

## Interconnecting Crises

In May 2020, a police officer in Minneapolis put his knee on the neck of a restrained Black man and kept it there for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. George Floyd's death haunts us. The deaths of unarmed Black Americans before and since haunt us. Across this country, people of all races and ethnicities are focused on the ways in which Black Americans have been targeted and denigrated by the policies and practices of our public institutions. Americans, collectively, are coming to understand how deeply structural racism<sup>1</sup> has shaped those policies and practices that disproportionately harm Black, Latinx, Asian, and immigrant communities. At the same time, in New Jersey as elsewhere, the COVID pandemic has underscored those racial disparities and structural inequities. People of color, again, are disproportionately impacted by the public health crisis and hurt most by the corresponding economic fallout. Addressing these crises requires a commitment to ending systemic racism.

### Criminal Justice Crisis

**Police violence.** In 2018, a 16-month investigation by NJ Advance Media examined police use of force over 5 years (2012-2016) in every local police department in New Jersey.<sup>2</sup> The findings included:

- Evidence that 10% of police are responsible for 38% of all incidents of use of force.
- Data that statewide, a Black person was more than three times more likely to face police force than someone who is white; in Millville, the disparity was more than six times; in South Orange, nearly 10 times; and in Lakewood, 22 times.
- Statewide "at least 9,281 people were injured by police from 2012 through 2016. At least 4,382 of those [injuries] were serious enough that the subject was sent to the hospital, though reporting of hospitalization is inconsistent. At least 156 officers put at least one person in the hospital in *each* of the five years reviewed."<sup>3</sup>

2020 data from Newark show these patterns persist. Black residents account for only 50% of Newark's population, yet in the past 6 months have experienced 71% of stops, 79% of arrests, and 82% of the incidences of use of force.<sup>4</sup>

**Mass incarceration.** Reforms in New Jersey have reduced the state's inmate population over the

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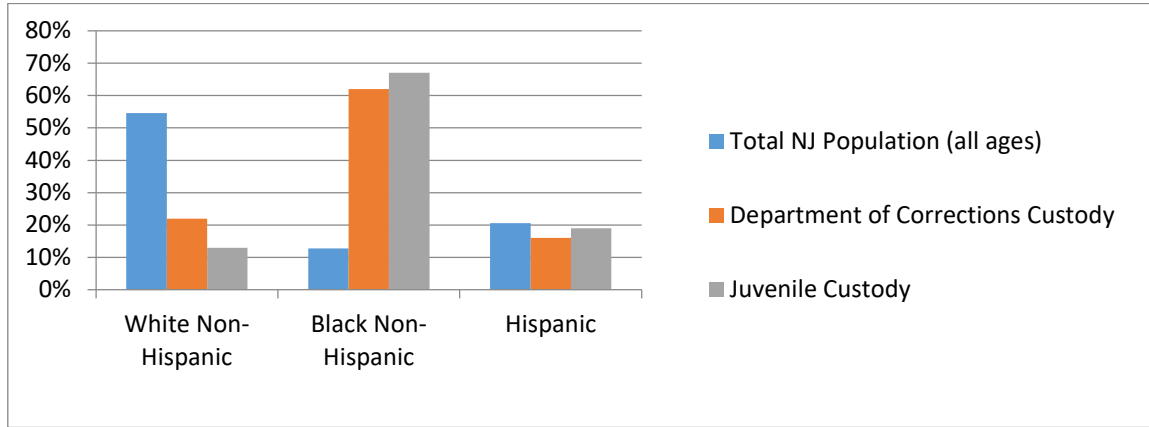
<sup>1</sup> Structural racism is the mechanism by which policies and practices "disproportionately segregate communities of color from access to opportunity and upward mobility by making it more difficult for people of color to secure quality education, jobs, housing, healthcare, and equal treatment in the criminal justice system." [Urban Institute](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The Force Report](#), NJ.com, 2018

<sup>3</sup> ["Hundreds of cops are using force at alarming rates"](#) NJ.com, 2018

<sup>4</sup> ["Newark must do more to stop racial disparities in policing"](#) NJ.com, July 2020

last 20 years,<sup>5</sup> making the state a leader in reducing mass incarceration. Yet, New Jersey’s racial disparities remain among the worst in the country. Nationally, in 2018, African Americans made up 12% of the adult population and 33% of those in prison.<sup>6</sup> Even more striking, in New Jersey in 2020, African Americans made up 13% of the total population and 62% of those in prison.<sup>7</sup>

