Salvation and Social Justice Policy Agenda 2022-2023
**Mission Statement**

Salvation and Social Justice seeks to liberate public policy theologically by modeling the hope and resiliency of Black faith; where historically marginalized people move from lament to liberation by envisioning and creating their own community led solutions to a structurally racist society.

**Problem Statement**

New Jersey continues to lead with some of the highest racial disparities in the country. In New Jersey, Black residents are incarcerated at a rate of 12.5 times that of white residents. Black people make up just 15% of the population in the state yet they represent 43% of the arrests for drug violations despite the fact that there is no evidence that Blacks use drugs at a higher rate than whites. New Jersey has the fourth highest maternal mortality rate in the nation with Black women being 7 times more likely than white women to die before or after they have given birth, and Black babies, 3 times more likely to die than white babies before reaching their first birthday. New Jersey’s schools are the 6th most segregated in the nation and the most segregated in the North, adversely affecting scores of Black children subjecting them to disparate conditions such as overcrowding, insufficiently staffed schools, and limited access to resources and opportunities.

**Vision Statement**

Our vision is one in which New Jersey not only becomes a more just and equitable state by acknowledging, addressing, and repairing racist structures that continue to harm Black communities, but that New Jersey will lead in the quest for reparative justice throughout the nation. Our priorities, shaped by those most impacted by harmful policies in our state, seek to heal communities through the creation of a more equitable and just New Jersey.
Codifying the New Jersey Attorney General’s Use of Force Directive

In December 2020, Attorney General Grewel released a new statewide use of force policy. If codified it would significantly strengthen protections against police use of force for people in this state beyond any administration. Codifying the Attorney General’s use of force policy would also make New Jersey a national leader, with some of the strongest statutory prohibitions and guidance on use of force in the country.

Abolish the War on Drugs in NJ

Draconian drug laws, especially those in New Jersey, have been at the helm of the over policing, disparate arrests, prosecution, incarceration, and disenfranchisement of Black communities. We call to decriminalize the use and possession of personal use amounts of all drugs. We call to have punitive drug laws abolished, and in its place, we support policy that approaches drug use from a harm reduction and restorative justice framework and prioritizes reinvestment into communities most harmed.

Abolish Life and Virtual Life Imprisonment in NJ

We encourage legislators to adopt policy that: ends life imprisonment; ends mandatory minimums; and expands the clemency and pardoning processes for those subjected to disproportionate application of the law. We support policy that is grounded in science about public safety and recidivism and recognizes the humanity of all people.

Racial Impact Analysis

In 2018, the legislature passed S677, which requires that the Office of Legislative Services prepare racial impact statements for policy changes that affect pretrial detention, sentencing and parole. To date, there has only been one racial impact statement written as it pertained to decriminalization of cannabis. We call to have the legislature allocate funds to secure the personnel and professional expertise required to ascertain and analyze statistical information that is critical to understanding the effects of legislation on certain socioeconomic and racial demographics as required by law.

Community Led First Response:

We encourage legislators to adopt policy that establishes Community Response Teams as an alternative to law enforcement responses for nonviolent substance use, behavioral and mental health calls. Community response teams would serve as mental health and crisis intervention first responders that would rely heavily on highly trained professionals other than police. Community Response Teams have been proven to be effective tools in violence interruption as well as limiting unnecessary and harmful interactions between police and communities of color.

Police Decertification

New Jersey is currently one of four states in the nation that do not have a police decertification process. We support policy that would require Police Training Commissions (PTC) to establish a police licensure or certification program and empower the Commission to revoke the licenses of officers who engage in specified acts of misconduct. Officers who have been decertified may not be hired by another law enforcement agency in the state or law enforcement adjacent professions (i.e., school resource officers, court officers, parole/probation officers, etc.). Additionally, the PTC would be required to report the decertification of officers to the National Decertification Index (NDI) (S780/S784).
Community Investments

Reinvestment of Cannabis Revenue

Ensure that cannabis revenue is reinvested in those communities most harmed by the war on drugs. We will continue advocacy efforts to the Cannabis Regulatory Commission (CRC), Governor, and the legislature to inform the ways in which revenue should be allocated to have the most impact in repairing Black communities. A significant portion of tax revenue from cannabis should be redirected towards restorative programs in impact zones, especially those that support equity and wealth building efforts. We advocate for a transparent and inclusive process that centers community voices during all stages of the reinvestment process. Reparative efforts must establish an industry framework that supports those disproportionately affected by past policies by providing startup capital, ensuring their participation in the reinvestment process, and prioritizing the applications of Black businesses.

American Rescue Plan (ARP)

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every aspect of life, however in Black communities the pandemic has only further exacerbated problems that previously existed. We seek to ensure that this plan, intended to offer economic recovery for everything from schools to infrastructure, focuses on two particular areas that have been woefully neglected in the city of Trenton:

Birthing Deserts and Black Maternal Health

We seek to address the erosion to access of maternity care by funding neighborhood Maternal health centers in Black communities. For instance, the widespread closures of maternity care units in Trenton have only worked to amplify existing disparities in maternal health. The first step to addressing those disparities involves allocating dollars towards the rebuilding of these critical sources to health care.

The absence of community programs

The presence of comprehensive community programs that speak to particular needs in Black communities is integral to youth development and violence interruption efforts. We seek to funnel dollars allocated by the ARP to blighted properties owned by Black churches throughout the state in order to house and develop critical community programs such as restorative justice hubs.
Black Maternal Health
We call for policy that funds, preserves and protects authentic culturally competent doula care by centering Black women in policy discussion and implementation. Currently there is nowhere a Black woman can give birth in the city of Trenton, therefore we advocate for a Trenton based Black Maternal Health Center that includes pre and postnatal services as well as a birthing center.

Universal Health Coverage
Last year we, alongside several of our partners, were successful in getting the “Cover All Kids” legislation passed, which provided universal health care coverage to all children in New Jersey. Moving forward we seek to ensure the successful implementation of this policy through adequate community education and outreach efforts. Additionally, we seek to expand coverage for adults who are now ineligible or unable to afford existing health care coverage options for a myriad of reasons.

Qualifying Racism as a Health Crisis
We encourage legislators to adopt policy that qualifies racism as a health crisis as well as supporting policy that: requires implicit bias training for doctors; establishes adequate and accessible preventative care in Black communities; and mandates racial impact statements for all health care policy.

Desegregate New Jersey Schools
We encourage legislators to adopt policy that eliminates zip code barriers and increases access to education across superficial district lines. We support policy that establishes Division of School Desegregation in Department of Education to identify racial and socioeconomic segregation of school districts and to ensure better integration into public schools by centering community voices in the process as well as providing transparent reporting of the division’s findings (A1984/S820).

Eliminate Zero Tolerance Policies in New Jersey Schools
We propose policy to restrict schools’ ability to suspend or expel students in certain situations and mandate that they create alternative methods for discipline within a certain time period. We support the implementation of SBIRT in every school. Additionally, we support policy that seeks to examine current school discipline practices and addresses the way in which current policies perpetuate racial disparities that fuel the school to prison pipeline.