

*State of the City Address 2019  
Mayor W. Reed Gusciora  
Trenton, New Jersey*

Good evening. I want to thank the state and county officials who have joined us tonight; members of the clergy; Members of Trenton City Council; members of my administration; our numerous community organizations; and most importantly the residents of this great Capital City.

Tonight, we are at a crossroads in an extraordinary time and an extraordinary place for the City of Trenton. As we continue to move the city forward, I stand here before you, to report that Trenton is trending in the right direction.

We have had a decade of neglect but for the first time there is a sense of optimism in this city, that if we all pull together, we can be successful in this Third Battle for Trenton. I see a very different, but much improved landscape not only from where we were one year ago, but where we will be in the next five years. That is what we will discuss tonight.

I am so pleased with the cabinet that we have assembled to help me right this ship, and of the City's 1,500 workers who show up every day to commit themselves to making a Trenton that we can be proud of. I am

especially pleased that over the past year we have hired 362 new permanent and provisional workers. The vast majority of them call Trenton their home.

In each area of importance from 1) public safety; 2) economic development; 3) education and 4) water; we have managed to move the needle in a positive direction. Things are not going to happen overnight. But today, there is a sense of purpose, a new sense of ownership, and a sense of pride for living in Trenton.

I thank the people of this great city, not just for putting me in office, but for making sure that I am held responsible. The decisions made here impact all Trentonians. But your voices are heard. Your opinions are appreciated. Your input is a necessary part of our local government.

Together, the State, County, City Council, our public servants and the people of this city, we can continue to lift Trenton up and with unity build a city for current Trentonians and for the hundreds of new residents that move in every year.

I want to take a moment to reflect on something special that we, as a community, accomplished this September. We cannot diminish the importance of having one, central, state of the art high school. The 150-million-dollar project will prove, in the years to come, the difference that a great educational institution can make. Now more than ever, while four separate school communities are coming together as one, they need our support. They need to know that it does indeed take a village. I urge every single one of you: get involved in our school system. I am not *necessarily* asking you to donate money. I am not *necessarily* asking you to donate labor. I am simply asking you to come out to a football game. Show up to our theatre productions. Show our support for our students, and show that their community is here for them.

While the State has imposed a Memorandum of Understanding that stands, looming over our every move, we have persisted. We are continuing to work with Lieutenant Governor Sheilah Oliver, and The

New Jersey Division of Community Affairs, on hiring Trenton residents first, and finding savings to keep city services running without substantially increasing costs. The Department of Environmental Protection is working with our Water Department to maintain a high standard of service and quality that we, as Trenton residents expect from our Water company. They have kept us accountable. We have come a long way since those on the outside, pushed the city towards a state take over. We are no longer on that path. Period.

Last year I reported that State funding was cut. Today I can say that with the reinstatement of the Capital City Line Item to the State budget. We are back on the upswing. I can also say with confidence, that without the help of New Jersey State Senator Shirley Turner, Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli, that would never have been possible. I know that Governor Murphy is committed to helping to make sure that the State is giving their fair share to the Capital City. With the partnership of our friends in the legislature, we hope the State fully reinstates Capital City Aid to historic levels,

rectifying the financial instability the prior Governor's administration imposed on us.

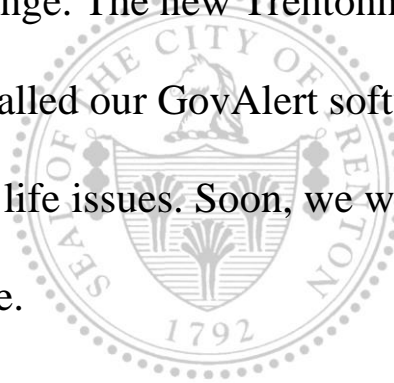
Through hard work, the Murphy Administration has proven itself to be an ally. The signing of Executive Order 40 is proof of their dedication to Trenton. Together we are taking advantage of the assets available to the State and using them to make the Capital City a better place to call home.