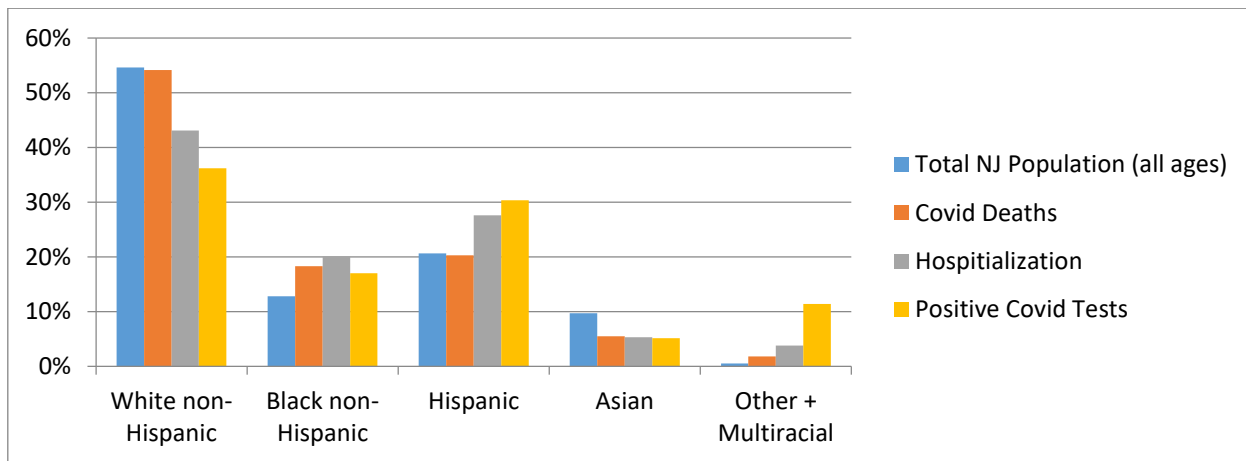


The same disparities persist in the juvenile system in 2020: of the youth incarcerated in New Jersey, 67% are Black, 19% are Hispanic, and 13% are white.<sup>8</sup>

**COVID-19 Crisis**

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on New Jersey residents’ health and economic vitality and has stressed the functioning at every level of government.

**Public Health.** As of July 27 in New Jersey, 179,812 residents have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and 13,884 residents have died of confirmed disease<sup>9</sup>; in April-June, New Jersey was the second hardest hit state in the country.



<sup>5</sup> [Offender Statistics](#) NJ Department of Corrections, January 2020  
<sup>6</sup> [“Black imprisonment rate has fallen by a third”](#) Pew Trusts, 2019  
<sup>7</sup> [Offender Statistics](#) NJ Department of Corrections, January 2020  
<sup>8</sup> [Juvenile Demographics and Statistics](#) NJ Juvenile Justice Commission, January 2020  
<sup>9</sup> [COVID Confirmed Case Summary](#) NJ Department of Health, 2020. Note: (1) ethnically Asian residents are proportionally less likely to test positive and (2) no data at all are reported for Native American residents.

The chart demonstrates the skewed distribution of COVID cases. But even more striking are the disparate confirmed rates of infection: for Black and Latinx residents there were 15.2 and 16.8 positive tests, respectively, for every 1,000 residents, whereas for white residents only 7.4 positive tests per 1,000 residents. The rate of positive tests for Latinx residents and Black residents is more than twice the rate for white residents.

Black, Latinx, and other residents of color have been more likely to contract Covid disease because they are overrepresented in service and other “essential” and high-exposure job categories. These patterns of employment are the results of structural barriers, including discrimination, that have limited workers, especially women of color, to jobs that have few protections or benefits, and few opportunities for advancement.<sup>10</sup> The latest COVID-19 case and mortality data mirror the stark health disparities the Black population has historically faced<sup>11</sup> including higher incidence of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, the two top underlying disease risk factors for death by COVID-19.<sup>12</sup> These underlying health conditions are in turn associated with poverty, lack of access to health care, and poor insurance coverage,<sup>13</sup> which also cause testing and treatment delays for this population.

**Economic Impact.** The economic fallout from COVID-19 in New Jersey has been no less devastating. As of June 13th, 13 weeks since the state shut down, 1.24 million New Jersey residents, 28% of the state’s current labor force, have filed for unemployment benefits.<sup>14</sup> In June, New Jersey’s unemployment rate stood at 16.6%, above the national unemployment rate of 11.1%. To date, more than \$11.6 billion in state and federal unemployment benefits have been paid.<sup>15</sup> Workers of color, who disproportionately occupy low-wage jobs in the most impacted sectors, are at greater risk of layoffs during COVID-19.

