

THE
**UNITED
BLACK
AGENDA**

Building Wealth
& Demanding
Representation in
Black Communities

WE ARE THE
UNITED BLACK AGENDA,
AND THIS IS OUR MISSION.

WE WILL ALWAYS
ACKNOWLEDGE AND PROACTIVELY
ATTACK THE ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUALITY;
AGGRESSIVELY PURSUE LEGISLATION, POLICIES,
AND PROGRAMS TO MITIGATE THE RAVAGES
OF WHITE SUPREMACY; AND AFFIRM THE TENETS
OF DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, AND LIBERTY.



**UNITED
BLACK
AGENDA**

2023
Legislative
Priorities



Our Call to Expand Black Wealth & Prosperity

Many Black New Jerseyans can't access high-quality health care, live in thriving and inclusive communities, build generational wealth, or even vote. Why? Because systemic inequities, racist policies, and state-sponsored violence are designed to deny them their rights and bar them from prosperity.

The white supremacist systems we live under — and the leaders who uphold and abide by them — conspire to harm Black lives and hinder Black wealth. State figures on wealth and income gaps serve as evidence of these roadblocks to our prosperity.

While the median net wealth of Black people in our state is \$17,700, the median net wealth of white New Jerseyans is \$322,500. To further illustrate this contrast, a Black person could purchase a new compact Kia with their net wealth while a white person could buy a top-of-the-line Bentley with their net wealth.

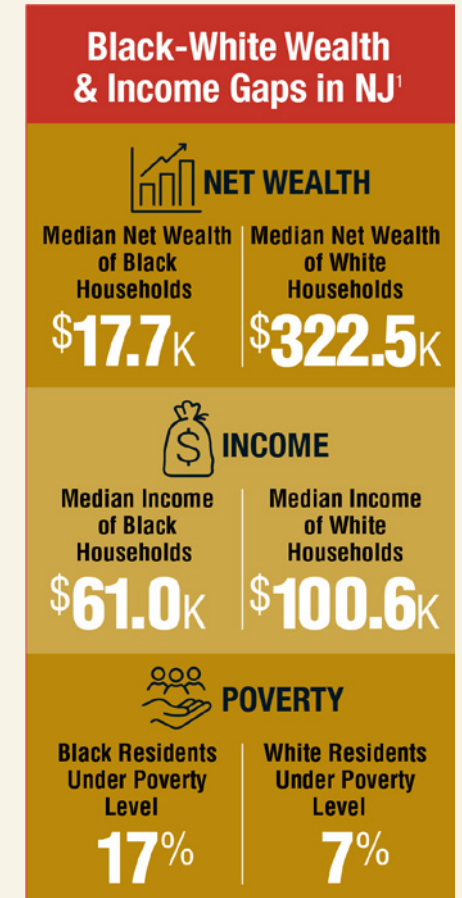
Why is this figure so low among Black residents in one of our nation's most affluent states?

Pointing to a lack of cognitive ability or business acumen as the answer would be the wrong — and racist — answer. Our state's action to codify Black skin as a threat and deficit in its policies and practices would be the correct one. Simply put, the campaign against Black wealth and health is rooted in the ideologies of our society as well as the foundations of our institutions. Our state's systems deny us bank loans, incarcerate us at higher levels, bar us from voting, deny us quality health care, overpolice us in our communities, teach us in subpar schools, segregate us in crumbling and polluted neighborhoods, and harm or kill us in the justice system.

Disrupting this targeted effort to marginalize and sabotage us is our goal at the United Black Agenda (UBA). And we are using every tool in our arsenal — from grassroots organizing and policy work, to the pulpit and the courtroom — to demand social justice for Black communities.

Our state's health is better for all New Jerseyans when Black communities enjoy full political participation and representation, with access to economic security and opportunity. Our vision at the UBA is to provide a shared space for our respective organizations to not only promote the welfare of Black New Jerseyans but to also address the state's history of discrimination, while ending the marginalization and subjugation of our people.

