7-POINT PLAN

UNITING MAYORS TO STRENGTHEN NEW JERSEY’S URBAN CITIES, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

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On November 12, 2007 members of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) and suburban communities joined to release a seven-point plan focusing on strengthening New Jersey’s urban communities and families.

The NJUMA’s plan, titled *Uniting Mayors to Strengthen New Jersey’s Urban Cities, Families and Communities*, was developed to encourage inter-city collaboration in order to create a better future for all residents of our state, by focusing on a broad range of issues directly related to improving the quality of life in urban communities. This plan aggressively and proactively addresses the areas of crime and public safety; education and positive youth development; environment and public health; family and community welfare; housing and economic development; tax reform and intergovernmental relations, and unfunded mandates.

The NJUMA is comprised of 26 urban municipalities. The Association serves its members through quarterly meetings and annual conferences which keeps them informed on relevant issues. The Association is a vehicle for our membership to collectively provide feedback to state policy makers.

We will continuously seek avenues to keep our seven-point plan before the Governor and the legislature.
Crime & Public Safety

One of the most important factors affecting both the quality of life and the economic recovery and growth in our cities is public safety. Overall arrests and reported crimes decreased from 2000 to 2005, yet statewide arrests for murder and weapons increased among both adults and juveniles. Statewide data indicate that the majority of crime occurs in 20 specific municipalities. The increase of violent crime in these communities is tied to an increase in gang presence. There is an additional concern about the estimated 70,000 ex-offenders, who are largely males between the ages of 20 and 40, who will re-enter the municipalities that currently have the highest unemployment rates. We seek to identify holistic intervention and prevention strategies to re-entry that move beyond incarceration models. Gov. Jon S. Corzine stated, "By focusing on the factors that can help prevent..."
recidivism, such as education, treatment, housing, gainful employment and healthcare, we can help to re-establish those who have gone astray and in turn create safer communities."

Many attempts have been made to address the rising crime rates. The federal Drug Enforcement Administration’s Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) was conceived in 1995 in response to the overwhelming problem of drug-related violent crime in towns and cities across the nation. MET was established as a cooperative program with state and local law enforcement counterparts. There have been 15 MET deployments in New Jersey since the inception of the program: Asbury Park, Camden, Paterson, Atlantic City, Lakewood, Passaic, Plainfield, Pleasantville, Trenton, Long Branch, Jersey City, two in Newark, and two in Elizabeth. Legislation L.2001, c.243 was signed into law providing the judiciary with funding to expand drug courts. The plan involved a three phase process that will result in the establishment of a statewide drug court system. The New Jersey drug courts focus on substance abusing criminal offenders who are charged with nonviolent offenses and do not have prior convictions for violent crimes.

The New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) supports the governor’s three part plan to combat crime and create safer cities and neighborhoods in New Jersey. In addition to advocating for full funding to implement the various components and phases of the Governor’s Crime Prevention Strategy, the mayors are calling for the state legislature to fully fund, implement and evaluate initiatives such as Cease Fire and the Essex Anti-Crime Partnership, and to provide ongoing support and expansion of these initiatives.
2. Education & Positive Youth Development

Low educational attainment on the part of adult residents is a serious problem in the majority of our urban communities. A third of the adults over age 25 in our cities lack a high school diploma or its equivalent. The discussion around low educational attainment has been ongoing. This debate led to Abbott funding, school construction funding, and the current conversations about school funding and tax reform. New Jersey's urban mayors are advocating for the state and the Department of Education to meet the full mandate of *Abbott v. Burke* to include full Abbott funding and completion of stalled Abbott school construction projects. While the

Association supports and is actively engaged in conversations related to school funding finance reform, we strongly support policies and reform efforts that continue to provide additional funding to support Abbott schools.

High-quality childcare and early education programs lay the groundwork for future economic success by preparing the
next generation with life and learning skills. Strengthening the capacity of early care community providers, advancing culturally and linguistically competent curricula and practices, and promoting PK-3 training and certification programs are essential to ensuring that children are ready for kindergarten and beyond. In addition, we support the findings and recommendations of The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy and the New Jersey Childcare Economic Impact Council’s 2006 study titled *Benefits for All: The Economic Impact of the New Jersey Child Care Industry*, which outlines what business, government and industry can do to foster economic growth and strengthen the quality of early care and education for all children in New Jersey.

As the high school drop-out rate increases, after-school and youth programs must address the issues of career preparation and mentoring for career options and shadowing opportunities. In addition, we support findings in the August 2007 report titled *New Jersey’s Special Review Assessment: Loophole or Lifeline?*, which suggests among other strategies, retooling, enhancing and restructuring, not eliminating the Special Review Assessment (SRA) process. These efforts can also address the linkages between high youth unemployment rates and increased high school drop-out rates.

