New Jersey's Political Leadership Cannot Continue to Take Black Votes for Granted While Excluding Black Businesses.

An Uncomfortable Question for Governor Mikie Sherrill and the Democratic Leadership of New Jersey.

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New Jersey has a serious credibility problem. Our state celebrates its diversity, depends heavily on the political support of African American voters, and routinely speaks about economic opportunity and inclusion. Yet when it comes to distributing billions of taxpayer dollars through public contracting, Black-owned businesses remain largely excluded from meaningful participation.

How long can this contradiction continue?

African Americans have consistently supported Democratic majorities in New Jersey's Legislature, delivering approximately 90 percent of their votes to Democratic candidates and, according to our analysis, approximately 94 percent to the state's two most recent Democratic gubernatorial candidates. Yet that political support has not translated into meaningful economic opportunity.

The evidence is staggering.

New Jersey's January 2024 Disparity Study examined state procurement activity between July 2015 and June 2020. Its findings revealed that Black-owned businesses received just **13 formal construction prime contracts worth $3.3 million**. Meanwhile, nonminority male-owned businesses received 2,662 contracts valued at approximately **$10.85 billion**. White women-owned businesses received 264 contracts worth approximately $277.9 million.

These are not anecdotal complaints. These are findings documented in a state-commissioned disparity study.

The question is not whether disparities exist. The question is why New Jersey's political leadership has failed to implement meaningful corrective measures.

I have met with Governor Mikie Sherrill prior to her being elected and members of her respective teams on several occasions during and after the elections; providing information, strategies, and proven best practices to address the systemic underrepresentation of Black businesses in state contracting. Similar recommendations have been shared with legislators. Unfortunately, meaningful action has yet to materialize.

Other jurisdictions have demonstrated that the government can do better. Under former New York City Mayor Eric Adams, the city was awarded $6.4 billion in M/WBE contracts in fiscal year 2024, achieving a record 31.2 percent utilization rate. Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's administration established new microbusiness and midsize business reserve programs to expand access to government procurement. These examples demonstrate that leadership, policy innovation, and accountability can produce results.

New Jersey should be learning from these models rather than explaining why progress remains elusive.

Consider another troubling policy issue: Project Labor Agreements. New Jersey's current statutory threshold is $5 million, compared with the federal government's $35 million threshold for large-scale construction projects. The difference deserves serious examination. The state should evaluate whether its existing threshold unnecessarily restricts competition and limits opportunities for smaller contractors, including qualified Black-owned construction businesses.

The same questions arise in automobile insurance. New Jersey permits education, occupation, and insurance scores to influence insurance tier placement when combined with other approved criteria. What relationship should these factors have to the actual driving records of responsible motorists? Legislation has been introduced to prohibit their use. This deserves thoughtful consideration.

The economic consequences of exclusion extend far beyond individual businesses. New Jersey has approximately 1.2 million Black residents and over 124,000 black businesses, representing an enormous economic constituency. Excluding these businesses from meaningful contracting opportunities undermines entrepreneurship, employment, wealth creation, and intergenerational economic mobility.

Consider what is happening nationally.

The November 2026 midterm elections produced an extraordinary political milestone. Five Black governors will serve simultaneously for the first time in American history: Wes Moore in Maryland, Keisha Lance Bottoms in Georgia, Byron Donalds in Florida, Aaron Ford in Nevada, and David Crowley in Wisconsin.

Georgia and Florida have particularly painful histories of racial violence and exclusion. In 1912, more than 1,000 Black residents were driven from Forsyth County, Georgia, through racial terror. In 1920, the Ocoee Massacre in Florida resulted in the destruction of Black homes, businesses, and communities, forcing approximately 495 Black residents from the area. Rosewood, Florida, experienced another devastating racist attack in 1923 that destroyed its African American community.

Yet in 2026, voters in these historically troubled states elected Black governors. These victories demonstrate that political possibilities continue to expand, even in places where racial barriers once appeared insurmountable.

New Jersey should recognize the significance of this moment.

The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey is not asking for preferential treatment. We are demanding fair access, transparent procurement practices, accountability, and the opportunity to compete for taxpayer-funded contracts.

For perspective, consider where Black-owned employer businesses are concentrated nationally. The leading 15 states, ranked by number of Black-owned employer firms using 2023 data, are:

1. Florida
2. Texas
3. California
4. Georgia
5. New York
6. Maryland
7. North Carolina
8. Virginia

9. Pennsylvania
10. Illinois
11. New Jersey
12. Ohio
13. South Carolina
14. Louisiana
15. Missouri

New Jersey has the business talent, capital, infrastructure, and consumer markets to become a national leader in Black business development. What it lacks is the sustained political will to make equitable participation a priority.

The Sherrill Administration and the Democratic leadership in the Assembly and Senate must understand that political support cannot be treated as permanent entitlement while economic opportunity remains unequal. Black political support must translate into Black economic opportunity.

The silence surrounding these disparities, particularly among individuals who claim to represent the interests of Black communities, is equally troubling. Representation must mean more than attending meetings, issuing statements, and participating in closed-door conversations. It must produce measurable outcomes.

We need a statewide procurement strategy, enforceable participation goals supported by the disparity study, transparent reporting, expanded small-business opportunities, prompt-payment requirements, and meaningful accountability for state agencies.

New Jersey's 1.2 million Black residents and its 124,000 Black business community deserve more than political rhetoric.

You cannot continually ask Black voters to help elect your administration while refusing to help Black businesses participate in the economic opportunities created by that administration.

The time for conversations has passed. The time for accountability and action is now.

Members of the Black Agenda have collectively stated our position and are eager for an intentional engagement with Legislators and The Sherrill Administration to derive substantive and transformational solutions to the systematic disparities which marginalize the black population of New Jersey.

Governor Sherrill, the question is simple: **Will your administration make economic inclusion a measurable priority, or will New Jersey continue to leave Black businesses behind?**