Undocumented workers in New Jersey – and their families – are at particular risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. New Jersey Policy Perspective notes, “Undocumented immigrants, who make up approximately 6 percent of New Jersey’s population, account for a disproportionate 15.7 percent of the workforce in [affected] service sector industries. In total, there are approximately 125,000 undocumented workers employed in service sector industries that are most likely to be harmed by the pandemic.”<sup>16</sup>

The federal government CARES Act, which provided cash assistance and expanded unemployment benefits, excluded undocumented workers as well as mixed-status families, leaving them without any financial safety net despite often occupying positions as essential workers.<sup>17</sup> The add-on effects in New Jersey are significant. It is estimated that 475,000 state residents are

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<sup>10</sup> ["On the frontlines at work and at home"](#) Center for American Progress, April 2020

<sup>11</sup> ["The impact of COVID on the Black community"](#) Dr. Denise Rodgers, May 2020

<sup>12</sup> [NJ COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#) 2020

<sup>13</sup> ["This is worse than war"](#) NorthJersey.com, May 2020

<sup>14</sup> [press release](#) NJ Department of Labor, June 2020

<sup>15</sup> [NJ data](#) Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2020

<sup>16</sup> ["Undocumented workers in service sector most likely to be harmed"](#) NJ Policy Perspective, April 2020

<sup>17</sup> ["Married to an undocumented immigrant?"](#) New York Times, April 2020

undocumented and that an additional 600,000-plus residents, including 200,000 U.S. citizen children, live in households with at least one undocumented person.

At the same time, the State of New Jersey faces significant fiscal issues, which constrain the state's ability to fund the supports vulnerable people need during these challenging times.

### **Public Policies Exacerbated These Crises**

Our broken criminal justice system and the COVID pandemic have most affected Black, Latinx, and non-citizen immigrant New Jerseyans. These crises have focused our attention on systemic racism, on the policies that create and perpetuate societal inequities and racial injustices. The public policy choices we have made have resulted in:

- Limited access to healthcare because health insurance is available only to certain groups of people, i.e., those eligible for employer-sponsored plans or those able to qualify for public programs, assuming they can afford the costs; in New Jersey, job losses due to COVID are estimated to have removed 124,000 New Jerseyans from their employer-provided health insurance<sup>18</sup>;
- Working conditions that allow some to work from the safety of their homes while others lost their jobs or had to continue working in unsafe conditions;
- The concentration of women into low-wage and increasingly dangerous “front line jobs”: for example, most of the essential workers in healthcare are not doctors and nurses but rather health care service, health care support, or direct care workers and, of these workers, 80% are women and 46% are African American or Latinx; essential workers experience low pay, high stress, and few supports to meet their own and their family needs, even in non-pandemic times<sup>19</sup>;
- Growing economic inequality reflected in decreasing government benefits that are needed by struggling families and, at the same time, increasing disparities of wealth; in New Jersey, the median net worth for a Black family is \$5,900, for a Latinx family is \$7,020, and for a white family is \$309,000<sup>20</sup>;
- “[M]unicipal government in New Jersey, with revenue raising, zoning and planning functions fragmented among [565] municipalities and [584] school districts”<sup>21</sup> that perpetuates segregation, sustains inequalities, and drives our state’s overreliance on property taxes;

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<sup>18</sup> [COVID-related insurance losses](#) Families USA report, July 2020

<sup>19</sup> [“Essential but undervalued”](#) Brookings Institute, May 2020

<sup>20</sup> [Reclaiming the American Dream](#) New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, 2019

<sup>21</sup> [Report for Action](#) Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorder, State of New Jersey (“Lilley Commission”), 1968, p 162

The numbers of municipalities and school districts were updated to 2018-19 figures. Note the number of school districts does not include non-operating (16), charter (88), and renaissance (3) schools. [New Jersey Public Schools Fact Sheet](#) NJ Department of Education, 2020

- Residential segregation coupled with housing costs that put affordable homes out of reach for too many New Jerseyans, as well as inadequate protections for renters and homeowners whose struggles to keep up have been set back by COVID;
- School district attendance boundaries that concentrate white and Asian students in higher wealth districts that can afford to better meet their students' needs, as was evident when some students were able to continue taking classes via Zoom and others' education stopped when the schools closed because those students were unable to access learning materials or internet lessons;
- Pollution that is concentrated in lower income urban communities, in which long-term exposure to irritants has resulted in increased rates of asthma and pulmonary disease, making residents more susceptible to the ravages of COVID;
- Existing criminal laws coupled with patterns of policing that have led to racial disparities in arrests for marijuana possession despite similar usage rates; in 2016, Black people in New Jersey were three times more likely than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession<sup>22</sup>;
- Mandatory minimum sentences that disproportionately affect communities of color<sup>23</sup>; these extended terms of imprisonment make it difficult for inmates to reenter society when finally released, and are associated with negative physical, economic, and mental health consequences for the offenders' children, families, and communities<sup>24</sup>; and
- The nation's second highest rate of COVID-19-related deaths for incarcerated residents<sup>25</sup> who are disproportionately people of color.