In addition, NJUMA is actively engaged in conversations with the Department of Education and the New Jersey League of Municipalities regarding the formula for school funding and strategies to engage the legislature. Furthermore, both a short- and long-term solution is needed to develop a strategy around moving school construction forward. Lastly, we support strategies that look at investing in our youth to ensure their success through after-school programs and other special initiatives.
In urban areas throughout New Jersey, residents are exposed to a multitude of environmental and public health hazards including lead poisoning, indoor air pollution, poor ambient air quality, contaminated urban rivers and wetlands, vacant lots, and lack of open and green space. Cumulatively, the effects of these hazards on urban residents and high risk populations such as children and the elderly are compounded by issues including environmental injustice, economic stagnation and social ills. This results in disproportionate risks to residents and unsustainable stress on the quality of the air, water and land in urban neighborhoods. The disproportionate risk in all likelihood results in disproportionate health impacts in urban communities and needs to be addressed as a public policy issue in which prevention is given top priority.
Fine particulate matter (PM) air pollution has been estimated to kill approximately 60,000 people in the U.S. each year, making this deadly pollutant arguably the most important environmental health issue in the country today. This is especially true in New Jersey because the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that 13 of the state's 21 counties are in violation of the federal annual fine PM standard. Urban mayors are particularly worried about this pollution since city residents are almost certainly dying in disproportionate numbers from fine PM because its concentration is highest in urban areas. It should also be noted that in addition to causing premature death, airborne PM has been associated with a wide array of illnesses including cardiovascular disease, asthma and lung cancer. There are existing policies that could reduce fine PM concentrations but more inventive strategies still need to be developed.

New Jersey is poised to act on global warming. In July 2007 the state legislature enacted the Global Warming Response Act that sets goals for carbon dioxide emission reductions. The state will also participate in a regional carbon-trading program that will begin in the near future and is intended to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. As urban mayors, we view global warming as an opportunity to: 1) save lives in urban areas now by emphasizing strategies that reduce emissions of fine PM and its gaseous precursors along with carbon dioxide emissions; and 2) create nonpolluting jobs in urban areas through the extensive use of renewable energy, and through improved efficiency and energy conservation. Using renewable energy, while also improving efficiency and conservation, is a particularly attractive policy in urban areas because it has the potential to simultaneously fight global warming, reduce fine PM concentrations and provide much needed jobs. The way to begin this effort might be to build Abbott schools that are powered by solar energy, and to adapt urban churches and municipal buildings to this renewable energy source.
Taking these thoughts a step further, NJUMA favors the creation of an urban redevelopment policy that uses the precautionary principle, and addressing environmental justice issues as the framework for a comprehensive urban revitalization strategy. This policy would include: 1) the extensive use of renewable energy, improved efficiency and improved energy conservation to fight global warming, provide jobs and reduce fine PM concentrations; 2) programs in urban high schools that would prepare students to go directly into renewable energy jobs or attend college to prepare themselves for a career in this field; and 3) a site remediation policy that would create funding streams for the thorough and safe remediation, and therefore eventual redevelopment of brownfields sites.

This policy area will address the range of environmental and public health problems facing urban residents in the targeted cities of the NJUMA, while specifically prioritizing particulate matter air pollution, lead poisoning, site contamination and remediation, and green space for parks and other community needs. Attention should also be directed toward promoting investment in downtown districts, coordinating a strategic capital investment plan, and encouraging brownfields redevelopment and “green” city initiatives. We will work with the state Department of Environmental Protection, the Environmental Justice Advisory Council and statewide advocacy organizations such as the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance to achieve these objectives.

The Association advocates for legislation and administrative support of the governor’s climate change initiatives (Global Warming Response Act and the Energy Master Plan) as strategies to address global warming and green house gas emissions, and contribute to workforce development and the economic growth of urban communities. Specific public health concerns include the treatment and prevention of childhood obesity, access to quality healthcare and urban hospital closings and relocations.
4. Family & Community Welfare

Most of our communities are plagued by various issues regarding the welfare of families, particularly youth. Issues such as high unemployment, substance abuse, and mental health create enormous stress and have great impact on families in our communities.

Significant investment has already been made in school-based youth services, which leverages federal funding streams. These programs provide direct services and supports to youth in their respective schools. We recommend greater coordination between the various state agencies, primarily Human Services, Education, Health and Senior Services, to expand the number of school-based youth services sites. This has proven to be an effective intervention method and should be continued in the future.

There are multiple factors that can elevate a family’s risk for child maltreatment, including teen births; preterm and low-weight babies; mothers with little or no prenatal care; mothers who use tobacco, alcohol or drugs; and mothers who suffer from domestic violence, poverty or perinatal depression. Reform efforts should continue to ensure that our children are protected, and the numbers of safe foster care families are increased to accommodate the need. We must work to ensure that the various programs started under these reform efforts (e.g., differential response, family success centers and home visitation programs) are continued. We advocate for expanded support and access to drug and alcohol treatment services which contribute to healthier and stable families.

