

# TRANSITION MEMORANDUM

**To:** Governor Elect Mikie Sherrill

**From:** Taysha Milagros Clark-Reid, Public Policy Director-Northern New Jersey (NNJ)  
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Volunteers of America-NNJ, a division of Volunteers of America-Greater New York

**Date:** November 7, 2025

**Re:** Congratulations and Transition Priorities

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Congratulations on your election! As governor, there will be many challenges ahead and opportunities ahead, few more pressing than ensuring that New Jersey is an affordable and safe place to call home. Presently, New Jersey ranks as the 7<sup>th</sup> most expensive state in the country for renter households<sup>1</sup>, and homelessness has increased eight percent since last year.<sup>2</sup> This reality is a call to action for your administration and the multiple stakeholders responding to this challenge.

At Volunteers of America-Northern New Jersey, it is our mission to end homelessness. We are a faith-based, antipoverty organization that has been in operation for nearly 130 years. Our programs provide comprehensive housing, health, and wealth-building services to households with a range of challenges that make them susceptible to homelessness, including youth, veterans, survivors of domestic violence, seniors, and people with mental health disabilities. Our years of experience serving a range of constituencies make us uniquely qualified to offer ideas, support, and scalable solutions to aid your administration as you work to enhance affordability for all New Jerseyans.

Nonprofits like VOA-NNJ are key partners in tackling the challenges your administration will face. VOA-NNJ is ready to aid your administration in achieving your vision for a stronger New Jersey. Please consider us your partners as you look for solutions to the State's affordability challenges.

To make a real impact together, we need your support to ensure our organizations remain strong in helping achieve our shared goals. Many nonprofits across the state currently rely on legislative earmarks to sustain their operations. Although this funding supports important programs, it leaves organizations vulnerable to political shifts, creating financial instability that hinders long-term planning. While this instability has not diminished organizational or programmatic excellence, it weakens nonprofits' ability to consistently meet the needs of their communities.

It is possible and necessary to strike a balance between the local expertise of legislators and ensuring a fair, transparent process with an allocation formula based on relative needs across the state. Given the threats of federal funding cuts, it is even more important for our state governments to shore up the social safety net and leveraging existing funds to support our most vulnerable constituents.

To promote transparency, equity, and sustainability, we encourage exploring solutions such as:

- Developing an allocation methodology based on need and shared priorities.
  - This methodology can use poverty levels as a proxy for need and should use district-level data. Additionally, one can implement a weighted ranking system wherein communities with the highest need, using poverty levels or AMI as proxy, receive the most earmarks.
- Transitioning to an RFP model that rewards impact and accountability
  - This will involve leveraging local knowledge of nonprofits who have a proven record of effectiveness and working to build rapport with new providers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nlihc.org/oor>

<sup>2</sup> <https://monarchhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/New-Jersey.pdf>

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We also recommend making better use of our state agencies' institutional knowledge, leveraging them not just as funding pass-throughs, but as active partners who understand community needs and can help operationalize effective solutions.

- The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has a robust data hub, which it uses to inform its decision-making. Additionally, their partnerships with municipalities and proactive tools are a vital resource for the community.
- The Department of Human Services (DHS) has been a tremendous resource for constituents with behavioral health challenges and their partnerships with the Department of Community Affairs have allowed for maximizing capacity to meet constituents' needs.
- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has provided key supports for families and youth involved in the child welfare system, from housing to community supports including programs like Keeping Families Together.

Outlined below are our priorities for your administration to strengthen the state and improve the lives of the people we collectively serve.

## **Workforce**

New Jersey must adopt fiscally responsible government contracting practices and invest in the human services workforce to ensure that nonprofit providers like VOA-NNJ can effectively and flexibly respond to the evolving needs of residents. Roughly two-thirds of New Jersey nonprofits receive government funding, and more than half report that these funds make up at least a quarter of their annual budgets<sup>3</sup>. Nonprofit providers are essential partners in advancing state priorities and caring for communities, yet they need stronger financial stability to sustain both organizational and community well-being.