It is long past time to resolve these issues.

### **Continuing a Commitment**

Since 1970, [The Fund for New Jersey](#) has focused its philanthropy on improving the quality of life in the Garden State by supporting good policy decision-making. At its core, good public policy is the remediation of injustice and inequity. Since The Fund's earliest years, its grantmaking has addressed the compounding inequities in opportunity, outcome, and influence, and sought to ameliorate these injustices. This has been our focus.

By way of example, The Fund has tried to improve educational opportunities for public school children in New Jersey's cities. Fund grants supported the *Abbott* litigation and the redistribution of state monies to address disparities in local school funding that disadvantaged predominantly Black and Latinx students. More recently, The Fund has supported efforts to address New Jersey's segregated schools and to offer remedies that will improve education and integrate classrooms.

<sup>22</sup> ["Still unequal, still unfair"](#) ACLU –NJ, November 2019

<sup>23</sup> [Annual Report](#) New Jersey Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission, November 2019

<sup>24</sup> ["Over-incarceration of nonviolent offenders hurts children and families"](#) American Bar Foundation, 2016

<sup>25</sup> ["A state-by-state look at coronavirus in prisons"](#) The Marshall Project, May 2020

Over decades, The Fund has supported the goals of the *Mount Laurel* decisions so that low income families, often African-American and Latinx, would have the opportunity to live in homes they can afford in communities that offer better schools, healthier environments, and better job prospects. The Fund has supported criminal justice and policing reforms, improved access to healthcare, and expansion of civil rights. The Fund’s grantees have confronted the racial disparities of income, wealth, and job opportunities; pushed for access to clean air and water and environmental justice; and worked to ameliorate the marginalization of immigrants and their families.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these efforts, progress in state policy has come slowly, in fits and starts. Now, in 2020, there is a new sense of urgency for reform shared by a diverse and growing number of New Jerseyans. Now is the time for all of us to intensify our efforts.

### **Responding in This Moment**

**We believe New Jersey’s COVID and post-COVID policy and advocacy response must address directly systemic racism and its effects.** Reforms must be led by, and advance the rights and interests of, Black, Latinx, Asian, and immigrant communities. Nonprofit and community-based organizations are already meeting to devise a *collective approach* that will bring together diverse groups to develop a *focused* strategy; the goal is to identify the key *shared priorities*, to select particular policy goals with the *biggest impact*, to develop a *coordinated plan* of advocacy and action, and to *work cooperatively* to make change.

**We recognize this timely opportunity for systemic change.** Public attention is focused on the need for structural reform and policy makers are now considering measures that were political non-starters only a few months ago. This current swell of interest creates an opportunity for change. At the same time, we recognize that the work to dismantle structural racism requires our strong and sustained commitment. As John Lewis told us: “Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime.”

**The Fund has increased its commitment to address structural racism and encourages other foundations to join this effort to advance policies that will expand racial justice, reduce social, economic, and health inequities, and build power and agency among Black, Latinx, Asian, and immigrant communities.** We anticipate spending – above our regular grants budget– \$900,000 in 2020-21 and, again, in 2021-22. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation awarded The Fund \$450,000 in support of these efforts. The Fund invites other foundations to join in this important work so that we can, together, build a better New Jersey.

Increased funding will enable support for:

- policy/advocacy organizations that are at the forefront of developing and pursuing this ambitious collective racial justice policy agenda;

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<sup>26</sup> The Fund highlighted these and other policy recommendations in its 2017 series [Crossroads NJ: Policy Choices That Define Our Future](#).

- community engagement, including Black-led grassroots organizing and diverse networks of youth leaders that emanate from Black, Latinx, Asian, and immigrant communities; and
- shared resources such as coordinated communications, collaborative planning, and technology to support the collective effort.

**The Fund for New Jersey will work with New Jersey’s foundations and nonprofits to improve our state’s institutions, policies, and practices so that structural racism will end.**