



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

New Jersey State Policy Lab

2026

ANNUAL REPORT



“THERE IS A WORD IN OUR LANGUAGE THAT, BY ITSELF, CARRIES NO SPECIAL GLOW. **COMMON** IS THE WORD. BUT AS THE ROOT OF OTHER WORDS IT IS RICH IN MEANING. IT HELPS FORM THE WORD **COMMUNITY** AND ANOTHER IMPORTANT WORD—**COMMONWEALTH**—A WORD OUR ANCESTORS USED TO SPEAK OF SOMETHING GREATER THAN ANY ONE PERSON; A WHOLE THAT DOESN’T MEAN MUCH UNLESS **ALL THE PARTS CONTRIBUTE.**”

—JAMES FLORIO, 49<sup>TH</sup> GOVERNOR OF NEW JERSEY

# A NOTE FROM OUR PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

The New Jersey State Policy Lab was created as the result of a grant from the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) in April 2021. Thus, this month marks our fifth anniversary. The Policy Lab was founded with the intent of bringing rigorous analysis to policy problems facing the Garden State. We have also been committed to involving students in policy research, engaging researchers from academic institutions around the state, and analyzing policies to determine whether they advance equity and fairness across New Jersey.

In five years, we have published more than 60 reports in areas as diverse as transportation, education, health, and housing as well as many others. Three times a year, we publish a report chronicling the state of the economy in New Jersey, and the forecast for the months and years ahead. Our research is regularly cited in the press and on social media. We also publish a weekly NJ State Policy Updates newsletter every Tuesday with over 1,200 subscribers on LinkedIn. We have worked with academics on all three Rutgers campuses and at other universities in New Jersey.

The past year has been particularly productive. We have issued reports on:

- Corporate ownership of 1-4-unit residential properties using property tax data from 2012 to 2022.
- A comprehensive, state-by-state summary of health insurance literacy and other education resources for consumers nationally.
- Practices surrounding automobile crash data availability and reporting and an examination of various states' publicly available dashboards to provide recommendations for New Jersey transportation.
- An evaluation of the quality of nursing homes in NJ relative to national trends and examined how facilities in the state responded to government-imposed quality standards.

This year, we have also inaugurated a "Policy in Practice" seminar in Trenton. Five times, scholars affiliated with the Policy Lab have presented to legislative and executive branch staff in the statehouse. These sessions continue to grow in attendance and have been an excellent means for ensuring that the work we do gets in front of the people charged with solving vexing policy problems in New Jersey.

Issuing reports is the most significant and public work that we do but it is far from the only thing. This year we hosted the third annual "Collaboratory" with Princeton University where students across the state get together and workshop solutions to one particular policy problem (this year it was access to higher education). We also run an annual summer internship program where we draw students from multiple universities together for the summer and teach them how to do research on policy problems. They each adopt a particular topic and present on it at the conclusion of the summer. These efforts are part of our commitment to advancing the education of policy analysis.

It has been my pride to serve as Principal Investigator of the New Jersey State Policy Lab for the past five years. The Lab, a collaboration between the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers New Brunswick and the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers Newark, has demonstrated that applying rigorous academic analysis to policy problems is compatible with furthering practical solutions and educating students. We hope to build on this over the next five years!



**DR. STUART SHAPIRO**

DEAN, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY BLOUSTEIN  
SCHOOL OF PLANNING AND PUBLIC POLICY

# A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is my privilege to serve as the Executive Director of the New Jersey State Policy Lab. Since its launch in 2021, we have worked to build something meaningful—producing high-quality blogs and reports, sharing them widely on our website and across social media, and holding ourselves to a standard of excellence in everything we do.

Working with faculty and staff with expertise in a wide range of policy domains, we have built a solid foundation of research informing the state’s policy development. We are consistently producing and sharing knowledge through reports and blogs, a policy newsletter, and economic forecasts—ensuring that timely and rigorous research reaches policymakers and the public.

As part of our **Policy in Practice** series with the Rutgers Government Relations team, we bring faculty experts to Trenton to discuss research directly with legislative staff. We have covered issues ranging from economic forecasts to the impact of corporate property acquisition on local communities. These sessions have led to engaging dialogues between researchers and policymakers, illuminating policy development efforts.

