Discussion Points

1. Dr. Dale G. Caldwell took the helm at the Department of State in January 2026.

- *Questions:* Please set forth the priorities of the Secretary of State for the department. How do the new Secretary's priorities differ from the prior Administration? What changes does the new Secretary intend to make to the department's internal operations and organization, program delivery, and program prioritization in terms of personnel and financial resources allocation?

The New Jersey Department of State (DOS), across all of its Divisions, Agencies, and Commissions, is vital to the people of New Jersey. As Secretary of State, Chief Election Official, and Lieutenant Governor, I am committed to continuing the prioritization of the work of the Division of Elections, as the democratic foundation of State government. Under this administration, DOS will also continue to prioritize enhancing the delivery of public goods with robust customer service. The New Jersey Business Action Center is receiving renewed focus and support, with expanding public awareness of the support available to enhance economic investment in New Jersey through advocacy, awareness, support and growth of business development.

I will also leverage my deep experience in community and action to the Office of Faith Based Initiatives, which will work closely with the Business Action Center as it becomes the Faith Action Center with a deep commitment to forward facing customer service rooted in public service and agency. DOS is expected to find new and ongoing opportunities to collaborate and create greater efficiency and synergy. The Division of Travel and Tourism and the New Jersey Historical Commission exemplify this focus with partnership efforts around the FIFA World Cup and the Semiquincentennial converging as one celebration of New Jersey's rich history and dynamic offerings.

To achieve my administration's mission and vision for the DOS, I have built capacity through the addition of mission driven and specific positions in the agency. First, I have hired an additional Assistant Secretary of State responsible for the cultural and volunteerism arms of DOS. In addition, I have appointed two Deputy Chiefs of Staff systemically placed to build capacity and amplify strategic goals. The DOS organizational chart also shifted supervisory structure, consolidated responsibilities, and streamlined management to ensure that all staff are

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

aligned to meet the goals of the new administration. To further support the goals, strategic alignment and mission driven outcomes, I have convened a series of cabinet meetings, division wide meetings and agency wide meetings where key performance indicators and cross collaboration grounds the daily operations of DOS.

2. The table below shows all allocations to the Department of State from the State's largely discretionary $6.24 billion federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund grant under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. The federal grant had to be obligated by December 31, 2024, and must be expended by December 31, 2026. Any sum remaining unexpended after this date will be reverted to the federal government. States, however, may transfer unexpended previously obligated funds among programs that had received an allocation by December 31, 2024.

Status of Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund Allocations to the Department of State as of December 31, 2025

PROGRAM	ALLOCATED	EXPENDED	BALANCE
250th Anniversary Celebration	$4,200,000	$387,708	$3,812,292
Tourism Advertising and Promotion	$25,000,000	$22,162,869	$2,837,131

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

State Archives Gallery Constructions	$1,020,000	$151,641	$868,359
Archives Exhibit at State Museum (Archives Funding)	$2,020,000	$1,167,382	$852,618
State Archives Gallery Operations	$665,000	$15,000	$650,000
Central Advertising for State Services & Programs	$1,250,000	$1,237,300	$12,700
Business Marketing Initiatives	$5,000,000	$4,993,319	$6,681
Poll Worker Daily Wage	$9,192,300	$9,192,300	$0
TOTAL	$48,347,300	$39,307,520	$9,039,780

- *Questions:* By program, by what date does the department expect to fully disburse the remaining Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund balances? Please identify the programs for which the department anticipates surplus balances by the federal December 31, 2026, expenditure deadline relative to the allocations shown in the table above as well the reasons for the expected surplus balances. If applicable, please describe the plan for reallocating undisbursed amounts prior to the federal expenditure deadline.

The DOS aims to fully expend all State Fiscal Recovery Fund monies well before the December 31, 2026, deadline. DOS will work with the Division of Disaster Recovery and Mitigation in the Department of Community Affairs and the Governor's Disaster Recovery

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

Office to ensure that any surpluses are reallocated towards other eligible State needs and expended before the deadline.

