We, the undersigned faith leaders, express our strong support for New Jersey’s new pretrial system that virtually eliminates money bail. Money bail is inherently discriminatory and creates a two-tiered system of justice that disproportionately impacts communities of color.

People of color fare worse than whites at every stage of the criminal justice system and the pretrial stage is no exception. Race and money bail amounts are significantly correlated. On average, black men are given a 35% higher money bail than white men and Latino men are given a 19% higher money bail than white men. Money-based pretrial systems automatically disadvantage people of color who are also more likely to be living in poverty.

When people cannot afford bail, they are forced to languish behind bars while awaiting trial. Such pretrial detention has been linked to significant negative consequences for both the individual and the community they live in. People lose jobs, housing, and connections to family and community.

A report published by the Drug Policy Alliance in 2013 found that almost three-quarters of those in New Jersey jails were being held pending trial rather than serving a sentence. Around 40 percent of these individuals were there solely because they could not pay money bail, often of nominal amount under $2,500; the average length of time they waited in jail was 10 months. The overwhelming majority of those suffering this gross unfairness were African American or Latino.

In 2014, in response to this injustice, an unlikely alliance including Governor Christie, the New Jersey Legislature, the Judiciary, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and civil rights and racial justice advocates came together to fix New Jersey’s broken pretrial system and pass bail reform.

The reform went into effect on January 1, 2017 and so far we have seen positive results. Because of bail reform fewer people are sitting behind bars awaiting trial. In just the first six months of implementation, the statewide pretrial jail population has dropped by 20%.

Bail reform has also improved public safety. Under New Jersey’s old system, a judge could not even consider dangerousness to the community when making pretrial release decisions. Now a judge is authorized to consider dangerousness and can order the pretrial detention of someone found to be too dangerous to release pending trial. Since January 1, around 14 percent of defendants have been detained pretrial. Preliminary data from the New Jersey State Police shows crime rates continuing to decline since January 1st.

Opponents of bail reform have a vested interest in seeing New Jersey fail. As the bellwether state on this issue, New Jersey’s success is already influencing policy decisions in other states. As the for-profit bail industry continues to attack in New Jersey, we stand united in our faith and commitment to defending bail reform in our state.

There is nothing more important than promoting justice and protecting the safety and well-being of our communities, and bail reform is doing just that.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Joel N. Abraham, Temple Sholom, Scotch Plains
Pastor Bryant R. Ali, New Psalmist Worship Center, Newark
V. Rev. Peter Anthony Baktis, Princeton
Rev. Emilie Boggis, Beacon Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster, Truah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Rabbi Marc Kline, Monmouth Reform Temple
Rabbi Clifford M. Kulwin, Temple B’nai Abraham
Rev. Emilie Boggis, Beacon Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Rev. Sara Lilja, Director, Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of NJ
Bail Reform
Faith Leader Letter of Support

Irvina Booker, Faith is Our Pathway, Inc.
Rev. Jose C. Lopez, Latino Minister of New Jersey For Justice

Rt. Rev. Mark M. Beckwith, Bishop of Newark
Father Jack Martin, Archdiocese of Newark

Rev. Gregory Bezilla, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
Derek Minne-Bloom, Food Justice at Trinity Episcopal Church, Asbury Park

Rev. Charles F. Boyer, Bethel AME Church, Woodbury
Rev. Gladys G. Moore, St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit

Rev. Howard A. Bryant, Sr., Presbyterian Minister (Honorably Retired)
Rev. Jaye S. Newbold, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Succasunna

Pastor Nathaniel Bullock, First Baptist Church of Kenilworth
Rev. Peter A. Olsen, Trinity Lutheran Church, Bogota

Pastor Amos Caley, Reformed Church of Highland Park
Rabbi Hannah Orden, Congregation Beth Hatikvah

Rev. Ramon Collazo, Santa Isabel Lutheran Church, Elizabeth
Rev. Margaret Otterburn, Church of the Messiah, Chester

Rev. Christa Compton, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Chatham
Rev. Archie Palmer, Episcopal Church of the Annunciation, Oradell

Pastor Michael Corso, Sophia Inclusive Catholic Community
Rabbi Karen R. Perolman, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun

Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz, Temple B'nai Abraham
Deacon Kathryn Prinz, Grace Lutheran Church, Mendham

Cantor Lucy B. Fishbein, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun
Rev. Kristina Reyes, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Sparta

Rev. David Ford Sr., St. Matthew Baptist Church, Roselle
Vicar Serena Rice, Abiding Peace Lutheran Church

Rev. Mary Forell, Good Shepard Lutheran, Weehawken
Rev. Dr. Terry Richardson, First Baptist Church, South Orange

Pastor Willie Dwayne Francois III, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Pleasantville
Rev. Beth Rauen Scialino, St. Bernard's Episcopal Church, Bernardsville

Rabbi Matthew D. Gewirtz, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun
Pastor Leroy Scott, Faith Christian Counseling Center, Beverly

Rev. Robert Gregson, Executive Director, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of NJ
Imam Wahy-ud Deen Shareef, Masjid Waarith ud Deen, Irvington

Bishop William Hampton, In Christ Fellowship Ministries, Inc.
Rev. Fred E. Sharp, Concord Missionary Baptist Church, Perth Amboy

Rev. Dr. Denison D. Harfield, Jr., Wallace Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Summit
Rev. Ronald Slaughter, Saint James AME Church, Newark

Pastor Quincy C. Hobbs, Jr, Zion Hill Baptist Church
Senior Cantor Howard Stahl, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun

Rev. M. William Howard Jr., Bethany Baptist Church, Newark (Ret.)
Rev. Christine A. Stiger, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Somerville

Rev. William Ingram, Shiloh Baptist Church, Elizabeth
Rev. Donald A. Stiger, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Somerville

Rev. Kathryn Irwin, Holy Trinity Lutheran, Nutley
Rev. Robin Tanner, Beacon Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Rev. Jack Johnson, Coalition of Religious Leaders, Coordinator
Rabbi Donald Weber, Temple Rodeph Torah

Pastor Pam Jones, Communities in Cooperation, Inc.
Rev. William M. Williams, III, Asbury United Methodist Church, Atlantic City

Rev. Timothy Jones, Bethany Baptist Church, Newark