It is important for services to leave families stronger and more self-sufficient. We should continue providing additional youth programs and prevention activities, and look at welfare programs, HUD changes and emergency service legislation.
5. Housing & Economic Development

NJUMA aims to advance the well-being of children, families and communities in New Jersey’s cities. We are especially concerned with the prospects of low and moderate income people and the institutions that serve them. We understand the importance of paying attention to the shifting racial and ethnic make-up of many communities in New Jersey and to the opportunities and challenges these shifts are creating. Through the neighborhood planning process, local officials in the urban centers will continue to work with residents, business owners and other community members to establish a vision for neighborhood revitalization. The neighborhood plans should be consistent with municipal master plans, redevelopment plans and other locally adopted plans such as the Urban Enterprise Zone Development Plans.

The Association has worked collaboratively with the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey and agrees with the findings in its September 2006 report Cities in Transition: New Jersey’s Urban Paradox. The report states that, “New Jersey’s future competitive position will depend heavily on its ability to harness its cities’ strengths, while simultaneously enabling them to rebuild that social and economic fabric and reduce their dependency on outside resources.” Downtown revitalization has an important role in attracting additional economic benefits to urban centers. Urban centers should build upon the unique and historical assets of their downtown districts and create thriving centers of commerce, residential living and entertainment. Since downtown revitalization has the potential to catalyze redevelopment in surrounding neighborhoods, existing resources should be employed to help implement downtown economic development projects.

We express deep concern about policy initiatives and
legislation impacting Regional Contribution Agreements (RCAs). We support the current policies related to RCAs and will only consider the elimination of RCAs as part of a comprehensive housing reform package. In addition, we support the use of eminent domain as a necessary urban revitalization strategy for urban mayors and municipal leaders. Moreover, we assert that the utilization of eminent domain and the statutory definition of “blight” are clearly aligned within the urban context. While we understand the potential for misuse with RCAs and eminent domain, these strategies have been used wisely and legally by our urban mayors to promote home ownership, revitalize neighborhoods and promote economic development. Moreover, we support NJUMA President Mayor Wayne Smith and Trenton Mayor Doug Palmer’s proposal for the creation of an “urban fund” that would replace the revenues generated by RCA agreements, and the creation of a Blue Ribbon Commission on Affordable Housing to examine these issues and, more importantly, provide a comprehensive review of the Fair Housing Act.

We support programs to provide affordable housing opportunities to police, firefighters and teachers as an incentive to live in the communities in which they work. Like the rest of America, New Jersey’s economic health depends on the development of a skilled workforce with the knowledge and ability to adapt to changing economies. Therefore, we promote strategies to improve the level of job training and development in urban centers, and advocate for improved technology. Lastly, we are in strong support of Urban Enterprise Zones (UEZs) and the restoration of municipal-wide UEZs.
NJUMA supports a comprehensive strategy to reform property, sales and excise taxes. There has been concern regarding the state’s revenue system and its response to demographic, economic and technological changes. In addition, issues surrounding distribution of tax burdens, property tax administration, school funding formulas and continuous budget deficits remain without redress. The system produces divisions which result in tensions between school districts, municipalities, interest groups and citizens. Over the last four years New Jersey has increased taxes more than any state in the nation. The total cost of these tax increases is $924 for every citizen per year. Conversely, the average increase in the other 49 states over this same period is only $143 per capita.

The efforts to increase efficiency and reduce costs have been insufficient to reverse the negative effects of the overuse of property taxes. Varying methods will require reforming other parts of the tax structure, rescinding some property tax relief programs that are poorly designed and increasing the use of more progressive taxes. The Association is also engaged in conversations relating to tax reform and school finance reform with stakeholders around the state.
NJUMA will work strategically with its state and federal legislators to carve out and implement initiatives to support New Jersey's urban cities. Complex and cross-jurisdictional issues such as immigration and homeland security, rapid demographic shifts, unemployment and underemployment, increased crime rates, re-entry, and educational equity, among many other issues, are formidable issues that require coordination at every level of government. NJUMA has established a Mayor’s Intergovernmental Relations Committee to address many of the above referenced intergovernmental concerns and coordinate communication and intervention strategies at the local, county, state and federal levels.

We will also work with decision makers at each level to support funding for mandates by creating multiple revenue streams for urban cities. At the federal level, the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 addresses this issue by requiring the production of new information to be used in the legislative process and of new procedures intended to slow down, if not halt, the creation of new unfunded mandates. In addition, the Act calls for certain executive
branch procedures relating to the development of new regulations that might lead to new mandates and requires a study of existing mandates. The Unfunded Mandates Reform Act consists of three components: revising congressional procedures regarding future mandates; adding new procedures for federal agency regulatory actions; and studying existing mandates to evaluate their current usefulness. The long-standing, prior practice of state-imposed, unfunded mandates has contributed to the rise in local property taxes which has increasingly burdened New Jersey’s property owners. NJUMA is concerned about the number of unfunded mandates handed down to local municipalities and most recently to our public schools under Abbott mandates.