet its basic needs within Newark. This tragic situation will persist well after COVID-19 is behind us; so, too, must our response.

The Task Force’s year-long investigation culminated in a powerful report, Building Financial Security: Newark’s Roadmap Toward a Guaranteed Income. It concludes that a guaranteed income program holds serious promise in addressing the financial vulnerability faced by many Newarkers — in particular, its communities of color. In addition to a number of specific policy recommendations at the state and federal level to reinvest in our communities, it recommends that Newark move expeditiously to develop a guaranteed income pilot. Why guaranteed income? As is true in vulnerable communities nationwide, the Task Force found many pernicious ways that low- and middle-income residents often fall through the cracks in our existing social safety net. Alarming numbers of residents across the state of New Jersey are unable to access the intended benefits from programs like TANF and the SNAP because of overly strict eligibility criteria, a stressful and confusing maze of paperwork, and payment disbursed in ways that severely limit their use. By contrast, the guaranteed income program we endorse by our report must be unconditional,
Guaranteed Basic Income Can Help Alleviate Racial and Economic Inequality (Continued)

The idea of a guaranteed income as a tool for racial and economic equity has a long and rich intellectual history among those for whom the economy has never truly worked. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Panthers both advocated for a guaranteed income as a material precondition for social citizenship. I hear those sentiments echoed in what Jasmine, a Newark resident, told our Task Force: “Newark is full of people with unrealized potential, but they need resources to reach that potential.”

Multiple other cities have taken up this mantle and begun experimenting with guaranteed income pilots. Mayor Michael Tubbs of Stockton, CA launched the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED) in 2019 to provide $500 to 125 low-income residents. Similarly, the Magnolia Mother’s Trust (MMT) in 2018 began providing $1,000 a month to 20 Black mothers living in public housing. Both initiatives show how powerful such a simple tool can be—allowing people to get long-needed dental work to smile freely again; to pay off predatory debt; to experience the dignity of being able to pay for an emergency car repair without asking for help.

The positive impacts of such pilots and many studies of direct cash transfers worldwide have paved the way for a national conversation on recurring cash transfers, especially vibrant among multiple Democratic leaders in the House and Senate (including Senator Cory Booker). While guaranteed income will not end the systemic inequality and racism that inspired recent protests, it would represent the kind of investment in our black and brown communities our nation has too often failed to provide.

With its long history of community-led social change, Newark is joining cities at the vanguard of this growing movement because our communities face common struggles. For 60-plus years, our residents have organized around labor and civil rights, environmental justice, equitable development for neighborhoods and education—and most recently, as a model for demonstrating against unaccountable police violence. That tradition of community empowerment finds natural expression in a guaranteed income, which implicitly recognizes that poor and working-class families, like all families, deserve the dignity of self-directed lives. This is where our nation should be heading. And, as former Mayor Kenneth Gibson said, “Wherever American cities are going, Newark will get there first.”

Together, we can turn this moment of collective uncertainty into a movement that leads to an America where we trust our people by putting more money into their hands not just because there is a crisis, but because it is the right thing to do.

Mayors Leading Local Responses to a Global Health Crisis
By: Julie DeSimone, Program Officer, New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute, Mayors Wellness Campaign

Food insecurity, ways to stay active while in quarantine, virtual mindfulness to support better mental health, and sharing wellness resources with older residents through local TV are just some of the topics and actions Mayors and their Mayors Wellness Campaigns (“MWC”) have focused on since early March. New Jersey’s local leaders are leveraging their partnerships with local businesses and non-profits and activating volunteer networks to focus on collecting and distributing food, creating or collecting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for local health care providers, and setting up networks for residents affected by necessary but difficult social isolation.

Public health, understandably, has had everyone’s attention recently and the COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on the need for a strong public health infrastructure and planning at all levels of government. The New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute (“Quality Institute”), has been supporting locally led health and wellness efforts through our MWC since 2004. The MWC encourages mayors to address health issues through local community actions and policy changes. There are 416 municipalities throughout the state participating in the MWC, with more joining each year. MWC programs focus on youth, seniors, municipal employee health, and the overall wellness of a community. Through the MWC, Mayors lead walks, help build community gardens, organize healthy cooking classes, spearhead fitness challenges, or host community-based educational programs on health topics such as advance care planning.

Each MWC connects with local health care providers and volunteers to provide expertise, resources, and momentum to their campaign. Quality Institute staff supports local MWCs with technical support, programming ideas and resources. Quality Institute staff also help Mayors think about their programs and policies more broadly to include not just health care access but also other factors that determine how healthy a community will be such as housing, the environment, and food security. Mayors are also encouraged to use localized data to identify and prioritize their needs and build a campaign that addresses their top priorities.

As your community battles COVID-19 and its health, social, and economic implications, the MWC can be an important partner to Mayors across the Garden State. As Mayors, you know the power of grass roots efforts. Now is the time to tap into the communal desire to help each other and give back to the community. It is also the time to address the wide inequities on health outcomes we see across communities.

