



August 19, 2020

The Honorable Senator Paul Sarlo
Chair of the Senate Budget Committee
New Jersey Senate
496 Columbia Blvd., 1st Floor
Wood-Ridge, NJ 07075

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Chairman Sarlo,

On behalf of the For The Many coalition, we, the undersigned, are writing to request that the FY 2021 budget process be as transparent and inclusive as possible.

Despite the earnestly good work done for the state's pandemic recovery, the budget building process is already falling into a familiar pattern, where the public is given little information about the timeline and other aspects of this unusual budget cycle. The pandemic-induced downturn is causing havoc on New Jersey's finances and we understand that exceptional actions are to be taken. But that does not excuse leaving the public, including legislators, advocacy groups, and the press, in the dark.

If the development of one of the most consequential budgets in New Jersey's history is hidden from view, the executive and legislative branches risk undermining the public's trust and perpetuating the notion that the budget process is nothing more than last minute deal-making behind closed doors.

As of today, 36 business days before the FY 2021 budget must be passed, there is no publicly available basic information on the budget process, like the schedule of key budget events and whether the New Jersey Legislature has plans to call upon state commissioners or fiscal experts to testify before finalizing the Appropriations Act.

We ask policymakers to adhere to principles of transparency and accountability with clear communication and opportunities for the public to review and analyze the forthcoming budgetary proposals.

Given the scale of the COVID fiscal collapse and lessons learned in the aftermath of the Great Recession, it is imperative that decision-makers meet the moment with integrity and openness. We urge our state decision-makers to release relevant budget documents in a timely fashion, commit to transparency in the state bonding review committee process, and hold legislative budget hearings with adequate notice and the option of virtual participation for the public's safety.

Thank you for taking our concerns into consideration. We need the budget to meet this moment. We deserve a transparent process that reflects the gravity of the fiscal crisis and its long-term impacts. We look forward to continued discussions as the FY 2021 budget is crafted, released, reviewed, and voted on over the next 36 business days.

Sincerely,

Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey
BlueWaveNJ
Clean Water Action
Environment New Jersey
Food & Water Watch
Hudson County Central Labor Council
IFPTE Local 194
League of Women Voters of New Jersey
Lutherans Engaging in Advocacy Ministry NJ
Make the Road New Jersey
New Labor
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice
New Jersey Citizen Action
New Jersey Education Association
New Jersey Policy Perspective
New Jersey Sierra Club
New Jersey Work Environment Council
New Jersey Working Families Alliance
New Jersey 11th For Change
Our Revolution Essex County
Save Our Schools NJ
SEIU 32BJ

CC: Members of the Senate Budget Committee

For The Many is a statewide coalition of more than 30 organizations working to expand funding for essential services and improve budget practices to meet current and future needs, especially for communities that have been historically marginalized.