

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 356

WHEREAS, the Coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") pandemic, which took the lives of over 33,000 New Jersey residents and well over one million Americans, proved to be the greatest crisis our State has ever faced; and

WHEREAS, on February 3, 2020, approximately one month before the first reported case of COVID-19 in New Jersey, I issued Executive Order No. 102, creating the Coronavirus Task Force in order to coordinate the State's efforts to appropriately prepare for and respond to the public health hazard posed by the virus; and

WHEREAS, after the pandemic had finally subsided, on November 28, 2022, I announced that New Jersey would be the first State in the nation to commission an independent and comprehensive review of its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the independent review was structured to include, but not be limited to, the state of readiness in New Jersey for a pandemic in early 2020; prominent emergency policy decisions that were made by our State government; the pandemic response with respect to vulnerable residents, including members of congregate care settings; and the State government's efforts to continue core functions, including providing direct services to residents; and

WHEREAS, the review was also tasked with examining the management of public health aspects of the pandemic, including testing, vaccinations, personal protective equipment procurement and distribution, and coordination of the health care system and of health information around COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the 910-page report that resulted from the review, titled "Independent Review of New Jersey's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," was completed on March 7, 2024, and is currently the

only comprehensive after-action review of a state government's response to COVID-19 in the entire nation; and

WHEREAS, the report both highlights numerous examples of New Jersey's strong leadership during the crisis, and identifies gaps in preparedness and structural deficiencies that must be addressed; and

WHEREAS, the report includes 33 recommendations for how New Jersey should prepare for a future emergency based on the State's experience with the COVID-19 pandemic and best practices in emergency preparedness; and

WHEREAS, the report's recommendations are focused on preparedness for a future pandemic but also apply to other types of emergencies that the State may face and have implications for daily operations of the State in non-emergency situations, such as improvements in New Jersey's public health infrastructure, efforts to promote health equity, and strategies to leverage technology in the State's delivery of services to residents; and

WHEREAS, as Governor, it is my duty and responsibility to protect the health and well-being of our residents by taking all necessary preparatory measures in response to threats posed to the public from future pandemics and other emergencies; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary for Executive Branch departments and agencies in New Jersey to study the report and its recommendations and to integrate the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic into their operations and planning for future emergencies; and

WHEREAS, coordination across the Executive Branch is necessary to evaluate and implement the report's recommendations and address other lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, much as such coordination was necessary to respond to the pandemic itself;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, PHILIP D. MURPHY, Governor of the State of New Jersey, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and by the Statutes of this State, do hereby ORDER and DIRECT:

1. There is hereby established a Task Force on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness ("Task Force"), which shall be responsible for evaluating the recommendations contained in the Independent Review of New Jersey's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic to determine which recommendations can appropriately be implemented under current law, providing guidance on implementation of those recommendations by Executive Branch departments and agencies, and making recommendations to the Governor concerning the report's other conclusions. This Task Force shall supersede the Coronavirus Task Force established in Executive Order No. 102 (2020), which is hereby rescinded.

2. The Task Force shall be co-chaired by the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health and the State Director of Emergency Management, who is the Superintendent of State Police. In addition to the co-chairs, the Task Force shall consist of the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections, the Commissioner of the Department of Education, the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Adjutant General and Commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Attorney General, the State Treasurer, the Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Civil Service Commission, the Chief Executive Officer of the Economic Development Authority, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, the Chief Technology Officer, and the Executive Director of the Governor's Disaster Recovery Office, or their designees.

3. The Governor may, as determined to be appropriate, appoint additional members to the Task Force. All members of the Task Force shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor and without compensation.

4. The Task Force shall organize as soon as practicable after the appointment of its members and shall convene as often as requested by the Governor or co-chairs.

5. The Task Force shall be purely advisory in nature and shall provide advice to the Governor and other Executive Branch departments and agencies as appropriate.

6. The Task Force is authorized to call upon any department, office, division, or agency of this State to supply it with data or other information or assistance available to such agency as the Task Force deems necessary to execute its duties under this Order. Each Executive Branch department and agency is hereby required, to the extent not inconsistent with law, to cooperate fully with the Task Force and to furnish such assistance on as timely a basis as is necessary to accomplish the purpose of this Order. The Task Force may consult with experts and other knowledgeable individuals in the public or private sector on any aspect of its mission. To the extent necessary, the Department of Health and Department of Law and Public Safety shall provide professional and clerical staff to the Task Force, and the Governor may designate an individual to serve as the Executive Director of the Task Force.

7. Within 90 days of this Order, all Executive Branch departments and agencies shall review all administrative orders, directives, and waivers they issued relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, and provide to the Task Force: (a) an inventory of all such administrative orders, directives, and waivers, and amendments thereto; (b) an assessment of the continuing efficacy of such administrative orders, directives, and waivers, or

components thereof, that remain in effect; and (c) an assessment of the value of maintaining such policies outside the COVID-19 emergency context.

8. For purposes of this Order, "Executive Branch departments and agencies" shall mean any of the principal departments in the Executive Branch of State government and any agency, authority, board, bureau, commission, division, institution, office, or other instrumentality within or created by any such department, and any independent State authority, commission, instrumentality, or agency over which the Governor exercises executive authority, as determined by the Attorney General.

9. Nothing in this Order shall be construed to confer any legal right upon any person; nothing shall be construed to create a private right of action on behalf of any person; and nothing shall be used as a basis for legal challenges to rules or other action or inaction by a State entity.

10. Nothing in this Order shall be construed to supersede any federal, State, or local law.

11. This Order shall take effect immediately.

GIVEN, under my hand and seal this
22nd day of March,
Two Thousand and Twenty-Four,
and of the Independence of
the United States, the Two
Hundred and Forty-Eighth.

[seal]

/s/ Philip D. Murphy

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Parimal Garg

Chief Counsel to the Governor