We encourage the members of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association to start your own Mayors Wellness Campaign or if you already have one, to reach out and share what you’ve been doing since the pandemic hit. We’ll share your work with other leaders across the state. Together, let’s make New Jersey a healthier place to live, work, and play.

Here are the steps to take to launch or further your campaign:

Join the MWC or demonstrate your ongoing commitment to the health and wellness of your residents by signing your Annual Pledge of Participation today.

Check out our NEW MWC Handbook, a step by step guide to creating and strengthening your MWC.

Contact the MWC Program Officer, Julie DeSimone at desimo-ne@njhcqi.org.

Visit the Quality Institute Mayors Wellness Campaign page for resources and examples of what other towns are doing -- at https://www.njhcqi.org/mayors-wellness-campaign/.

Check out the Quality Institute’s COVID-19 Resources which include telehealth best practices, guidance on how to get health insurance, and community resources to help you engage with your residents.
Mayoral Support for S3752 “SMART Bill”
By: Mayor Andre Sayegh, City of Paterson

This pandemic has exacted a heavy emotional, physical, and financial toll on our country. Consequently, our cities have lost revenue and more tragically, our cities have lost lives. However, our cities have not lost hope.

Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) who co-hosted a Small Business Seminar for Paterson on this past spring, is now co-sponsoring a bi-partisan bill (S3752) with Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) that would provide direct funding to our country’s states and municipalities. The version in the House of Representatives (HR6954) is being co-sponsored by Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) and Congressman Peter King (R-NY). Without the aforementioned aid, our tenuous situation would only grow grimmer. Therefore, I urge every Mayor to support the State and Municipal Aid for Recovery and Transition (SMART) Fund.

The relief package would provide $500 billion to help states and local governments respond to the current public health and economic crisis while maintaining essential services. Moreover, funding can be used to make up for lost revenue and expenses related to COVID-19.

The funding formula includes a $16 billion set aside for Native American tribal governments and the balance of the aid would be allocated to states through three equally divided tranches:

1. One-Third Based on Population Size: This tranche of funding will be allocated to all 50 states, D.C. and U.S. territories based on each state or territory’s percentage of the U.S. population. One-sixth of a state’s allocation will be reserved for payments to counties and one-sixth will be reserved for payments to municipalities. Allocation of payments to counties and municipalities will be based on each entity’s share of the state’s population for this tranche.

2. One-Third Based on Infection Rates: This tranche of funding will be allocated based on each state’s share of the nation’s infection rate. New Jersey currently ranks #2. One-sixth of a state’s allocation will be reserved for payments to counties and one-sixth will be reserved for payments to municipalities. Allocation of payments to counties and municipalities will be based on revenue loss by all the counties or municipalities in the state over this period. This is designed to ensure that adequate funding flows to counties and municipalities that are disproportionately affected relative to their population.

3. One-Third Based on Revenue Losses: This tranche of funding will be allocated based on each state’s share of the nation’s revenue loss from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. One-sixth of a state’s allocation will be reserved for payments to counties and one-sixth will be reserved for payments to municipalities. Allocation of payments to counties and municipalities will be based on revenue loss from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020 of each such entity relative to aggregate revenue loss by all the counties or municipalities in the state over this period. This is designed to ensure that adequate funding flows to counties and municipalities that are disproportionately affected relative to their population.

It is estimated under only the first tranche that Paterson would receive more than $12 million. The two remaining tranches would also bode well for our city considering how the funding formula is calculated and how disproportionately Paterson has been impacted by this virus.

Crisis reveals character and that is why I appreciate the conscientious leadership of Senator Menendez and his colleague across the aisle, Senator Cassidy during this crucible. I also commend Congresswoman Sherrill and Congressman King for their ardent advocacy as well. This is not a time to point fingers, it is time to join hands to find sustainable solutions in our nation’s hour of need.

Now more than ever, we must demonstrate that the U in USA stands for United.

Resources for Residents During the COVID-19 Pandemic
By: Phyllis Salowe-Kaye, New Jersey Citizen Action

Now more than ever before, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has shown us that we are dependent on each other. As the situation continues to evolve day by day, and New Jersey families are faced with mounting economic and health care hardships, New Jersey Citizen Action wants you to know that we are here for you. While COVID-19 is temporarily shifting the way we work, it will not change our mission to fight for social, racial, and economic justice for all New Jerseys through issue advocacy, education, and the provision of free direct services.

NJCA’s Advocacy Team and Empowerment staff are hard at work, and continue to advocate for policies and resources critical to individuals and families across the Garden State, especially those most impacted by COVID-19. If you or someone you know is in need of information or assistance on housing, health care, worker and income support, consumer protection and fair housing, visit NJCA’s COVID-19 Resource Directory on our website.