Election Management and Coordination

3. P.L.2025, c.32 revises the design of primary election ballots and certain primary election procedures; provides for ballots to be arranged by office block; removes State committee members from the primary process; and requires reporting on primary elections by the Division of Elections. The Primary Election Ballot Design Impact Report issued April 8th, 2025, states the Division of Elections will collect certain data from each county clerk, municipal clerk, and board of elections offices following both the 2025 and 2026 Primary Elections, and all collected data must be retained by county election officials and made available upon request. The data to be collected includes:

- Overall experiences of election officials, candidates, and voters specific to P.L. 2025, c. 32:
  - Candidate and/or voter confusion incidents
  - Difficulties in administering primary elections by the election officials
  - Methods and remedies to resolve issues
  - Best practices to improve the conduct of future primary elections

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

- Overall Implementation costs outlined in P.L. 2025, c. 32:
  - Expenses related to design, materials, vendors, education, and all other relevant expenditures associated

- ***Questions:*** **Please request from county election officials and provide the implementation costs outlined in P.L.2025, c.32 regarding the expenses related to the design, materials, vendors, education, and all other relevant expenditures from the 2025 Primary Election. Please discuss the feedback from the overall experiences of election officials from the 2025 Primary Election.**

Individual counties reported increased costs related to ballot re-design/revision from printer vendors to ensure compliance. Increased amounts identified ranged from $6,000 to $13,000, based on county. Some counties opted to include additional comments and/or instructions on the sample ballot related to design changes; however, no additional costs were incurred. No alternative costs were reported to the Division.

Some counties reported difficulty with design and proofing related to the number/letter requirement. Counties explained this change adds both time and risk of potential errors to the design process.

Counties reported minimal confusion by voters. When confusion was relayed, it pertained to the letter requirement in the candidate box. Overall, counties reported the confusion was nominal and able to be addressed by the County Clerk offices.

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

4. P.L.2021, c.40 establishes early voting in New Jersey, giving voters the opportunity to vote four days prior to a non-presidential primary election, six days prior to a presidential primary election, and 10 days prior to a general election. P.L.2025, c.23 increases the number of early voting days before Election Day by 3 days for non-presidential primary elections and one day for presidential primary elections.

- *Questions:* **What did the Division of Elections observe regarding the change in voter behavior and preferences due to the establishment of early voting days under P.L.2021, c.40 and P.L.2025, c.23. Did the Division of Elections observe a shift in voting behavior from Election Day voting to early voting? Was there a higher turnout of total voters? Please update the table accordingly.**

Based on the 4-year election cycle, voter turnout increased since the implementation of early voting. The increase in early voting days appears to contribute to increases in overall voter turnout. It is important to note that while the 2025 Gubernatorial General Election turnout was lower than the 2024 Presidential General Election, historically, Presidential year turnout surpasses other election types within the 4-year cycle.

	Primary Election				General Election			
	EV Voters	EV Days	Average Early	Total Ballots Cast	EV Voters	EV Days	Average Early	Total Ballots Cast

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

			Voters / Days				Voters / Days	
2022	20,278	3	6,759	766,012	213,919	9	23,769	2,658,149
2023	24,103	3	8,034	604,540	124,197	9	13,800	1,760,049
2024	55,327	5	11,065	910,700	1,173,400	9	130,378	4,321,921
2025	148,686	6	24,781	1,331,450	741,924	9	82,436	3,369,507

General Election Turnout Data					
	Total Eligible Voters	Total Ballots Cast	Percentage of Ballots Cast	EV Turnout	EV Percentage of Total Ballots Cast
2022	6,444,613	2,658,149	41%	213,919	8%
2023	6,459,097	1,760,049	27%	124,197	7%
2024	6,682,699	4,321,921	65%	1,173,400	27%
2025	6,549,793	3,369,507	51%	741,924	22%

Primary Election Turnout Data					
	Total Eligible Voters	Total Ballots Cast	Percentage of Ballots Cast	EV Turnout	EV Percentage of Total Ballots Cast
2022	6,129,769	766,012	12%	20,278	3%
2023	5,982,469	604,540	10%	24,103	4%
2024	6,222,973	910,700	15%	55,327	6%
2025	6,267,366	1,331,450	21%	148,686	11%

