



**NEWS RELEASE**

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**New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Announces Release of Report on Civil Rights Impacts of Asset Forfeitures in New Jersey**

Washington, DC – The 2017-2021 New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a [report](#) about its examination of asset forfeitures in New Jersey. The Committee conducted three virtual panel presentations by national and state experts in September and November 2020. Committee members received testimony from individuals impacted by asset forfeiture, as well as advocates, attorneys, scholars, and government officials.

The Committee believes that numerous issues plague asset forfeiture practices, which combine to create a system that is ripe for abuse by law enforcement and result in individuals, mainly from communities of color and low-income communities, having their assets seized and forfeited by the government, often wrongfully. The revenue incentive for law enforcement makes bolstering their budget a top priority, often at the expense of fairness, and even, as set forth above, public safety. And, although bills signed into law in January 2020 provide some additional oversight of asset forfeiture, they do not fundamentally change the practice.

This report recommends significant reforms to asset forfeiture law—*see*, [report](#), pp. 16-20—to:

- assure that forfeiture actions, whether criminal or civil, are always accompanied by appropriate due process protections and the assistance of counsel;
- remove or reduce the incentives provided to law enforcement to use forfeiture to raise revenue for itself or to inappropriately use forfeiture to provide leverage in plea bargaining; and
- remove obstacles that forfeiture—like other fines, costs and fees—pose for the successful reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals into society, after serving their sentences.

“This is the second report recently published by the 2017-2021 New Jersey Advisory Committee, and again, I must extend my deepest appreciation to the members—who represent diverse occupational skills and points of view and have a shared commitment to civil rights in New Jersey—for unanimously voting to publish this report,” said Lawrence S. Lustberg, Committee Chair. He noted that, “Policy and law makers at every level in our state are aware of the Committee’s review of this important civil rights topic and look forward to the Report’s findings and recommendations. We hope that these recommendations will be helpful to New Jersey policymakers as they undertake badly needed legislative and regulatory reform of the forfeiture process.”

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 56 state Advisory Committees—50 States, District of Columbia and American Territories—offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. For information about the reports and meetings of the Commission and its Advisory Committees, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).