List of Direct Services

Housing Protection and Assistance During COVID-19 Pandemic

Under law, New Jersey sheriffs, court officers and their agents may not remove anyone from their homes for evictions caused by financial hardship during the state of emergency. If you believe landlords, tenants or organizations are violating Executive Order No. 106, please fill out this form.

For information on Rental Property and Evictions click here.

If you are facing a housing crisis, NICA offers free HUD-certified housing and foreclosure counseling services in English and Spanish. To apply for counseling today, click here and one of NICA’s Loan Counselors will call you to set-up an appointment over the phone.

Worker and Income Support

New Jersey has among the most comprehensive Earned Sick Leave, Temporary Disability and Family Leave Insurance laws in the country, which cover all employees—full-time, part-time, temporary and seasonal. Note: many of these policies continue to be expanded in the wake of state and federal responses to COVID-19.
NJCA staff are here to assist you in navigating this system and answering your questions on benefits and support for which you may be eligible. Email NJCA at Needincomesc- port@njcitizenaction.org. Hablamos Español. NJCA staff will return calls/emails within 48 hours.

Health Care Advocacy and Assistance
New Jersey Citizen Action and our partners at the NJ for Health Care Coalition are working hard to ensure that all New Jerseyans affected by COVID-19 have access to quality affordable health care.

Contact NJCA with healthcare coverage questions: getcovered@njcitizenaction.org

For more information on our health care advocacy?
Visit: NJForHealthCare.org
Have a story you want to share about how your health coverage has been affected by COVID-19?
Please share your story here: https://p2a.co/pDKCYLI
NJCA will continue to share helpful information and resources, as well as address the gaps in coverage and protections, and how NJ Citizen Action is advocating to improve and expand coverage in NJ. Stay connected by signing up for information above.

Don’t have health insurance? You may be newly eligible for coverage if you have been affected by COVID-19. Citizen Action is here to help and provides free enrollment assistance in English and Spanish. Email us today at getcovered@njcitizenaction.org to find out if you qualify

Hablamos Español. NJCA staff will return calls/emails within 48 hours.

Consumer Protection and Fair Housing
A housing provider cannot discriminate against you because of your actual or perceived race, national origin, religion, disability, or other LAD-protected characteristic. That includes by refusing to make repairs, or by treating you differently than a tenant of a different race or national origin in other ways.

These protections apply even if the conduct at issue stems from concerns related to COVID-19. For example, your landlord or building manager cannot refuse to make necessary repairs to your apartment because they say you are east-Asian and they are afraid of contracting COVID-19. The LAD does not prohibit a landlord from taking reasonable steps to protect the landlord or other tenants from COVID-19, but such reasonable steps would not include actions premised on stereotypes based on race or national origin.

If you feel that you are the victim of housing discrimination, contact Candace Harper at New Jersey Citizen Action at candace@njcitizenaction.org. Hablamos Español. NJCA staff will return calls/emails within 48 hours.

Taxes, Food Security, Dealing with Debt, and Stimulus Checks
For questions related to free tax preparation or tax counseling for the elderly, contact Naomi Anderson. Once we are able to re-open our offices, our free tax preparation services will resume immediately. To make an appointment once our offices are open, contact Naomi at naomi@njcitizenaction.org

You can file for free at New Jersey Online Income Tax Filing System, download Income Tax forms or make payments from their website.

Dealing with Debt during COVID-19
If you are having trouble dealing with debt as a result of COVID-19, New Jersey Citizen Action provides free Financial Coaching in English and Spanish to help you navigate the programs and services available to you and manage your debt during these difficult times.

One-on-one sessions will be provided via telephone and video conferencing.

Click here to apply for Financial Coaching today!

New Jersey Citizen Action Oil Group (NJCAOG) is comprised of thousands of New Jersey heating oil consumers who have joined together to say “NO” to high priced heating oil.

Individual households, businesses, churches and apartment owners can rely on low rates without having to shop around every time they need their tanks filled. The Oil Group serves every New Jersey county with the exceptions of Cape May, some parts of Atlantic, Salem, and Cumberland counties.

Email Wende Nachman, Director of NJCA Oil Group, at wende@njcitizenaction.org for more information.

For questions or guidance in completing the 2020 Census, contact Michelle Maas at michelle@njcitizenaction.org or Maria Menendez at maria@njcitizenaction.org, or go to www.2020Census.gov and complete the Census online today!

Please share this information to help us get out the information to people who need the resources and assistance during this unprecedented public health crisis.

Interested in staying informed? Sign up for our NJCA emails: https://p2a.co/lAotTkz.

New Jersey Citizen Action is a 38-year old statewide grassroots organization that fights for social, racial and economic justice. We combine on the ground organizing, legislative advocacy, and electoral campaigns to win progressive policy and political victories that make a difference in people’s lives. Our active campaigns include fighting for quality and affordable health care for all, fair and affordable banking and housing, consumer financial protection, affordable utility rates, workers’ rights, clean energy, and work and family balance issues like expanding paid sick days and family leave insurance.