The State of our City is strong. The State of our City is trending in the right direction. While we run into challenges, both old and new, every day, our progress is proven, our progress will continue. Trenton will continue to reform and resurge under our administration.

But our way forward is through unity. Through partnerships with Council, the State, County, and Federal governments, non-profits, community organizations, and religious institutions, we will better serve

every Trentonian. Not a select few, not a connected few, but every single member of the Capital City Community.

Our administration is fundamentally overhauling how City Hall operates. We've rolled out and are still refining a brand-new website. Anyone who suffered through using the old one knows how badly we needed to make that change. The new [Trentonnj.org](http://Trentonnj.org) is designed to better serve you. We have installed our GovAlert software, and we need your help to report quality of life issues. Soon, we will allow you to pay bills, with a credit card, online.



I encourage all of you to go and explore the new site. Every move we make is to better serve Trenton, and that's what drove us to update our presence on the internet.

Within City Hall itself, our Administration Department led by Adam Cruz, changed internal processes to consider Trentonians with non-violent criminal records for positions, and started a safety committee to

control injuries and safety costs, something that had not been done for over a decade.

We established these new hiring rules, with the incredible help of Tracey Syphax, Perry Shaw, and Jason Rogers, to give the incarcerated a second chance to get a job and change their lives.

I just hope Council also gives me a second chance in the coming months!

Perhaps most importantly, going forward, we have updated the City's budgeting process to streamline and modernize procedures in anticipation of improving technology. Our goal is to make the budget interactive, allowing residents to see and understand the budget as we do.

We also need to save money. Director Morelli, and our Law Department, work every day to make sure that we are being legally, fiscally, and ethically prudent in every aspect of our operations. We can better serve you because of him and his department's work, and the

money that they save us. We look to hire three new assistant City Attorneys to lessen our reliance on outside counsel (thank you Marge!), so if any lawyers are looking for a job; let me know.

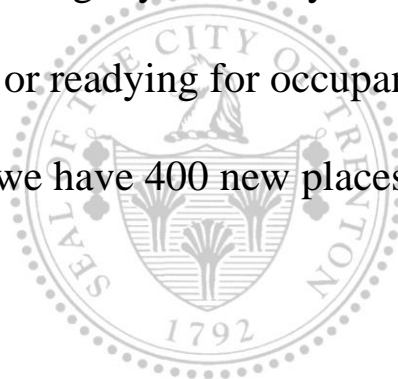
We continue to prioritize the need to generate revenue. Our City's real estate auction this past year made waves across the state. Bidding reached a record 3.3 Million dollars; a 400% increase from the last auction. Wins like that do not happen every day, and they are not the product of sitting around and waiting. Our staff in Housing and Economic Development, under Ben Delisle, is working hard, getting the cities vacant homes owned and occupied. Those 80 some odd auctioned buildings are now making their way back onto the tax rolls.

A few weeks ago, through a partnership with the Trenton Housing Authority, their hardworking Executive Director Jelani Garrett, and our tenacious Congresswoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman, we secured competitive funding from the US Department of HUD to re-plan a large swath of affordable housing. We are one of only four cities in the entire nation to win the 1.3-Million-dollar Choice Neighborhood Planning



Grant. This will provide us the tools to reimagine Donnelly Homes to make it safer and more in line with modern urban designs. Rest assured that every penny is being spent with the current residents in mind.

For those residents that are looking to purchase a home in Trenton, we are working to jumpstart our first-time homebuyer program. We don't need more landlords; we need homeowners taking pride in the City that we already love. I am nearing my 500<sup>th</sup> day in office and keeping my promise of demolishing or readying for occupancy, 1,000 homes in 1,000 days. As of now, we have 400 new places that people can call home.