We are calling on state legislators to stop taking the Black vote for granted and to start delivering on their campaign promises.



¹www.njisj.org/two_new_jerseys_by_the_numbers

Our 3 Legislative Priorities

As a coalition that works on behalf of Black constituents across the state, our UBA member organizations look forward to collaborating with legislators, partners, policymakers, and communities to advance three priorities focusing specifically on:



1. Eliminating the racial wealth gap and building a state where Black residents thrive



2. Repairing past and current harms to communities of color, and protecting Black lives



3. Removing barriers to democracy as well as promoting the leadership of Black and Brown people in legislative, judicial, and other prominent roles

“No longer will political figures show up at our churches in our neighborhoods only during election time, give a few preachers and people an appointment, and call that progress.”

— **Rev. Charles Boyer,**
Founding Director,
Salvation and Social Justice





Legislative Priority 1: ECONOMIC

Eliminate the racial wealth gap and build a state where Black residents thrive.

Black New Jerseyans deserve to be able to earn a living wage, afford their rent or mortgage, feed and clothe themselves and/or their families, and have money left over for an emergency fund and savings toward generational wealth. No resident should be forced to choose between basic necessities, nor should they have to live so close to the poverty line that one unanticipated expense unravels their lives. Systemic inequities, such as the racial wealth gap, disrupt the creation of healthy and thriving communities of color in our state. To that end, dismantling systemic racism requires an acknowledgment that economic discrimination in all forms directly influences an individual and a family's ability to thrive. The UBA advocates for legislation that:

- **Establishes a universal basic income program.** Invest in a comprehensive, guaranteed income program across the state. Pilot programs should be launched in urban communities, the state should raise the minimum wage to a livable one, and access should be expanded to include retirement benefit plans.
- **Creates pathways to wealth-generating industries.** Address the decades of racist practices and policies that undermine Black prosperity. Ensuring equity in the newly established cannabis industry should be a top priority in this plan. Meaningful access to the cannabis marketplace will help people of color to tap into a new source of generational wealth.
- **Develops and fully funds a baby bonds program.** Provide the greatest support to children of color from low-wealth households with this progressive program.
- **Invests in homeownership opportunities.** Support programs targeting first-generation homeowners, as well as offer down payment assistance and housing counseling. People of color should be able to purchase homes in areas where home prices are appreciating, not depreciating or remaining stagnant. We must also remove barriers and increase enforcement against discriminatory practices, such as appraisal discrimination. Furthermore, the state should continue to invest in homeownership opportunities for people of color.
- **Ensures economic justice through reparations.** Enact reparative policies, rectifying the generations of damages caused by systemic racism and the institution of slavery, and tear down the structural obstacles to wealth for communities of color. From establishing a Reparations Task Force that researches and develops strategic proposals, to reforming our state's discriminatory financial and taxation systems, legislators must take proactive steps to invest in the economic well-being of Black individuals and families.



Legislative Priority 2: SOCIAL

Repair past and current harms to communities of color, and protect Black lives.

Black New Jerseyans deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and their humanity should be valued as much as the lives of white residents. State and local systems must be held accountable for the past and current harms inflicted on Black individuals and communities. New Jersey's social infrastructure must be designed to lift people out of poverty and help them thrive. And we must address the historic disinvestment in communities of color that has led to New Jersey leading the nation in Black-white racial disparities across multiple systems. The UBA supports legislation that:

- **Incorporates racial impact statements into legislative processes.** Since the legislature has failed to adequately implement the state's 2018 laws on racial impact statements, we are calling for the establishment of the Ronald Rice Institute for Racial Impact. This independent agency will have the personnel and professional expertise to ascertain and analyze statistical information that's critical to understanding the effects of legislation on certain socioeconomic and racial demographics.
- **Prioritizes the health of communities of color.** Address persistent racial health disparities, which were exacerbated among marginalized communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The state should also protect Black individuals and families by addressing the lack of access to birthing care; providing universal health coverage for Brown and Black adults who are ineligible or unable to afford health care; and requiring implicit bias training for health professionals along with accessible preventative care in communities of color.
- **Enforces and safeguards the Mount Laurel Doctrine.** Continue to outlaw exclusionary zoning and require all towns to create a realistic opportunity to build their fair share of affordable housing. The landmark Mount Laurel case has led to the construction of over 70,000 new affordable homes in high-opportunity communities and put municipalities on notice to stop maintaining racial and economic segregation.
- **Protects Black lives and communities.** Support banning and criminalizing the police use of choke holds, create civilian complaint review boards, ensure state regulations align with the implementation of the Amend Police Certification bill, and codify the Attorney General's Use of Force Directive. We also advocate for the adoption of alternatives to law enforcement responses to nonviolent situations where community-led, first-response teams should respond instead of police.





Legislative Priority 3: POLITICAL

Remove barriers to democracy, as well as promote the leadership of Black and Brown people in legislative, judicial, and other prominent roles.

Black constituents must have unfettered access to our democracy. New Jersey is populated by nearly a majority of people of color, so it is beyond time for our state leadership to reflect the backgrounds of its constituents. Barriers to participation in our democracy, especially those that disproportionately impact Black communities, must be eliminated. A true democracy depends on the full participation of its members; our state must do better to make that a reality for Black residents. To that end, the UBA advocates for legislation that:

- **Prioritizes greater inclusion across state leadership.** Include more Black and Brown people on boards, commissions, the judiciary, task forces, and groups that manage state pension funds to ensure that the state administration is inclusive and truly reflects New Jersey's constituency.
- **Eliminates barriers to voting and civic engagement.** Fully protect the freedom of all constituents to vote by passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New Jersey; offering same-day voter registration, including on Election Day; restoring voting rights to people in prison; and expanding jury service to individuals with criminal convictions.
- **Increases transparency in all government actions.** Remove barriers to the state's budget and legislative processes so that Black constituents and communities can meaningfully engage in the lawmaking process.

Our Accomplishments & Mission

Since forming in 2017, our eight-member organization has demanded action and advocated for policy that will improve the lives and build the wealth of Black New Jerseyans for generations. The results of our work include, but are not limited to:

- the addition of **\$15 million** in state funds for First-Generation Homeownership programs
- the addition of **83,000** new voters on voting rolls
- the development of the Cannabis Commission and cannabis legislation
- the establishment of the Fair Chance in Housing Act
- an **\$8.4 million** investment in programs and services impacting youth
- a **\$750 million** investment in eviction relief
- a **1/3** reduction in the prison population
- the judicial appointments of **12** Black women
- the establishment of early voting days and the online registration of voters
- the continued push for implicit bias training for health care professionals
- the end of prison gerrymandering
- the passage of Housing Resource Center legislation, which ensures all available affordable housing units are listed on one website
- the reform of the Attorney General's Use of Force directive
- the launch of the racism as a health crisis initiative
- the increased use of body cameras by police officers
- improved relations with the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus
- the tracking of racial data related to the COVID-19 pandemic
- the establishment of relationships with foundations, as well as media and liberal organizations
- grassroots engagement via town halls, listening sessions, and podcasts
- advocacy around cannabis decriminalization, which includes a social equity excise tax and the requirement that 70% of cannabis sales tax be invested back into directly impacted communities

We will always acknowledge and proactively attack the root causes of inequality; aggressively pursue legislation, policies, and programs to mitigate the ravages of white supremacy; and affirm the tenets of democracy, freedom, and liberty.

We are the United Black Agenda, and this is our mission.

Our Member Organizations



United Black Agenda

Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey – <https://abwl-nj.org>

Fair Share Housing Center – www.fairsharehousing.org

Monarch Housing Associates – <https://monarchhousing.org>

NAACP New Jersey State Conference – www.naacpnj.org

New Jersey Association of Alpha Phi Alpha Chapters – www.njalphas.org

New Jersey Black Issues Convention – <https://njbic.org>

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice – www.njisi.org

Salvation and Social Justice – www.sandsj.org

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