NJCA is unique in that we combine issue advocacy and organizing work with the provision of free quality programs and services that empower nearly 15,000 New Jersey families each year. We have provided quality housing counseling services since 1995, upon receiving HUD-certification as a provider of housing and foreclosure counseling services. Since this time, we have become a leading, trusted provider of free financial empowerment services across New Jersey, offering one-on-one credit and financial counseling, housing & foreclosure counseling, free tax preparation, counselor-assisted health care enrollment, financial education, and homeownership preparation services. Our empowerment programs are offered statewide, with a strong focus on reaching minorities, single women heads-of-household, recent immigrants, veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities in NJ’s urban areas, where needs are most urgent. These programs include free HUD-certified housing, rental, and foreclosure counseling and homeownership education, financial education and financial coaching, free tax preparation, healthcare enrollment assistance and benefits counseling, and fair housing education, outreach, and enforcement.
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced two new grant opportunities for New Jersey’s urban farmers and their communities; The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grant Program and the Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreement Program. USDA’s new Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production will make $3 million available through the Urban Agriculture and Innovation Grant Program and $900,000 will be available for local governments through Community Composting and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreements. To improve and expand support for urban farming, the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production was established by the 2018 Farm Bill. It includes representatives from many USDA agencies, including the Farm Service Agency and the Agricultural Marketing Service, and is led by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. More information is available at farmers.gov/urban.

Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grant Program
These competitive grants will support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production projects through two categories; Planning Projects and Implementation Projects. A webinar recording is available that provides an overview of the grants’ purpose, project types, eligibility, and basic requirements for applying. Those interested in this grant opportunity are encouraged to listen to the recording. The webinar recording can be found here: farmers.gov/urban. USDA will accept applications on Grants.gov until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on June 7, 2020.

Planning Projects
USDA is making available $1 million for Planning Projects that initiate or expand efforts of farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs. Projects may target areas of food access, education, business, startup costs for new farmers, and policy development related to zoning and other needs of urban production.

Implementation Projects
There will also be $2 million available for Implementation Projects that accelerate existing and emerging models of urban, indoor, and other agricultural practices that serve multiple farmers. Projects will

Camden’s Micro Business Emergency Assistance Program
By: Mayor Frank Moran, City of Camden

I, along with the City Administration and the Department of Planning and Development announced the introduction of the Micro Business Emergency Assistance Program (MBEAP) to assist small business owners and operators within the City of Camden impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the Micro Business Emergency Assistance Program is to provide short-term financial relief to business owners and business operators within Camden to help offset their operating costs and qualified capital (inventory) expenses. The Camden MBEAP offers grants up to $5,000 per operator and or owner/operator location. The City of Camden Community Development Block Grant Program will provide funding for the Micro Business Emergency Assistance Program as part of the City’s Consolidated Plan/Action Plan.

This program will enable those small businesses most effected by the COVID-19 pandemic some much needed relief during this challenging time. These micro businesses collectively employ a large number of Camden residents. The City’s small business community has been the backbone of the local economy and we are pleased to help provide support. We urge our local businesses to apply. We are thankful to our U.S. Congressman Donald Norcross for his advocacy for this critical funding which is making a tremendous difference in the daily lives of so many.

“I am glad this grant funding is being offered to those small businesses who need help the most,” said Camden City Council President Curtis Jenkins. “The COVID-19 pandemic has stifled our community not only from a public health perspective but economically too. Our Camden residents and businesses face economic struggles on a daily basis. As elected officials, we advocate for those who cannot help themselves. Camden City Council and I are pleased to pledge our full support behind Mayor Moran’s worthy initiative.”

“The CARES Act that we passed in Congress is delivering federal resources to employers and families during this difficult time, and I’m grateful for Mayor Moran’s efforts to direct Community Development Block Grant funding to Camden City’s small businesses,” said Congressman Norcross. “This new program will help keep Camden City residents employed by providing critical support to small local businesses impacted by COVID-19.”

To qualify, applicants must satisfy a list of criteria which includes: possess a certified/mercantile licensed business located in the City of Camden, and or possess the required NJ business license to operate a personal service business. In addition, eligible businesses must employ Camden City residents. Applicants may also be required to provide additional supporting documentation like mortgage statements or an executed lease with the property owner. Funding will be provided on a first come, first serve basis. Priority will be given to those businesses operating in low and moderate-income areas, opportunity and promise zones, and those Camden small businesses directly impacted as a result of COVID-19. Consideration will also be given to retail commercial establishments without drive through capacity. Eligible grant expenses include, but not limited to: business lease payments, mortgage payments, utility payment, payroll, inventory and business debt payments.

