

## West Ward Community Coalition Co-Sponsors New Jersey Bail Reform Forum Briefing

New Jersey's Bail Reform and Speed Trial Act, implemented in January, 2017, was the topic of an interactive forum coordinated by the Safer Newark Council, the Rutgers University-Newark (RUN) Office of University Community Partnerships (OUCP) and the West Ward Community Coalition (WWCC) in collaboration with Newark Mayor, the Honorable Ras J. Baraka, on Monday, February 5, 2018. The *New Jersey Bail Reform Forum Briefing* held at Jehovah-Jireh Praise and Worship Church Center in Newark's West Ward featured Mayor Baraka; the Honorable Judge Glenn A. Grant, Administrative Office of the Courts; Anthony Higgins, Essex County Prosecutor's Office; and Lieutenant James Lopez, Newark Police Department. Samantha Washington, Staff Assistant, Rep. Donald Payne (D-NJ10) served as the moderator for the event organized by Safer Newark Council's Genna Jones and Elizabeth Ruebman and OUCP's Dr. Diane Hill and Habeebah Yasin, West Ward Initiatives/AmeriCorps VISTA Fellow and West Ward resident. West Ward Councilman Joseph McCallum, Essex County Freeholder Rufus Johnson and Jehovah Jirah's Senior Executive Pastor and host, Bishop Rudy V. Carlton, also provided context and commentary.

The forum was organized to explore the bail reform topic in depth as a response to interest and discussion raised at the December 6, 2017, West Ward Community Conversation, *Exploring Strategies and Partnerships to Improve Public Safety in the West Ward*. During the meeting speakers described both benefits and unintended consequences of the legislation, including a number of undesirable public safety concerns. December discussants included: Sergeant Todd Mazur, Newark Police Department ComStat Unit; Captain Michael Leroux and Detective Kevin Johnson, Newark Police Department, 5th Precinct; and the Safer Newark Council's Elizabeth Ruebman and Leigh Grossman, along with Senator Ronald L. Rice, a member of the WWCC Planning Committee. It was announced at that time that a follow up meeting would be dedicated to an exploration of the mounting concerns caused by the legislation.

Monday evenings' event was very well attended and enthusiastically received. More than 70 residents and stakeholders, most reached through the WWCC mailing list, engaged in compelling dialogue—asking questions, providing personal perspectives, and expressing concerns for how the legislation effects individuals and communities. Mayor Baraka admitted that while the law was not perfect, legislators, courts and public safety professionals continue through trial and error to search for policies that provide the best possible outcomes for residents in Newark and throughout the state.

The New Jersey Bail Reform and Speed Trial Act was intended to mitigate disproportionate consequences experienced by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals who found it difficult to post bail compared to more affluent counterparts for similar offenses. Individuals

were forced to remain locked up, sometimes for low level offenses, potentially resulting in loss of employment, housing, or suffering from other destabilizing by-products of their inability to pay. The bail reform legislation sought to remove financial barriers that unfairly disadvantaged poor people. Unfortunately, the law is not immune to abuses by repeat and/or more egregious offenders, causing frustration for all parties--the Newark Police Department, Newark and West Ward residents, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Courts.

Though not all audience member's questions could be answered during the two-hour forum, participants clearly demonstrated a desire to continue interactive discussions of this and similar public policy. A follow up event is anticipated. For more information and/or to be added to the West Ward Community Coalition mailing list contact Habeebah Yasin, West Ward Initiatives/AmeriCorps VISTA Fellow at [habeebah.y@rutgers.edu](mailto:habeebah.y@rutgers.edu).

For a photo gallery of the February 5, 2018 *New Jersey Bail Reform Forum Briefing* visit the West Ward Community Coalition's Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/West-Ward-Community-Coalition-1513305972090265/> -or- Office of University Community Partnership's Google Photo Album <https://photos.app.goo.gl/zVzek5vOhsEo9xQa2>

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