



The Honorable Cory Booker
United States Senate
717 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Booker,

We still need your help talking Governor Murphy about school segregation in New Jersey.

We regret that you did not attend our powerful public forum on this subject on November 21, 2019 at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Pleasantville. We were joined by nearly 300 residents, local and national civil rights leaders, educators and elected leaders to mourn the loss of a 10 year old boy, shot down at a high school football game, and to call for immediate action from our state officials to address the shameful scourge of racial and economic segregation in our schools.

Governor Murphy also did not make the meeting and we have received no response from him to the multiple invitations and request to meet over the past year. This includes our Community Forum at Bloomfield College last November with the Urban League, our May, 2019 Summit for Civil Rights in New Brunswick with Majority Whip James Clyburn and our most recent forum in Pleasantville. So we are asking for your help getting Governor Murphy to meet with us.

We believe you can be especially helpful as you are close to the governor and because of your own powerful personal story of defying and defeating segregation in your own life. As you well know, as a resident and former mayor of one of the most poverty impacted and historically segregated cities in the nation, racial isolation and concentrated poverty are a lethal combination that thwarts opportunity and cuts short lives that could otherwise thrive as yours and your brother Cary's did.

We believe Governor Murphy understands this but perhaps not at the personal level that you do. We are afraid political and legal advisors have unwisely discouraged him from addressing what is a critical and timely issue and a powerful political opportunity to transform our state and save lives.

You are probably aware that a lawsuit has been filed against the state of New Jersey and the New Jersey Department of Education for the extreme and toxic levels of racial segregation by school districts across our state. As you know, New Jersey has one of the highest rates of school segregation in America today, surpassing all the states of the former confederacy. And you also know that segregation by race and class has been proven by countless experts to be directly tied to our persistent gaps in educational performance, wealth accumulation, rates of incarceration, poor health outcomes, and even mortality.

As a lawyer, you know that Governor Murphy and Commissioner Repollet do not need a lawsuit or a ruling by the court to begin to address what the Governor has already acknowledged is an immoral, unjust and deeply damaging reality in our state. And you know that the litigation against the state by the Plaintiffs does not prevent them from acting to begin to address this grotesque injustice through legislative and executive action and through bold and decisive leadership.

We are happy to report that at our meeting on November 21, 2019 we received commitments from the Speaker of the New Jersey General Assembly, from the Senate President and from Republican legislative leadership to work with us and to hear our proposal for a legislative and community response to the crisis and to the lawsuit. We need our Governor and the Commissioner of Education to do the same.

As a former mayor, U.S. Senator, and now presidential candidate, we would like to present our plan to you and to seek your support and your help with Governor Phil Murphy.

Many people believe the issue of school segregation is too controversial to bring up in the political arena especially during an election season. We know you do not share that belief and you do not shy away from controversy - and this issue is already part of the public political conversation thanks to you and some of your Democratic Primary debate partners. But there is no one on that debate stage with as much lived experience as you and no one else with so clear a present-day and here-and-now example of both the crisis of school segregation and the historic opportunity to do something about it.

Sincerely,

The Building One New Jersey
School Desegregation Organizing Committee

Freeholder Ashley Bennett, Atlantic County
BOE Member Stephanie Lawson Muhammad, South Orange-Maplewood
Rabbi Gordon Geller, Ventnor
Bishop John Gandy, Egg Harbor City
Councilman Frank Santos, Galloway Township
Freeholder Caren Fitzpatrick, Atlantic County
Pastor Rev. Willie François, Pleasantville
Mr. Theodore Nixon, Willingboro
Mr. Paul Bellan-Boyer, Jersey City
Superintendent Nathan Parker, Montclair
Mr. Lloyd Henderson, Lawnside
Rev. Edward Harper, Marlboro
BOE Member Anyelis, Diaz, Haledon
BOE Member Pamela Kelly, Hamilton (Mercer County)
Reginald Davenport, Plainfield
Professor John Brittain, Washington DC (Advisor)
Professor Myron Orfield (Minneapolis (Advisor))

CC: Governor Phil Murphy