To protect those new homeowners and our current residents, Fire Director Derrick Sawyer is making great strides towards ensuring and improving the fire safety of our community. They've updated their computers, their records management system, and recouped over 300,000 dollars from FEMA. This past year they installed over 600 smoke alarms in homes across Trenton. They are taking proactive and preventative measures to keep us safer. We have open slots for new

firefighters, and we are looking for Trentonians to become first responders.

Further, TFD has been able to efficiently apply for, and receive grants from all sectors of the Federal and State government. They took a 113,000-dollar award for water safety and security along our riverfront, and another to pay for more cameras for our fire marshals. They are making your money go further, and every department can say the same.

Recreation, under the diligent leadership of Maria Richardson, enjoyed one of our most active and engaging summers in memory. Hetzel pool was reopened with a splash and will be ready for its first full season next summer. Funding was allocated for the renovation of the North Clinton and the West Ward Recreation Centers, Lipinski and Martin Luther King Jr. Parks, and the Breunig Avenue Playground. We have a plan to revamp our over 60 public parks, and we hope to have council's input during their review of the proposed ordinance. After all, every child deserves a safe and open place to play.

After school finished up in June, we offered a comprehensive array of recreational and cultural programming for our children. Recreation put on 16 ‘Take it to the Streets’ block parties, 9 ‘Movies Under the Stars,’ including one hosted by our active community leader Council President Kathy McBride, and 8 summer concerts. We served over 65,000 breakfasts and lunches at almost 40 locations across the City. We ran 5 pools to serve thousands of patrons. And our Youth Green Team cleaned over a dozen community sites.

We are excited about our 5-year Urban Community Forestry Plan. Through 2024 we will be bringing more greenspaces to our urban landscape. While just this year, we diminished the tree maintenance backlog by 60%. Our city is becoming more beautiful, but we always have more work to do.

Last year I said that we might have more potholes than craters on the moon. Well, under our administration, and led by Director of Public Works Wally Onitiri, we now have 3,000 less. State-funded ADA compliant ramps are being installed in all four wards. We’ve repainted

crosswalks, and we'll be painting more in the next year. We have many streets to be repaved and repaired, and we are doing everything we can to reinstate the State and Federal dollars that prior administrations had passed over.

Working with Senator Turner and Councilman Rodriguez we hope to soon reopen the Rt-29 tunnel for tractor trailers to lessen the stress on our roads. We are far from 'mission accomplished' but we are working with our partners at NJ DOT, and we are not giving up.

Illegal dumping is another constant strain on our City's quality of life. But we, alongside Neighborhood Improvement Association and Councilman Harrison, have been proactive. 230 alleyways were cleaned. Enforcement has ramped up. We have had cameras installed to stop these outsiders that use Trenton as a dumping ground. The NIA has been integral in this process. Octavia Stuphen, Aziz Ali, Rachel Cogsville, and countless volunteers from our community and beyond are tirelessly toiling in the trenches to clean up our City.

Working with PSEG and Councilman Muschal, LED lighting is taking the place of old incandescent bulbs, and new lights are being installed on our darkest streets. Over the next few years, we will be replacing ALL incandescents with LEDs. We are making our city brighter, and saving money on our electric bill.

I am incredibly proud something that some of you are using at this very second. 65 parking kiosks were installed throughout the City. And those new kiosks are on track to bring in 300% more revenue than last year. No longer will you be able to park indefinitely on our streets without paying. That money will go to community and social services for Trentonians. Many of which are already being provided through our multifaceted Health Department.

The Department itself, under Director Shakira Abdul-Ali, established over 40 new partnerships with other organizations to effectively root themselves in the social service community. These partnerships helped us to provide amenities for over 500 families, 300 individuals, and almost 1,000 children. These efforts were again supported through

Federal HUD funding, who awarded us over 4 million dollars to help our homeless populations. Through sub-contracting, making use of those previously mentioned partnerships, we helped to provide housing to 545 people, most of them youth and veterans.