Businesses can submit applications and questions to the City of Camden Department of Planning and Development Office located in Room 224, Camden City Hall, P.O. Box 95120, Camden, NJ 08101 or via email to MicrobusinessDevelopment@ci.camden.nj.us.

The program application and additional information about the Micro Business Emergency Assistance Program (MBEAP) can be found on the City of Camden website at www.ci.camden.nj.us.

USDA Announces New Grant Opportunities for Urban Agriculture and Community Composting
By: Edwin Muniz and Rosalynd Orr, USDA-NRCS
Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreement Program:
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has $900,000 available for local governments to host a Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction (CCFWR) pilot project for fiscal year (FY) 2020. The cooperative agreements will support projects that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans. The agreements are offered through USDA’s Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. USDA will accept applications on Grants.gov until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on June 26, 2020. Projects should span two years with a start date of October 1, 2020, and a completion date of September 29, 2022.

Cooperative agreements support projects led by local governments that 1) generate compost; 2) increase access to compost for agricultural producers; 3) reduce reliance on, and limit the use of fertilizer; 4) improve soil quality; 5) encourage waste management and permaculture business development; 6) increase rainwater absorption; 7) reduce municipal food waste; and 8) divert food waste from landfills. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service will assist with conservation-related activities. Priority will be given to projects that; anticipate or demonstrate economic benefits, incorporate plans to make compost easily accessible to farmers, including community gardeners, integrate other food waste strategies, including food recovery efforts, and collaborate with multiple partners. A webinar recording is available to provide an overview of the cooperative agreements’ purpose, project types, eligibility, and basic requirements for applying. Local governments interested our encouraged to listen to the recording, which is posted here: farmers.gov/urban.

More Information: Questions about Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production grant and the Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction cooperative agreement can be sent directly to the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production at UrbanAgriculture@usda.gov. Additional resources that may be of interest to urban agriculture entities include AMS grants to improve domestic and international opportunities for U.S. growers and producers and FSA loans.

NJ Water Bank Program and NJ Wastewater Utility Peer to Peer Initiative
By: Monique Griffith, Chair, Environmental Justice Advisory Council, Kim Gaddy, Vice Chair, Environmental Justice Advisory Council, and Andy Kricun, Chair, Water Working Group, Environmental Justice Advisory Council

The Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) would like to inform the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association of two opportunities to improve the operations of water and wastewater utilities and to reduce operating costs. The first opportunity is participation in the New Jersey Water Bank low interest loan program. The second opportunity is a soon to be launched New Jersey Wastewater Utility Peer to Peer Initiative.

The NJ Water Bank program is a state funding program that funds capital improvements to drinking water, wastewater and stormwater projects at very low interest rates (currently around 1%) over a 30-year loan period. In addition, the loan does not have to begin to be paid back until after the construction is completed. Therefore, the city will already be gaining the benefits of the capital improvement, such as lower maintenance costs and/or lower energy costs, just as the loan payments begin. In many cases, the operational savings from newer equipment more than offset the low annual debt service payments (because of the 1% interest rate and 30-year repayment period) so that the city can realize net savings immediately. The NJ Water Bank is a partnership between the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and the NJ Infrastructure Bank. Information about the NJ Water Bank is available at: https://www.nj.gov/dep/dwg/mface_njeifp.htm. Information about the NJ Infrastructure bank is available at: https://www.njib.gov/. For more information, please contact Eugene Chebra at Eugene.Chebra@dep.nj.gov.

In addition, the NJ Association of Environmental Authorities and other partners are working to implement a new peer-to-peer program for wastewater utilities. This program will involve wastewater utilities voluntarily sharing knowledge and information about best practices in wastewater operations, maintenance and management. This will result in improved environmental performance and reduced costs for wastewater utilities across the state, resulting in better protection of the public health of the citizens of New Jersey and its waterways. It is hoped that the program will be implemented later in 2020, after circumstances in NJ, and across the country, return to their normal state of affairs. We will keep the Urban Mayors Association updated about the status of this program, which promises to be a model and template for replication throughout the United States. Municipalities interested in joining the peer-to-peer initiative should contact Andy Kricun, Managing Director, Moonshine Missions at akricun@aol.com.

The Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) is an advisory body to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). It is not a division of the NJDEP. The information in this article is from the EJAC: https://www.nj.gov/dep/ej/ej-council.html.
After we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, there will still be lingering problems in New Jersey that must be addressed. Unfortunately, our waterways face threats from polluted stormwater runoff, unfunded and antiquated stormwater infrastructure, and industrial waste, and our clean drinking water can be contaminated by aging lead pipes that can cause a public health crisis as we recently saw in Newark.

In most urban areas, aging infrastructure contributes to unique water challenges. The wastewater and stormwater systems of most municipalities are over 70 years old, with some built over a century ago. These aging water systems often cannot handle the influx of heavier and more frequent storms due to climate change, which lead to increased flooding.

