To: Governor Chris Christie and the Members of the New Jersey Legislature

We, the undersigned faith leaders, express our strong support for Senate Bill 946 / Assembly Bill 1910 and urge you to take action to pass this important legislation without delay.

New Jersey’s bail system is broken. Nearly three-quarters of the 15,000 people in state jails are awaiting trial—rather than serving a sentence. Decisions about who is released pending trial are based on the ability to pay bail and not on the risk to the community. Nonviolent, low-risk offenders are warehoused in jails for long periods at great financial cost to New Jersey simply because they cannot pay sometimes nominal bail amounts. Meanwhile, high-risk offenders who do have the financial resources can obtain release.

More than half of the individuals in New Jersey jails are being held for nonviolent offenses. Many of these individuals could safely be released on bail pending trial but lack the financial resources to pay the arbitrary bail amounts set by New Jersey’s bail schedule. The average length of time individuals are held pending trial is almost one year.

Almost 40 percent of those held in New Jersey’s jails are there solely because of their inability to pay bail. More than 10 percent cannot pay bail amounting to $2,500 or less (more than 800 inmates are held for the inability to pay $500 or less).

It costs about $100 a day to hold an individual in a New Jersey jail; therefore, warehousing an individual for almost a year while awaiting trial costs New Jersey taxpayers more than $30,000. Thus, New Jersey’s current policy of jailing an individual who cannot pay, for instance, $500 bail, can cost New Jersey taxpayers more than $30,000—just while that person awaits a trial.

In addition, the jailed person is separated from his or her family physically, emotionally and financially, further exacerbating the challenges this individual and family face. New Jersey’s current bail system punishes the poor with a ten-month sentence before they ever have their day in court. It bases pretrial release decisions on resources rather than risk. This is immoral and dangerous.

There is nothing more important than protecting the safety and well-being of our communities. To that end we urge you to support S946 / A1910.

Sincerely,

Pastor Bryant Ali, New Psalmist Worship Center
Rev. Darrell Armstrong, Shiloh Baptist Church
Rev. Gedeon Aybar, Iglesia El Shaddai, Jersey City
Rev. Gregory Bezilla, Chaplain, Episcopal Campus Ministry, Rutgers University
Rev. William Caban, Defender of Christian Faith, Bayonne
Rev. William Coleman, Second Baptist Church, Asbury Park

Rev. Errol Cooper, First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens
Rabbi Pennie Cordobes, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun
Rev. Gabriel Cuervo, The Nazarine Church, Jersey City
Pastor Keith Davis, Evangelism Today Christian Church
Rev. Doris Glaspy, Roseville Presbyterian Church, Newark

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Faith Leader Letter of Support

Rev. Carol S. Haag, Unitarian Universalist Minister, retired Murray Grove Stewardship Committee Chair
Pastor Karen Hernandez-Grazen, Westminster Presbyterian, Trenton
Rev. Craig Hirshberg, UU Legislative Ministry of New Jersey
Pastor Francis Huber, First Christian Assembly
Pastor Verenander L. Hughes, Bethel Baptist Church
Rev. Robert Janis-Dillon, First Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hunterdon County
Rev. Gerald Kugler, St. John Lutheran Church, Union City
Rev. Sara Lillja, Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry
Rev. Jose Lopez, Iglesia Cristiana Avivamiento Pentacostal Church
Dr. Calvin McKinney, National Baptist Convention
Rev. Cedric McKoy, Beulah Grove Baptist Church
Rev. Bill Neely, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Princeton
Rev. Dana P. Owens, Messiah Baptist Church, East Orange
Rabbi Karen Perolman, Congregation B’nai Jeshurun
Rev. Juan Peterson, Angel Visit Baptist Church
Rev. Sunilida Ramos, Iglesia Del Avivamiento, Union City
Rev. Tomas Reyes, Iglesia Fuente De Salvacion, Jersey City
Rev. John Rice, Love Fellowship MBC
Rev. Bruno Rodriquez, Church of God, Jersey City
Pastor Leroy Scott, Faith Christian Counseling Center, Trenton
Rabbi Howard Stahl, Congregation B’nai Jeshurun
Rabbi Joshua Stanton, Congregation B’nai Jeshurun
Rev. JerQuentin Sutton, Social Action Chair, United Missionary Baptist Convention, Inc.
Rev. Ariel Torres, Monte Sinai, Newark
Rev. David Torres, The Path to Heaven, Long Branch
Pastor Austin Whitaker, Calvary Community Rebirth Ministries
Pastor Vanessa Wilson, Magnolia Road Church, Pemberton