We aim to support our most vulnerable community members. Our seniors are an invaluable portion of our population. We were awarded over 200,000 dollars for senior services this year. Their golden years deserve to be ones filled with joy and support. Trust me, every time I meet a senior Trentonian, I think of my 90-year-old mother, who needs just a little extra help throughout her day. We are providing that helping hand to every senior in Trenton.

Senior centers are a necessary resource for our community. Reading, Sam Naples, South Ward, and the Jenney Stubblefield centers will be under our continuous care, while we explore new ways to rehabilitate the buildings themselves.

Our problem with stray dogs and cats also needed to be addressed. This past year our Animal Shelter has rescued over 200 animals and with our

partners in Trenton Animal Rocks, and with the support of Councilwoman Marge Caldwell-Wilson, have found homes for almost 150 of them. However, some still live in the shelter, where volunteers give their time to better the life of a dog or a cat. 88 volunteers were trained just this year to help keep run our animal shelter. They and everyone who gives their time while expecting nothing in return deserve our praise. We are working towards opening two new trailers to lessen the overcrowding caused by our renewed interest in this issue.

We have also initiated a commitment to creating a ‘Resilient Trenton!’. Our 5-year citywide campaign is designed to promote and support the development of trauma-informed care, helping our residents resolve and address the stress of working and living our challenging world.

On the money side, we were awarded almost 900,000 dollars for our cancer research and our lead programs. They are educating our constituency in workshops, clinics, and schools. They provide essential health services to uninsured residents, giving relief from the stresses of living without adequate resources.

With increased commitment from the State, we will invest in our public safety, improve the technology serving our police and, most importantly provide them the cameras and tools so that we can stay accountable to the public. Under the leadership of Director Sheila Coley, the Trenton Police Department has recorded a 12% decrease in overall crime. But even one robbery, or one shooting is too many. We have work still to do.

Director Coley has made significant strides to better secure each ward. She has revamped walking patrols throughout our Capital City. She has increased the number of patrol units. The officers who watch our children get to school safely, and help our seniors cross the road, are tirelessly working. With council support, we will add new recruits to our ranks, in order to further our public safety efforts.

Still, technology needs to be improved in the aging headquarters. We need to continue recruiting Trenton residents. But TPD has shown undeniable, and indiscriminate progress since the last time that I stood here.



Regrettably, like any other urban center in the United States, crime and gun violence persist, and are not going away in this city. It is not going away today, nor tomorrow. As long as guns are easily accessible across the river, and across the country, we will continue to see violence in our city. However, a gun cannot pull its own trigger; it is the people that feed on hate, and through their cowardice, use firearms to settle petty and meaningless arguments. But we are NOT, intimidated. I could stand here, and like so many others in my position, establish a taskforce, or a study commission that would tell us what we already know. But that would be a disservice you, and a waste of time. We know our problems. We know what must be done. And unlike my predecessors, we are getting it done through a balance of security, and proactive programs.

I will continue to advocate for improvements to our educational institutions, for recreation programming, for afterschool activities, to make sure that our youth are given a choice to follow the path of virtue and not the way of the wicked. We will prevail and, as a City, lift Trenton together.

We are building educational partnerships with the best schools in America. In addition to the ongoing relationships with the six major local colleges and universities. Even Princeton's Theological Seminary is stepping up to the plate.

Mercer County Community College, Princeton University, Rider University, TCNJ, Thomas Edison are all helping to improve our home. Our innovative learning center in the downtown will be a beacon of educational excellence to the next generation.

In addition, the City is currently working with Princeton as part of its Tiger Challenge. This program partners a team of students with faculty and community advisors to design a solution to social justice concerns.

We even have Princeton students helping our youth learn the violin.

TCNJ continues to help through their Bonner program, and Thomas Edison hosts forums that help us identify paths forward. Mercer County

College is even expanding training that helps Trenton students ready themselves for tomorrow's workforce.