We knew from the beginning that if we wanted to have a lasting impact, we needed to do more than produce research, we also needed to **invest in students**. We launched our **summer internship** with a simple but powerful idea: recruit students with lived experiences and a passion for a specific policy issue and give them the tools necessary to explore it. Working with gifted graduate students, we developed a curriculum that would ground them in strong research methods, connected them with faculty experts, mentors, and practitioners, and gave them windows into the possibilities of careers in public service.

We also worked to help students find their voices—to carry the concerns of their communities into their careers as policy analysts and researchers. Now in our fifth year of hosting this program, our interns have grown into leaders contributing to a stronger, more informed state. Notably, we invite former interns and research assistants to serve on panels, sharing insights with current students about ways to continue making a difference with their careers.

Our work with students extends beyond the internship program. Through our **Policy Collaboratory** with SPIA in NJ, we convene graduate students from across the state to tackle some of New Jersey’s most pressing challenges—from sea level rise (in 2024) to affordable housing (in 2025), and access to higher education (in 2026). This year, teams of students developed and presented policy proposals to representatives of the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. These proposals generated meaningful solutions supporting expanded access to educational opportunities in the state. Importantly, this program also builds students’ confidence in their ability to influence public policy in New Jersey.

That same impact is what led us to spearhead our November 3<sup>rd</sup> blog highlighting the most pressing **policy priorities for the next governor**—proposed by Policy Lab-funded researchers. These recommendations included strengthening economic opportunity, improving health, education, and infrastructure, building capacity to manage powerful technologies, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic deaths, and advancing resilience across New Jersey.

We are prepared to continue this important work into the future, building connections between research and policy, investing in the next generation of leaders, and centering the needs of communities across New Jersey. Our current research projects are focused on such topics as treatment outcomes for opioid use disorder, strategies to eliminate pedestrian fatalities, and impacts of artificial intelligence in policing, education, and small businesses in New Jersey.

**We are a small but mighty team, and we are proud of all that we have accomplished.** We would like to thank all the individuals who have contributed to this work in the past and who will be a part of it in the future. Together, we are informing policymaking and improving the quality of life for everyone who lives in New Jersey.

*Elizabeth Cooner*  
**DR. ELIZABETH COONER**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
NEW JERSEY STATE POLICY LAB

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# OUR LEADERSHIP



**ELIZABETH COONER, ED.D.**  
*Executive Director*



**STUART SHAPIRO, PH.D.**  
*Principal Investigator*



**CHARLES MENIFIELD, PH.D.**  
*Co-Principal Investigator*



**GREGORY PORUMBESCU, PH.D.**  
*Co-Principal Investigator*



**KELCIE RALPH, PH.D.**  
*Co-Principal Investigator*

# OUR TEAM



**KEVIN MAJEWSKI, PH.D.**  
*Research Manager*



**MEGAN MCCUE**  
*Public Relations Specialist*

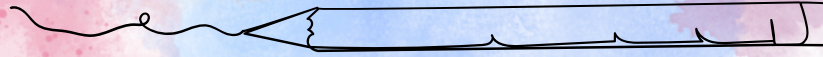


**CANDACE HARRISON**  
*Administrative Coordinator*



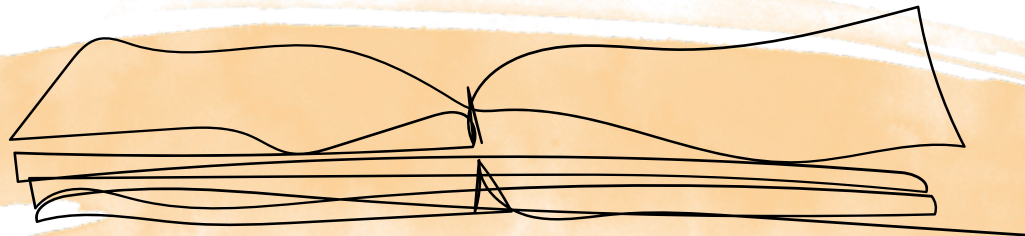
**PATRICIA WALSH, M.A.T.**  
*Researcher*