In communities like Newark and Camden, when the volume of stormwater exceeds the capacity of local wastewater treatment plants, untreated polluted stormwater and sewage is discharged directly to nearby streams, rivers, and other water bodies and often backs up and overflows into homes, sidewalks, and streets. These events are known as combined sewer overflows (CSOs), and contain untreated or partially treated human and industrial waste, toxic materials, and debris carried by stormwater. In New Jersey, there are 21 municipalities which suffer from CSOs regularly.

A recent study from the University of Maryland and Texas A&M found the federal government lacking in its investments to local stormwater infrastructure, shifting the burden to many cash-strapped states and local governments to raise the revenue to improve these systems. Here in New Jersey, our water infrastructure requires $40 billion in investment over the next 20 years. Updating our stormwater infrastructure will cost over $16 billion of that amount. So what can municipalities do?

One proven and cost-effective solution to help manage polluted stormwater runoff is investing in green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is an approach to stormwater management that mimics the natural water cycle and absorbs runoff like a sponge and cleans it up. There are economic benefits too; every dollar spent on green infrastructure can realize between $7 to $27 dollars in ancillary benefits including improved health outcomes and increased property values.

Another strategy for municipalities to fund stormwater infrastructure improvements is a stormwater utility, which is a funding mechanism approved by the state. It allows a town, county, or regional sewage authority to assess a fee based on a property’s impervious surface area and contribution to polluted stormwater. The assessed revenue is dedicated to maintaining and upgrading infrastructure designed to reduce pollutants into water bodies and provide control of stormwater to prevent flooding. The average homeowner or renter can afford it — since it’s based on a “polluters pay” principle. Large commercial properties such as warehouses and big department stores typically pay the largest fees. These funds also are legally dedicated and cannot be diverted to a municipality’s general fund. Across the U.S., there are nearly 1,800 stormwater utilities and they are so popular that they exist in 41 states.

New Jersey LCV, with our Flood Defense New Jersey Coalition partners, recently held a webinar about the benefits of stormwater utilities and how they can save communities much needed revenue, especially during a time of significant fiscal constraints caused by COVID-19. Green infrastructure and stormwater utilities are the most cost-effective and equitable way to protect our cities, cherished lakes, bays, and reservoirs. For more information about stormwater utilities, visit the Flood Defense Coalition Website www.njlcvef.org/flood-defense/resources-for-officials.

The New Jersey League of Conservation Voters is an organization is the statewide political voice for the environment that works to elect environmental- ly responsible candidates to state and local offices, advocate for strong environmental policies, and holds elected officials accountable to safeguard the health of our communities, the beauty of our state, and the strength of our economy.

### Clean Energy Equity Act: The First Step Toward Implementing the Equitable and Resilient Solar Plus Storage Policy Roadmap

**By: Pari Kasotia, NJ Shines Campaign Lead Advocate, Vote Solar**

In the Winter 2019 issue of the Urban Mayors Press, we called on urban mayors to support the Equitable and Resilient Solar Plus Storage Policy Roadmap and NJ Shines Campaign.

Despite these challenging and unprecedented times, we have made tremendous progress. As a first step toward implementing the Roadmap, we are supporting the CleanEnergy Equity Act in the New Jersey Legislature (S.2484, A.4185). We are proud to have Senator Singleton (District 7) championing our cause as a prime sponsor, along with Senator Rice (District 28). In addition, Senators Addiego (District 8), Pou (District 35), and Ruiz (District 29) are co-sponsoring the bill. On the Assembly side, the bill is shepherded by Benson (District 14), Reynolds-Jackson (District 15), and Pinkin (District 18) as co-prime sponsors. In addition to the very influential leadership at the top, this bill is supported and advocated for by over 15 New Jersey environmental, justice, and solar organizations, including the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA) and NAACP New Jersey State Conference.

The bill is a major step toward ensuring all New Jerseyans are part of the clean energy economy as we transition to a 100% clean energy future. Specifically, it calls for the following:

- Establish an Office of Clean Energy Equity (OCCEE) charged with equitable deployment of clean energy technologies for New Jersey’s overburdened communities.
- Deploy onsite solar or community solar and energy efficiency to reduce the energy burden of 250,000 low-income households or 35% of low-income households, whichever is larger by 2030.
- Deploy 400 megawatts of storage in overburdened communities by 2030.
- Develop solar or clean energy curriculum and paid workforce training programs that provide solar training to at least 2,500 individuals from overburdened communities by 2025.
- Officially endorse the Clean Energy Equity Act by sending an email to Pari Kasotia, lead advocate for the NJ Shines campaign at pari@votesolar.org.
- Reach out to your local representatives to endorse the Clean Energy Equity Act by co-sponsoring and extending their support.