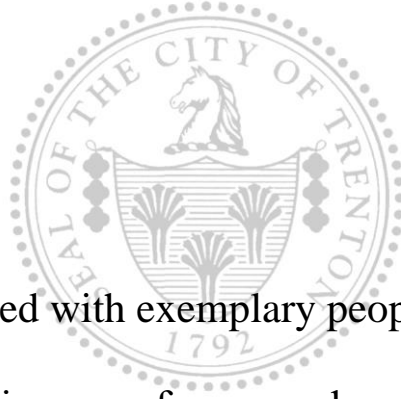
Through our partnership with New York University and encouragement of Councilman Jerrell Blakley, the City is conducting a disparity study regarding our procurement procedures. Trenton is committed to ensuring both a fair process and equitable representation of our diverse entrepreneurs.

We were also thrilled to be accepted into the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative. This initiative tailors a program, especially for Trenton, to aid us in better managing, organizing, and utilizing our data within all Departments, even Water.

Under the leadership of our former Water Director Shing-Fu Hsueh, and our current interim director Steve Picco, We ARE complying with DEP regulations. And NO, as long as I am Mayor, Trenton Water Works will never be privatized. However, going forward there is much to do to improve the system and infrastructure to better service our customers.

We are lessening our reliance on long-term consulting contracts, which

can drain Trenton Water of its limited resources. We are working on staffing internally with a priority on Trenton residents so that those with the qualifications to oversee our water safety know the system and know the city. And yes, we are working tirelessly to address the issue of lead piping, and we will not stop until replacement pipes are standard in the Capital City. The health and quality of our water is and will always be a priority of our Administration. The *public health* will always be a priority.



We know this city is filled with exemplary people, and I would be remiss if I didn't recognize one of our own here in the Mayor's office.

An exceptional student at Trenton Central High School, Ranai Morgan started this summer as one of our Seasonal Student Workers.

Due to her hard work with our office of Veterans Affairs, the Capital City has received Governor Murphy's "*We Value our Veterans*" community award. Members of our armed services have paid a titanic debt, and they have our support.

Ranai is one of thousands committed to improving the lives of other Trentonians. Kids from Isles Youth Build, who cannot even vote, work every day on projects from the City Hall atrium, to little league baseball fields. We need more like them. We need people who give a damn about their City.

From thousands of individual efforts, we are united in one goal. We are improving the City of Trenton. We are a united body. And we are working every day to guarantee that the diverse community that we represent is getting their fair share. Every accomplishment that I reference tonight was made possible through the efforts of more people than I could ever name. Unity is driving us toward the future.

We now have effective protocols for taking advantage of grants. We have invited audits from a variety of organizations to make sure that your money, the taxpayers' money, is being taken care of with the utmost scrutiny and frugality. We are in the business of working together, and working transparently, with the public.

I now speak to those watching from outside the City limits. Mark my words: Trenton IS trending upward. Property values are rising at a rate not seen for decades.

Businesses are opening every week. From Hanover to East State there is tangible change. We are recreating our own urban landscape for the better. If you want proof, look at what the Latino Merchants Association, and the African American Chamber of Commerce are doing throughout our community.

We want residents that are willing to invest, to act on building this city together. Our census numbers in 2020 are expected to show growth. By 2030, they will show success. But a decade of progress is born from daily routines.

This is a city built on the grit and determination of immigrants, newcomers, and deep-rooted families alike. Our capital city has seen its population change from decade to decade, with new and different people

bringing their character and identity to our neighborhoods. Trenton cannot build for the future on the backs of only our current residents. On every street, on every block there is a home that needs to be filled. We have plenty of room for those from outside Trenton; we must embrace these new neighbors as they will be a catalyst for our resurgence.

When I first took office, I stood on the steps of City Hall and told you that were in a battle for Trenton. Together, we are fighting for the small wins just as much as the big ones. We will continue working towards a united Trenton. We have set the trend upward. And, together, we WILL lift Trenton.

Thank you. God bless America, and the historic Capital of New Jersey, the City of Trenton