# OUR MISSION

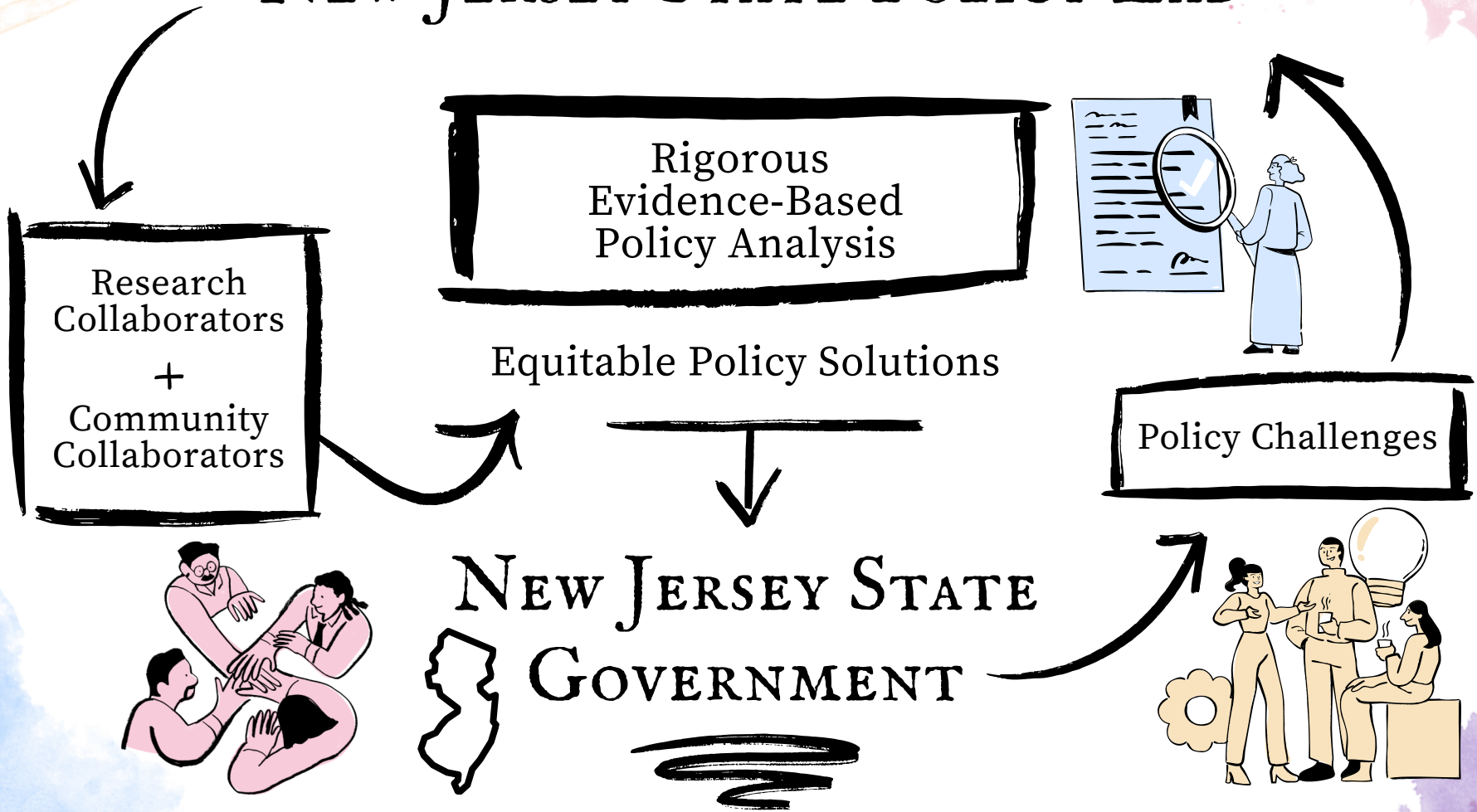


The **New Jersey State Policy Lab** assists the State of New Jersey and its many communities in the **design, implementation, and evaluation of state policies and programs** by conducting **rigorous evidence-based research** that considers equity, efficiency, and efficacy of **public policies and programs** in holistic and innovative ways.