However, this will not be possible without substantial funding from the state. Your residents pay into the clean energy program funds, but seldom benefit from existing programs that can lead to significant savings on utility bills, improved air quality, and job opportunities. That is because the programs are not designed with equity in mind. We intend to change that through this bill and put equity front and center in the program offerings of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU). Therefore, we are requesting that 10% of BPU’s annual clean energy program budget, or $50 million annually, be set aside to undertake the activities listed above.

You can play a significant role in getting us across the finish line. We request two things from you:

- Officially endorse the Clean Energy Equity Act by sending an email to Pari Kasotia, lead advocate for the NJ Shines campaign at pari@votesolar.org.
- Reach out to your local representatives to endorse the Clean Energy Equity Act by co-sponsoring and extending their support.

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis that has disproportionately impacted low-income and communities of color, and the unprecedented social movement to ensure equality for people of color,
permanent change can only be brought if every function of our society works toward equity, diversity, and inclusion. Affordable clean energy is crucial to our quality of life and pursuit of the American Dream. Please join our campaign by lending your voice to our bill. It is time your residents get access to clean energy, clean air, and good paying jobs.

Senator Singleton noted in our launch event in December, “If we are serious, truly serious, about our commitment to having clean energy in New Jersey then it must be inclusive... especially to those who are in underserved and low income communities.” Let us make this vision a reality.

To learn more about the campaign, please reach out to Pari Kasotia at pari@votesolar.org or visit our website at www.njshines.org.

Building Back Better: Investing in Healthier, More Resilient Cities and Transportation Systems

By: Dominic Frongillo, Executive Director, Elected Officials to Protect America, and Arjun Shreekumar, New Jersey Coordinator, Elected Officials to Protect America

The COVID-19 pandemic has tragically hit cities across New Jersey hard. Over a million people are out of work statewide. Many of those jobs may not return. We need to stimulate our economy with good-paying jobs. We can start by modernizing and cutting pollution from our transportation sector.

The pandemic brought racial disparities to the forefront, forcing many to understand that most employment, education, and environmental injustices are race-based. At the same time, the nation has been awakened to our systemic racial injustices, and elected officials have an opportunity and moral obligation to act.

More elected officials have become aware of the systemic changes that need to take place. We know we cannot return to a normal that was unjust. To begin building a more equitable normal, we can start by investing in a cleaner, smarter transportation future that will lead to better health outcomes for everyone.

Our cities can have more tree-lined streets with bike paths, walking lanes, wider sidewalks, and open spaces for recreation -- spaces that reduce stress and enable residents to enjoy lifelong beneficial health outcomes. Making our cities better places to live and work creates a virtuous cycle of rising property values, more vibrant local economies, and an increased tax base to fund ongoing improvements. This healthier future is within reach.

Low-income communities, communities of color, and people with disabilities have long suffered from air pollution caused by vehicle emissions. A Harvard study found increased death rates from COVID-19 for people living in areas where toxic air pollution is high — communities that face environmental injustices daily. This is something that we have the power to change. A recent study found carbon emissions worldwide fell by 17 percent from pandemic lockdowns. Over 43 percent of the total decrease came from reduced traffic from cars, buses and trucks — a sector which makes up 42 percent of New Jersey carbon pollution.

While we’re opening up our cities in the aftermath of the pandemic, many people will continue to work from home. This affords us an opportunity to make sweeping infrastructure investments: modernizing upgrades to our roads, bridges, and trains that will make them healthier and efficient, while reducing pollution. Envision a future where our cities and transportation systems truly capitalize on their geography and allow all residents to travel with ease locally, and across the state and region — that’s the future we need to invest in.

It’s heartening to know that New Jersey is already at the forefront with the groundbreaking passage of the Electric Vehicle law (S2252/A4819) this January. Providing $300 million for EV purchasing rebates over the next ten years was a major step. Recently, the NJ DEP announced that they will use the Volkswagen settlement to dedicate $35 million to electrify medium and heavy-duty diesel vehicles, especially in our cities, and $76 million to fast-charging EV infrastructure that will significantly expand the availability of public fast chargers along road corridors by 2025. The EV legisla-

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Gov. Phil Murphy’s announcement to lift the shelter in place order across the state is of great concern to the members of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association.

According to state Department of Health data, African Americans make up 20% of the 12,303 people who have died in New Jersey from COVID-19, while representing only 13% of the state’s total population — many of whom reside in urban communities.

This disproportionate death rate is evidence that our urban centers must reopen with great caution, with slow, methodical strategies that must differ from our suburban and rural neighbors.

We understand that making blanket COVID-19-related orders for a state as demographically and geographically diverse as New Jersey is a challenging charge to communities and local leaders. For example, an order to open parks may be appropriate and safe for the 30,000 contiguous acres of Stokes State Forest and High Point State Park in Sussex County, but not for the crowded basketball courts of Newark and Paterson, where proper social distancing is impossible. Urban communities such as Irvington have a geography of only 2.9 miles with a population of nearly 80,000 residents and are much more populated than suburban communities of similar size. Residents in municipalities such as Roselle and Perth Amboy have difficulty accessing transportation to testing sites.

