

Civil Liberties Policy Recommendations for Governor Mikie Sherrill

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As New Jersey's top elected leader, Governor Mikie Sherrill has a responsibility to safeguard and advance civil rights and liberties, and fight against federal abuses of power. The people of New Jersey expect and deserve a governor with a strong, demonstrated commitment to a fair and equitable state where the rights of all are defended and protected. Policy decisions made by the Sherrill administration will shape the lives of all New Jerseyans, and the future of our state, for generations to come.

To build a fairer future for all, the ACLU of New Jersey encourages Governor Sherrill to prioritize the following list of policy recommendations throughout her tenure. Though inexhaustive, these areas of focus provide a series of integral guiding principles for the Governor and her cabinet. If pursued, these priorities will help ensure that New Jersey is a safer, freer, more welcoming, and more affordable state for all.

Immigrants' Rights

All people in New Jersey should feel safe accessing public services without fear of family separation or discrimination. Our state is stronger when people can report crimes, seek the medical care they need, and participate in public life freely and fairly. As the Trump administration expands brutal federal immigration enforcement in New Jersey, targets vulnerable communities, and erodes federal civil rights protections, it is crucial for Governor Sherrill to prioritize policies that support the safety, health, and welfare of all New Jerseyans.

- Strengthen the Immigrant Trust Directive and ensure its statewide compliance so that state resources are used to support community priorities, not U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
- Ensure the Detention and Deportation Defense Initiative is fully funded so that every person who is detained has access to lawyers.
- Develop and implement rapid response resources for ICE actions and raids across New Jersey communities.
- Increase funding for legal representation for unaccompanied minors.
- Increase funding for language access implementation.
- Oppose the Trump administration's efforts to mobilize the National Guard against New Jerseyans.
- Oppose efforts to expand immigration detention in the state, including at Fort Dix.

Democracy & Civic Engagement

A government by the people, for the people, can only exist when members of the public are able to freely participate in civic life and make their voices heard. New Jerseyans deserve transparency from our elected officials, unrestricted voting rights, the freedom to dissent, and the ability to meaningfully obtain information about and weigh in on important government decision-making. The ACLU-NJ urges Governor Sherill to uphold the foundations of our democracy by being accountable to the people of New Jersey.

- Prioritize the expansion and protection of voting rights by signing the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey and same-day voter registration into law, increasing voter registration agencies, exploring ranked choice voting, and supporting opportunities for non-citizen and youth voting, especially in local elections.
- Take a comprehensive approach to defending democracy and expand efforts to protect New Jerseyans from threats to their rights, health, safety, and wellbeing by the federal government.
- Ensure the Office of the Attorney General ends its legal representation of the county Boards of Election to avoid potential conflicts with voting rights initiatives.
- Restore voting rights for people who are incarcerated.
- Strengthen and defend privacy protections for state voter registration records.
- Standardize mail-in ballot forms and cure processes.
- Defend protections against law enforcement at polling places and other institutionalized voter suppression tactics.
- Standardize poll worker training.
- Protect the autonomy and authority of the Office of the Comptroller.
- Increase government transparency by restoring and expanding the Open Public Records Act and modernizing the Open Public Meetings Act.
- Prepare for the 2030 census and subsequent redistricting work.

Criminal Legal Reform

While New Jersey has made strides in reducing its prison population, our state's criminal legal system is rooted in excessively punitive policies that have resulted in pervasive over-criminalization, mass incarceration, and racial injustice. The brunt of the harms directly caused by these flaws fall disproportionately on people of color, especially Black New Jerseyans. Particularly given that, under the Trump administration, the U.S. Department of Justice no longer engages in police oversight, conducts pattern and practice investigations,

or utilizes consent decrees to hold departments accountable, meaningful state-level oversight led by Governor Sherrill is that much more vital.

- Embrace categorical clemency by continuing the Clemency Advisory Board and providing second chances to incarcerated New Jerseyans.
- Increase investments in state-level resources to respond to police misconduct and hold police departments accountable.
- Implement the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act fully and end solitary confinement in the state.
- Incentivize state agencies to hire people with criminal convictions and provide increased support to rehabilitation and reentry programs.
- Advance reforms to the parole system.
- Support policies to eliminate fines and fees that burden people charged with crimes.
- Prioritize and expand expungement of past convictions.
- Expand jury service eligibility to people with completed sentences, including those on parole and probation.
- Expand youth justice efforts by eliminating the youth waiver and youth detention centers.
- Eliminate pretextual stops through data-based traffic safety reforms.
- Embrace harm reduction and ensure our state-level response to drug use is grounded in dignity and compassion, not punishment.
- Protect constitutional rights by establishing rules and limits on the use of new surveillance technologies like face recognition, automated license plate readers, and more.

Racial & Economic Justice

The discriminatory history of our country makes racial and economic injustice inextricably linked, and we see these effects every day in New Jersey. Discrimination, structural inequality, and implicit biases combine to create unacceptable racial gaps in the criminal legal system, housing, employment, education, health care, and every other area of civic life. The ACLU-NJ urges Governor Sherrill to boldly confront these deep sources of injustice to ensure that all people have equal access to government resources.

- Pursue policies that promote racial and economic equity, including addressing the racial wealth gap and racial disparities in homelessness and housing opportunities.
- Create and sufficiently fund a right-to-counsel program for eviction proceedings.
- Ensure full funding for programs that support eviction protection, harm reduction, and civil rights protections.

- Expand affordable housing in both rental and home ownership markets, so everyone who needs a home can afford one.

Data Privacy

New Jerseyans deserve to feel secure about control over their personal information. They should not have to choose between using modern technologies and protecting their civil liberties. The ACLU-NJ calls on Governor Sherrill to ensure free speech, security, and privacy protections are enhanced rather than compromised by technological innovation.

- Prioritize automated license plate reader policies that ban out-of-state data sharing, limit data retention periods, and require probable cause or heightened suspicion for data access.
- Empower New Jerseyans to claw back their personal data from unregulated data brokers by requiring data brokers to register with the state and offer a universal deletion mechanism.
- Improve and expand our state's comprehensive data privacy law by banning the sale of sensitive data including personal location information, geolocation information, health data, immigration information, and more.
- Ensure that any adoption of generative AI in government respects the civil rights and liberties of all New Jerseyans.

Gender-Affirming & Reproductive Health Care

Everyone should be able to access affordable, high-quality health care that they need and deserve. The ACLU-NJ urges Governor Sherrill to eliminate barriers that people face in accessing health care, including abortion and gender-affirming care, because access to care is a right, not a privilege.

- Support the provision of gender-affirming health care throughout the state.
- Remove financial barriers to abortion care by requiring health insurance providers to cover a range of family planning and reproductive health care services, including abortion, without out-of-pocket costs to the patient.
- Shield both patients and providers from criminal or civil liability for receiving or providing gender-affirming care and abortion care, including those traveling from out-of-state.

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