By utilizing the combination of strong ties to New Jersey's **diverse communities** and **significant expertise** in collecting, cleaning, and analyzing data, the **New Jersey State Policy Lab engages and collaborates with stakeholders** such as community groups, the state government, and municipal governments to create **high quality datasets and evidence** that reflects our state's diversity and **empowers state policymakers** to address the needs of New Jersey communities more effectively, innovatively, and equitably.



# NEW JERSEY STATE POLICY LAB



# FIVE YEARS IN RETROSPECT




**The New Jersey State Policy Lab (NJSPL) formally began in April 2021** after a competitive grant process from the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE). The NJSPL, jointly managed by the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy in Rutgers–New Brunswick and the School of Public Affairs and Administration in Rutgers–Newark, has developed and published a solid foundation of **public policy research** on a wide array of subjects, including the economy, education, healthcare, and more.

The NJSPL now regularly solicits **proposals for policy analysis from scholars** throughout the Garden State annually, evaluates and selects proposals for funding, and then works with project leaders to publish blogs throughout their research process along with a final report in conclusion of their findings. The NJSPL team, led by Executive Director Elizabeth Cooner, then endeavors to ensure the **research gets in front of policymakers** at the local, municipal, and state levels to whom it might be most relevant.

In the five years since its formation, the NJSPL has published over **60 reports** in a variety of important policy areas, some of which have had impacts on policy in New Jersey such as:

- **The Trends in Investor Acquisition of Residential Properties in New Jersey** report was presented to select Housing experts within the Office of Governor Mikie Sherrill.
- Research deriving from our regularly published **R/ECON Economic Forecasts** have been featured and cited in articles from NJ.com, the Asbury Park Press, New Jersey Business Magazine, and more.
- Ahead of the gubernatorial election, the NJSPL invited affiliated faculty and staff to identify the most pressing priorities for the next administration and compiled the input from over 20 researchers into **Policy Priorities and Recommendations for New Jersey's Next Governor**.



# FIVE YEARS OF ANSWERING PRESSING POLICY QUESTIONS

The New Jersey State Policy Lab's evidence-based research addresses a broad range of societal issues, with these examples representing a fraction of the policy questions that have been answered by our broad network of researchers:

## EDUCATION & WORKFORCE NEEDS



- What **promising practices** are associated with improved student learning?
- How do we **re-engage disconnected youth?**
- What impact will emerging technologies and demographic shifts have on **education and workforce demands?**
- How have **teacher education programs** responded to changing certification requirements?
- Which **communities of students** have access to high-quality academic opportunities?
- How has New Jersey progressed toward its **higher education goals?**

## CANNABIS BUSINESS & TAXES



- Do **cannabis-related business impact home sale prices** and municipal taxes?

## HEALTH & HEALTH CARE



- How can we best address **mental health needs**, especially for vulnerable populations, such as youth?
- What policies would support improvements in **long-term care for seniors?**
- How can we ensure **access to health care** for vulnerable populations?
- What **health insurance literacy initiatives** improve access to care?
- What strategies address the **emotional well-being of nurses?**
- How can we expand **access to nature for people with disabilities?**

## JUSTICE SYSTEM REENTRY



- What **services/supports could be implemented** to care for individuals involved in the justice system and to reduce recidivism?

## ECONOMICS



- What **economic trends** are forecasted for New Jersey?
- How do **housing costs impact** out-migration of seniors?
- Who experienced the greatest **financial burdens from inflation?**

## HOUSING



- Which communities face the **greatest eviction pressures?**
- How can we **support aging in place?**
- How do **corporate acquisitions of residential properties** impact communities across the state?
- How can **vacant commercial properties** be activated to address community housing needs?

## ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY



- How should New Jersey respond to **climate risks like flooding?**
- What variables are critical in measuring **communities' resilience** in responding to disasters?
- What policy frameworks support **healthy, just, and resilient communities?**
- What policies can New Jersey implement to support **regenerative agriculture** technologies?

