

“Social justice should be the underlying goal of all humanity.”

-Alan V. Lowenstein, Institute Founder

institute25

NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE | 25TH ANNIVERSARY

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60 Park Place, Suite 511

Newark, NJ 07102-5504

ph. (973) 624-9400

fax (973) 624-0704

email: justice@njisj.org

www.njisj.org

April 23, 2024

Governor Philip Murphy

225 W State Street

Trenton, NJ 08625

Senate President Nicholas Scutari

67 Walnut Avenue

Clark, NJ 07066

Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin

569 Rahway Avenue

Woodbridge, NJ 07095

Dear Governor Murphy, Senate President Scutari and Assembly Speaker Coughlin,

We, the Jury of Us Coalition, write to urge you to join our effort to pass and sign strong versions of A834/S292 into law, without carve-outs, to end New Jersey's misguided practice of prohibiting people with criminal offense convictions for life from serving on juries.

The right to a jury of one's peers is foundational, and deeply embedded in our legal systems and Constitution. Yet, New Jersey bans between 438,000 and 533,000 people of the overall population from ever serving on juries due to criminal convictions. By connecting jury service to our criminal legal system, New Jersey—a state with some of the worst racial disparities in incarceration in the nation—imports racism into its jury selection process. As a result, between 219,000 to 269,000 Black people in NJ are banned from jury service—a staggering 23% to 29% of NJ's overall Black population. By denying so many people – particularly Black and other people of color – from serving on juries, our juries become whitewashed, failing to reflect the diversity of our state, and people of color accused of crimes are not judged by a jury of their peers. This undermines the legitimacy and integrity of New Jersey's justice system.

Prohibiting people with criminal convictions from serving on juries is also at odds with the goal of reintegrating people into society. People with criminal convictions who have served their time and regained their freedom should participate in the same civic obligations as their neighbors. acknowledged this when, with advocates by

do social justice.

your side, you led New Jersey to restore the right to vote to formerly incarcerated people on probation and parole. Foundational anchors like voting and jury service connect the individual to their communities, benefiting everyone.

It is now time to join Maine, Indiana, North Dakota and Washington and allow people with criminal convictions to serve on juries. Any potential bias would be addressed by our existing voir dire system: a case-by-case jury selection process where the parties and judge are rightfully in the best position to determine each juror's ability to be fair and impartial within a particular case, just like they do with any other issue.

Finally, at a time when it is already difficult to get enough people who want to serve on a jury, having a categorical bar that leaves out about a half a million people is simply short-sighted.

We urge you to prioritize passing and signing into law strong versions of A834/S292, without carve-outs. Our juries must reflect the rich racial, cultural and socioeconomic diversity of our state, strengthening both our justice system and our communities.

Respectfully,

All of Us or None – South Jersey

Alliance of Families for Justice

American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey

American Friends Service Committee Prison Watch

Anti Violence Coalition of Hudson County

Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers of New Jersey

Black Lives Matter Paterson

Cherry Hill Women's Center

Council on American-Islamic Relations—New Jersey (CAIR-NJ)

Fair Share Housing Center

Faith in New Jersey

First Friends of New Jersey and New York

Garden State Bar Association

Innocence Project

JUSTICE 4 THE 7

Latino Action Network

Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP)

League of Women Voters of New Jersey
Legal Services of New Jersey
Lutherans Engaging in Advocacy New Jersey
Make the Road NJ
National Action Network South Jersey Chapter
NeighborCorps Re-Entry Services
New Brunswick Area NAACP
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice
New Jersey Citizen Action
New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence
New Jersey Harm Reduction Coalition
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
New Jersey Office of the Public Defender
New Jersey Prison Justice Watch
Newark Antiviolence Coalition
Newark Communities for Accountable Policing
New Jersey Working Families Alliance
New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP)
Our Revolution NJ
Prison Policy Initiative
Prisoners Legal Advocacy Network
Reimaging Justice Inc.
Returning Citizens Support Group
Salvation and Social Justice
Solidarity 22
SOMA Action
St. Bartholomew Lutheran Church
The Center for Justice Innovation
Transformative Justice Initiative
Trenton Anti Violence Coalition
Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair

Unitarian Universalist FaithAction NJ
Urban Changes LLC
Ward F Council Office, Jersey City NJ
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

cc: Asw. Reynolds-Jackson
Sen. Mukherji