Despite significant investments in serving vulnerable populations, corresponding investments in building a strong and stable workforce have faltered. Current human services contracts often force organizations to choose between delivering critical services and paying staff a living wage. This false dichotomy ultimately harms both clients and employees. To remedy this, New Jersey must establish financially sound contracts that equitably support the needs of both the people served and the professionals who serve them. If our work to guarantee NJ is an affordable place to call home, contracts should not perpetuate poverty conditions for staff.

- When state agencies release RFPs for human services programs, they should be required to include a model budget including salary parameters that ensure fair and livable wages that are comparable to similar roles in government or the private sector.

## **Housing**

VOA-NNJ recognizes that homelessness is, at its core, a housing issue. To effectively address New Jersey's intertwined housing and homelessness crises, the state must invest in the entire housing continuum—from emergency shelter to supportive and permanent housing.

- We need year-round shelter access and capacity for both families and individuals in every county with coordinated intake procedures.
  - Currently, shelters are unevenly distributed across the state, and the absence of coordinated intake procedures has created significant regional disparities. Some counties are oversaturated with shelters and resources, while others lack even basic supports. As a result, many households experiencing homelessness are forced to leave their communities to obtain assistance.

<sup>3</sup> <https://njnonprofits.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025AnnualSurveyRpt.pdf>

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- The State should develop a central vacancy control and shelter inventory system where all shelter providers can report vacancies and receive referrals across the network of shelters throughout the state so that residents in need do not need to bear the burden of finding resources on their own.

To ensure shelters function as an effective short-term tool, they must be paired with broader investments in affordable housing and comprehensive services that address the full spectrum of need. Progress can be achieved through the following ways:

- Providing technical assistance to municipalities to assist them in meeting their A4 obligations to expand affordable housing supply
- Protecting and growing the Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Fully funding the State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP) to better serve cost-burdened New Jerseyans.

## Health

VOA-NNJ advocates for expanding access to medical and mental health care through layered services, the growth of pilot programs, stronger care coordination among providers, and increased funding for health initiatives. Central to our approach is the belief in community integration and comprehensive support services that address the full range of individual needs.

As a nonprofit provider serving residents across the state, VOA-NNJ delivers a wide array of essential services but continues to face challenges stemming from policies and practices that limit clients' agency, self-determination, and access to care. Despite these obstacles, we remain steadfast in our commitment to destigmatizing services and providing compassionate, high-quality care for New Jerseyans in need. However, the rapidly shifting healthcare landscape demands thoughtful and timely action. An estimated 765,000 New Jersey residents are at risk of losing Medicaid coverage due to policy changes. To ensure that every New Jerseyan maintains access to care, we urge your administration to champion responsive, equity-driven policies that reflect the urgency and complexity of this moment. This involves:

- Creating and ensuring health care options for New Jerseyans
- Developing advisory boards and opportunities for constituents with lived experience with mental health challenges to share and inform priorities and decision making in agencies.

## Wealth

To truly end homelessness, we must go beyond providing housing and health services by also creating wealth-building opportunities that enable households to sustain and afford their homes over time. At VOA-NNJ, we have integrated financial empowerment into our youth programs—most notably through the My First Place (MFP) program, which combines housing support with employment and educational initiatives. To comprehensively address the full range of needs, we urge your administration to:

- Invest in education and workforce development
- Replicate the MFP model across other programs.

Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of our mission and should likewise be a priority for this administration, as it offers a sustainable path to stability and affordability for all New Jerseyans.

## Conclusion

The challenges before your administration are significant, but they are far from insurmountable. They offer a unique opportunity to demonstrate innovative, bold, and thoughtful leadership. Addressing these issues cannot rest on your shoulders alone; it requires a coordinated, whole-of-government and community-wide response that meets the scale

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of need. It is our shared responsibility to confront these challenges together—breaking down silos and collaborating to co-create effective solutions. By adopting a proactive, data-informed approach that reflects both evidence and the lived experiences of our constituents, we can chart a stronger, more equitable path forward for New Jersey. Please consider VOA-NNJ your partner in this endeavor.

Our specific legislative priorities are in the attached memorandum for your reference.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with your team, and can be reached via e-mail at [treid@voa-gny.org](mailto:treid@voa-gny.org) and via phone at (917) 708-0126.