## DIGITAL EQUITY & ACCESS



- Who has access to **digital tools?**
- How can we **promote digital equity among seniors?**
- How are **government agencies** responding to and/or integrating emerging technologies like AI?
- What is the relationship between **digital skills and trust in state government?**

## TRANSPORTATION



- What practices are associated with improving **traffic safety?**
- What **transportation needs** exist across regions of the state, and how do such needs affect economic opportunities?
- How can we respond to **safety concerns surrounding e-bikes** while ensuring accessibility?
- What strategies can be implemented to **reduce pedestrian fatalities** and serious injuries?

## WOMEN, CHILDREN, & FAMILIES



- How can we bolster New Jersey's **childcare infrastructure?**
- What **child-care provider subsidies** best support childcare needs?
- What factors impact **gender wage gaps?**

ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS AND MORE CAN BE FOUND WITHIN  
**NEW JERSEY STATE POLICY LAB'S REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS**

# RECENT POLICY REPORTS & RESEARCH

The following are some key insights derived from research the NJSPL has released in the past year:

## TRENDS IN INVESTOR ACQUISITION OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES IN NJ



Researchers found that corporate ownership of 1-4-unit residential properties excluding condominiums more than doubled between 2012 and 2022 in NJ, with corporate ownership most heavily concentrated in urban centers and some shore communities.

## COMPUTING ON THE INSIDE: INTERNET ACCESS FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS



In state prisons across the country, there has been little movement toward developing comprehensive, forward-looking policies regulating technology in incarceration. This report provides recommendations including convening a state task force to address this gap in access.

## EVALUATING THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS & IMPACT OF HEALTH INSURANCE LITERACY INITIATIVES



The primary purpose of this report is to serve as the first comprehensive state-by-state summary of health insurance literacy initiatives and/or educational resources available to consumers nationwide.

## ANALYZING THE USE AND EQUITY OF ARPA FUNDS IN NJ LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



The American Rescue Plan Act represented a historic \$350B investment to support local governments in responding to the economic and public health challenges of the pandemic. This study examined how local NJ governments allocated and used their ARPA-SLFRF funds compared to other states.

## CRASH DATA AVAILABILITY AND BEST PRACTICES ACROSS THE U.S.



Annual traffic crashes typically exceed 200,000 in the Garden State, according to the NJDOT, and this study surveyed states across the U.S. to analyze practices surrounding auto crash data availability and reporting such as publicly available dashboards.

## HOW EDUCATION PROGRAMS RESPONDED TO TEACHER CERTIFICATION POLICY CHANGES IN NJ



In 2022, NJ removed the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) as a statewide requirement for teacher certification and researchers spent two years interviewing education preparation programs to understand how they adjusted their assessment requirements.

# PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

From the very beginning, one of the key objectives in creating the New Jersey State Policy Lab has been to establish a **network of scholars and research centers within New Jersey institutions** of higher education to coordinate state policy research and facilitate collaboration. In the four years since, the NJSPL has **forged connections with dozens of universities, schools, and centers** within the Garden State and beyond.

Further, the NJSPL guiding mission is to identify and respond to **state government and community needs for effective policy solutions** through firsthand research and coordination with relevant experts across the state. Our cohort has grown to include:



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH NEW JERSEY INSTITUTIONS

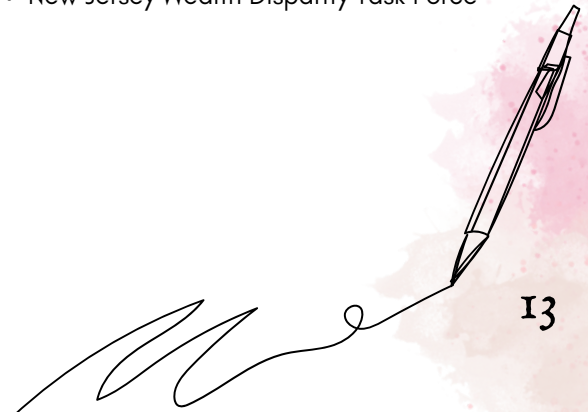
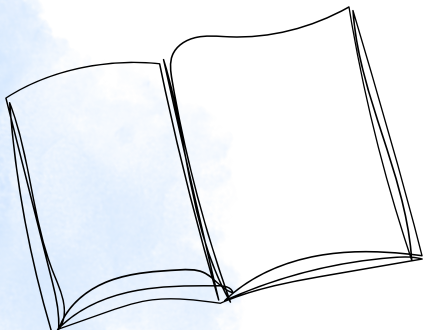
- Rutgers-Newark
- Rutgers-New Brunswick
- Rutgers-Camden
- Montclair University
- NJIT
- Princeton University
- Princeton School of Public and International Affairs
  - SPIA in NJ
- Rowan University