What’s more, many undocumented residents feel uncomfortable getting tested for fear of being quarantined and unable to work. Considering the fact that the undocumented population is restricted from receiving money via the CARES Act, a positive test could threaten their only means to financial stability and the livelihood of them and their families.

Furthermore, there have been inconsistencies in establishing testing sites throughout the state. For instance, a FEMA testing site was never opened in southern New Jersey. Currently, testing sites are operating in the Bridgeton-Millville area, through a Federal Qualified Health Provider. It would have been more appropriate, however, if these sites were opened at the same rate as was done for northern communities. The rate of infections was not as drastic in the southern area of the state, but if this region had a state-sponsored site at the onset of the pandemic more lives may have been saved. Given that access to testing has been inconsistent across New Jersey, we are uncertain of the most accurate count of coronavirus cases that currently exist in the state. This further drives the need for clear and even more measured phases to be established by the members of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association in conjunction with the governor’s office to properly manage reopening in our unique communities.

With the governor’s latest reopening orders, we are faced with enforcing rules in our cities that contradict the state orders. For example, we have legitimate concerns about allowing block parties, a staple of summer city life, until we see our COVID-19 infection rates plummet to low, single digits. But with the state allowing outdoor gatherings of up to 100 people, it will be more difficult for us to educate and inform our residents as to why they should not hold these gatherings. In the current tense environment over the wanton police-brutality death of George Floyd, it also creates an unnecessary spark of unrest if our police try to enforce the rules we believe will keep our residents safe.

There is an implied message to the statewide relaxed restrictions that the threat of the virus has dissipated. While it has been reduced, we feel without continued proper social distancing, testing, contact tracing, and further mandating of PPE and mass sanitizing of public spaces and venues, the number of infections will begin to rise, which the data has proven is lethal to our communities.

We strongly urge the following policies to keep our urban residents safe and healthy:

- engaging with the mayors in the association to establish separate guidelines for reopening that addresses and supports the unique needs of urban municipalities;
- a declaration from the governor allowing for flexibility and autonomy in the mayors’ strategies to reopen;
- a state plan to address liability issues that cities may face as they adhere to executive orders or push back on those reopening orders. These actions may cause them to face lawsuits from businesses and citizens alike;
- guidance from the state on resources available for contact tracing and testing of residents and municipal staff;
- availability of resources for testing undocumented immigrants, many of whom make up a large portion of the agricultural workforce in our state;
- support of S-2350/A-4132 to allow furloughs and continued health care coverage, noting that furloughs can’t be voluntary, and cities must have the flexibility to use this tool when needed.

We put forth these suggestions with the understanding that many municipalities have unique circumstances and face different pressures to reopen, and the governor must find a balance of all those needs while always putting the safety of the state’s residents first. We ask that urban mayors are provided the leeway to also act with the protection of the lives of our residents at the core of our actions. Further, we understand that our infection rates have decreased due to our significant work with the governor to establish guidelines during the coronavirus onset. We ask that the same consideration and opportunity to collaborate be given to the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association to work to reopen with public health and safety at the forefront of decisions in urban municipalities.

New Jersey Urban Mayors Association Statement: Reopening in Urban Communities
Enhance Your Public Sector Career!
At TESU’s John S. Watson School of Public Service

Named after the State’s first African American Assemblyman, and the nation’s first African American chairman of an Appropriations Committee, the John S. Watson School of Public Service of Thomas Edison State University (TESU) offers undergraduate and graduate programs focusing on public service that are designed for working adults interested in professional and personal growth. The School’s mission is to serve higher education and the public interest as a school of innovation, information, and policy formulation; to support informed public policy and to strengthen leadership in local, county/regional, and state government, the nonprofit and private sectors; to provide applied research, technical assistance, program development, and policy analysis; and to strengthen the capacity of people and organizations providing services in the public interest. The Watson School houses the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy which consists of various policy centers and manages the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association. The Watson School partners with the Watson Institute to provide students with hands-on public sector experience as they work to complete their educational goals.

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• Graduate Certificate in Fundraising and Development
• Graduate Certificate in Strategic Planning and Board Leadership for Nonprofits

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NJUMA is an organization comprised of 32 New Jersey urban municipalities. NJUMA serves its members through meetings and annual conferences which keep them informed on issues affecting their ability to provide adequate services to their residents.

NJUMA also assists its members in interpreting legislation and state policy and has worked with the Governor’s Office to assist in defining an urban policy agenda. NJUMA uses its 7-Point Plan for Strengthening Cities, Families and Communities as a guide for addressing the critical issues of its member cities. This Plan is designed to aggressively address the areas of crime and public safety; education and positive youth development; environment and public health; family and community welfare; housing and economic development; tax reform and intergovernmental relations, and unfunded mandates.

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