## RESEARCH COLLABORATORS

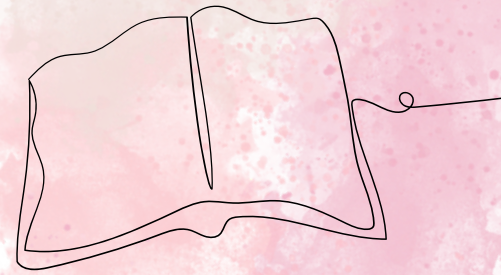
- Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center
- Eagleton Institute of Politics
- Heldrich Center for Workforce Development
- Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies
- New Jersey Collaborating Center for Nursing
- New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well
- Ralph W. Voorhees Center for Civic Engagement
- Rutgers Graduate School of Education
- Rutgers New Jersey Medical School
- Rutgers School of Communications and Information
- Rutgers School of Criminal Justice
- Rutgers School of Public Health
- Rutgers School of Social Work
- Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs

## STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- New Jersey Office of the Governor
- New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education
- New Jersey Department of Education
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- New Jersey Department of Human Services
- New Jersey Governor's Office of Equity
- New Jersey Wealth Disparity Task Force



# STUDENT IMPACT



## SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



2022 COHORT



2023 COHORT



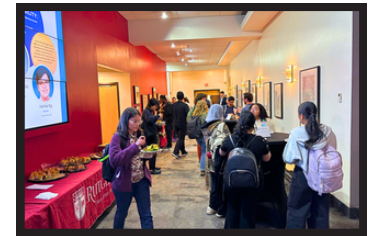
2024 COHORT



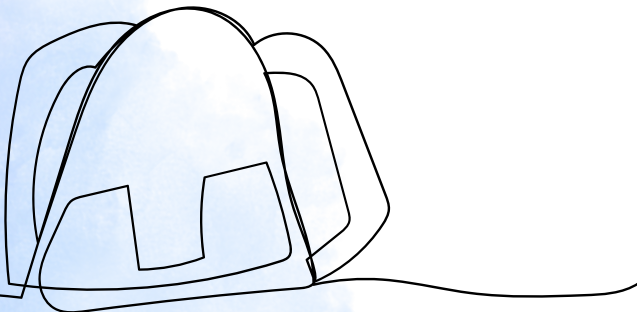
2025 COHORT

The New Jersey State Policy Lab's **Summer Internship** program is an experiential learning initiative designed to **empower undergraduate and master's level students** with the research, communication, and civic leadership skills essential to democratic engagement. Celebrating its fifth year this summer, this internship has become a celebrated opportunity for students from all backgrounds to start or continue their interests in public policy endeavors that most appeal to them.

## SHARING CAREER EXPERIENCES AND NETWORKING



## MEETING WITH POLICYMAKERS IN TRENTON



# POLICY COLLABORATORY

In March 2024, the New Jersey State Policy Lab partnered with SPIA in NJ at the Princeton University School of Public and International Affairs to hold the **first annual policy research collaboration**. The **Policy Collaboratory** is a one-day event which brought together **graduate students from Rutgers and Princeton** to brainstorm various approaches to address policy problems; the first year the selected theme was managed retreat and climate change, and the second year the selected theme was affordable housing access.

Now on its third year, the NJSPL and SPIA in NJ held the latest **Policy Collaboratory** with support from the Rutgers Democracy Lab in March 2026 at the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development in downtown New Brunswick. This year's theme for discussion and analysis was **access to higher education** in NJ and beyond, and for the first time the event was open to graduate students across the Garden State. All told, more than 30 students from Rutgers, Princeton, Seton Hall, and Montclair State University attended and worked together to identify opportunities and solutions to addressing higher education access.

**We thank all the students who participated, as well as the panelists, experts, and moderators who graciously donated their time**, from organizations which include: Education Law Center, Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies, Princeton Office of the Dean of the College, Rutgers Academic Affairs, Rutgers Division of Access and Community Engagement, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration, Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, Eagleton Institute of Politics, and the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. We would also like to thank the Rutgers Democracy Lab for funding this event as part of their Solving Grand Challenges program.



# OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY

## NEW JERSEY LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES



## NJBIA PUBLIC POLICY FORUM FEATURING GOVERNOR MIKIE SHERRILL



## HOSTING RESEARCH SEMINARS IN TRENTON FOR POLICYMAKERS AND LEGISLATORS



## RESEARCHERS ERIC SEYMOUR, KATHARINE NELSON, AND STEPHEN DANELEY MEETING WITH HOUSING POLICYMAKERS

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ELIZABETH COONER WITH LT. GOVERNOR DALE CALDWELL



# POLICY IN PRACTICE

In the spring of 2025, the New Jersey State Policy Lab began Policy in Practice, a new seminar series hosted at the New Jersey State House in Trenton, bringing researchers and policymakers together to discuss compelling public policy issues impacting New Jerseyans.

The following are research projects and reports that have been featured thus far:



## THE FUTURE OF NEW JERSEY JOURNALISM

Presented by  
Marc Pfeiffer, *Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy*



## R/ECON ECONOMIC FORECAST FOR NJ AND BEYOND

Presented by  
Will Irving, *Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy*



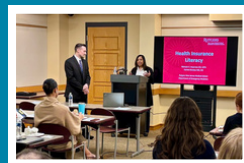
## TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND edTPA POLICY CHANGES IN NJ

Presented by  
Drew Gitomer, *Rutgers Graduate School of Education*  
Rachel Garver, *Montclair State University*



## EVALUATING HEALTH INSURANCE LITERACY INITIATIVES

Presented by  
Nicholas Imperato and Kamini Doobay, *Rutgers New Jersey Medical School*



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND CORPORATE ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY

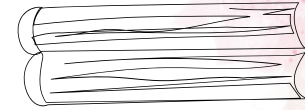
Presented by  
Will Payne, *Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy*  
Eric Seymour, *Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy*  
Katharine Nelson, *Rutgers Center on Law, Inequality, and Metropolitan Inequity*  
Stephen Danley, *Rutgers Center for Urban Research and Education*



## MORE SEMINARS TO COME IN 2026!



# LOOKING FORWARD



As the New Jersey State Policy Lab enters its next phase, our focus will be on deepening impact. With our foundation of five years of rigorous research, strong partnerships, and meaningful student engagement, we will pursue several strategic priorities:

## STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

We will continue to expand collaboration with all three Rutgers campuses and with other universities, and deepen partnerships with government, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropy. In particular, we hope to work with state agencies to more effectively evaluate their programs using rigorous empirical research. These relationships will be essential in our efforts to advance interdisciplinary solutions and scale impact.

## LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES, INFORMING POLICY

We hope to launch a statewide listening tour to engage directly with community-based organizations and local leaders to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing New Jersey's diverse communities. These conversations will help ground our research agenda in lived experience, surface emerging needs, and ensure that policy solutions are responsive and inclusive.

## HUB FOR POLICY DIALOGUE IN NEW JERSEY

Building on our Policy in Practice sessions, we will formalize a recurring series of convenings to bring together policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and community voices. These forums will foster collaboration, elevate diverse perspectives, and strengthen the connection between academic research and policymaking.

## SUSTAINING AND GROWING OUR WORK

To support these efforts, we will pursue diversified, multi-year funding that enables long-term planning and innovation. Such opportunities will allow us to respond to emerging needs while maintaining the rigor that defines our work.

## MEASURING AND DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

We will strengthen how we track our influence on policy and practice, such as when our work informs legislation or helps agencies adopt effective practices. By understanding connections to legislation, we will better be able to ensure that future work is designed to improve policy in New Jersey.

***Taken together, these priorities will allow the New Jersey State Policy Lab to continue to build on our role as a trusted partner to policymakers in the state.***

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

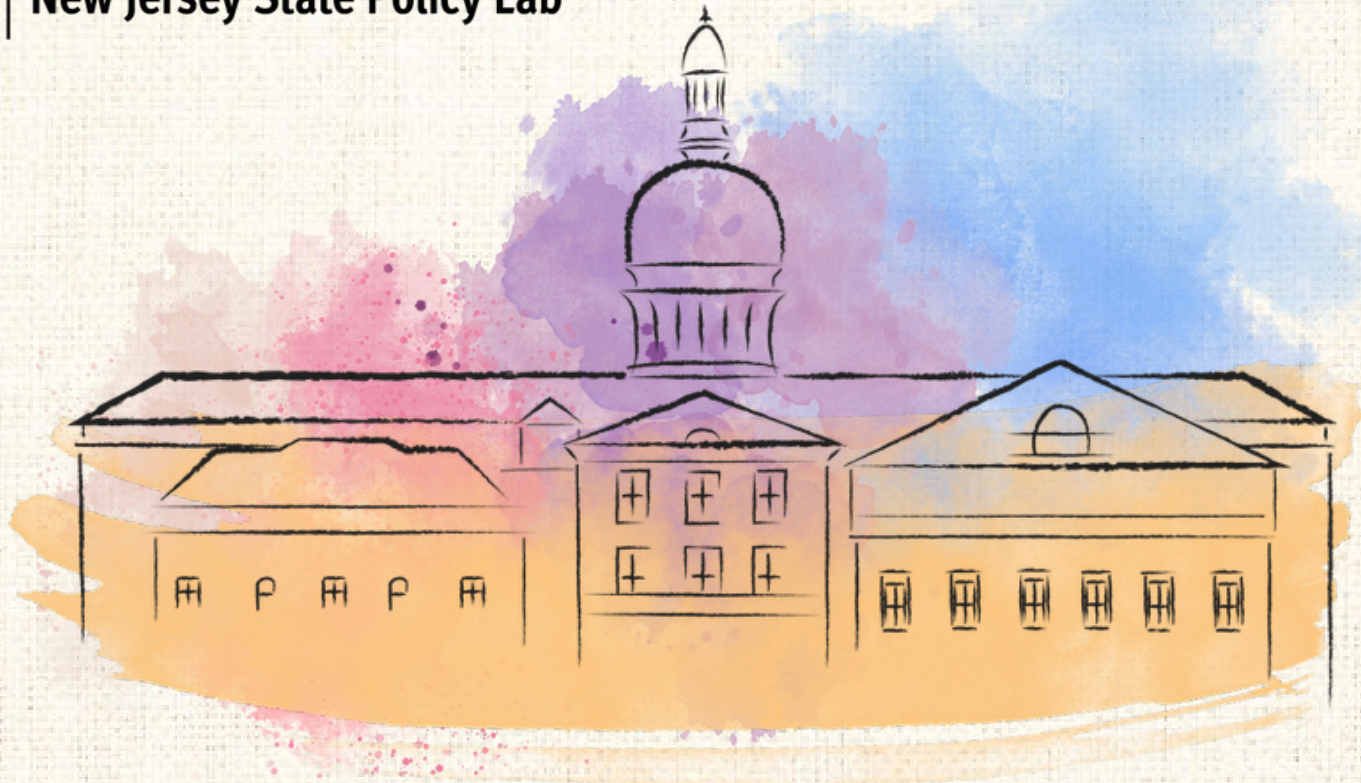
While the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education administers the partnership that funds the New Jersey State Policy Lab, the contents of this report do not necessarily represent the policy of the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and you should not assume endorsement by the State of New Jersey, elected leadership, or other employees of the State of New Jersey. Any omissions or errors are the sole responsibility of the author(s).

The New Jersey State Policy Lab would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge all the Rutgers faculty and staff that have provided countless hours of research, support, mentorship, and more on behalf of the NJSPL and our interns. Furthermore, we express our sincere appreciation for the many centers, schools, and universities that have partnered with us over the course of the last four years. This collaborative spirit has strengthened the NJSPL and our team, and enabled us to continue to provide rigorous, evidence-based policy research in support of all New Jerseyans.





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**New Jersey State Policy Lab**



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