5. Of the $61.0 million in cumulative appropriations from FY 2023 through FY 2026, $29.2 million has been expended and $11.1 million in budget authority currently remains in FY 2026, net of amounts returned to the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year and funds reappropriated in the subsequent year for future expenditure. Of the

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

cumulative expenditure of $29.2 million, approximately $2.5 million was expended on Division of Elections operating costs including expenditures for salaries and wages, legal services, and maintenance of computer software while $26.7 million was allocated to counties. The annual appropriation has declined from $20.0 million in FY 2023 to $10.0 million in FY 2026.

- *Questions:* **Because the annual appropriation declined from $20.0 million in FY 2023 to $10.0 million in FY 2026, does this mean that costs are normalizing at a $10.0 million level? Of the $26.7 million in state payments allocated to counties for early voting, please provide a breakdown of the categories of expenditures. What amount is anticipated to be allocated to counties for Early Voting in FY 2027? What are the remaining needs of the counties with regard to implementation and operation of Early Voting? What are the division's needs with regard to the administration of the program?**

Initial funding estimates for the implementation of early voting were made during the early stages of the pandemic, when supply chain disruptions and other factors led to uncertainty about future costs. More recently, as the full-cycle cost of early voting comes into clearer view, the annual early voting appropriation has been reduced to eliminate structural surplus. Going forward, annual early voting expenses are expected to be comparable with State appropriations, with some variation due to the timing of reimbursement applications. Additionally, counties are permitted to submit reimbursement applications for each election on a rolling basis with no deadline for submission and often submit multiple applications extending across fiscal years.

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

The following expenditure categories are permitted for reimbursement by county election offices:

- Early Voting Equipment: Counties are eligible to receive reimbursement for equipment expenses (tangible assets with an original per unit cost of $250 or more and an expected useful life of greater than one (1) year) but is not limited to the following: computers and software related to early voting equipment. Counties must maintain an early voting equipment inventory record listing each item.
- Additional Staff Hours and Overtime for Early Voting: The State will reimburse the cost of any overtime hours reasonably incurred by the county election office staff for the preparation, support and maintenance of early voting. The cost of regular work hours will not be reimbursed by the State.
- Temporary Staff Hours and Overtime: The State will reimburse the cost of any additional temporary staff reasonably incurred by the county election office for the preparation, support and maintenance of early voting.
- Early Voting Site Rental Fees: A rental fee of $100 per day, per early voting site (required by law), will be reimbursed. Rental fees exceeding $100 per day must receive pre-approval from the Division of Elections.
- Early Voting Poll Worker Pay: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for poll worker salaries for the early voting period. The State will reimburse based on $21.43 per hour worked for each poll worker. Counties are also eligible to be reimbursed for one Supervising Poll Worker per site, for the early voting period. Counties will be reimbursed for one Supervising Poll Workers for each early voting site established within the maximum required by law. County Boards of Elections in counties with Superintendents of Elections must coordinate with the Superintendent's office to ensure the Supervising Poll Workers are properly trained on the voting machines and e-poll books. The State will reimburse $30.00 per hour for the Supervising Poll Workers at each early voting site.
- Ancillary Early Voting Site Expenses: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for ancillary items related to early voting sites. This category includes but is not limited to temporary ADA compliance measures, parking rental, security cages, binders, supply bags, privacy booths, surge protectors/UPS units, cable ties, signage, and cleaning needs.
- Warehouse: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for expenses related to warehouse accommodation for early voting equipment. This category includes, but is not limited to rent, electrical upgrades, shelving, tables, surge protectors and retrofitting. Counties must obtain pre-approval from the Division of Elections prior to entering into rental agreements and/or construction contracts.
- Transportation: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for expenses related to transportation needs for early voting. This category includes but is not limited to transportation of e-poll books, voting machines, storage cages, and all other early voting equipment and supplies. This

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

includes staff mileage for personal vehicles and vehicle rental. This does not include the purchase of vehicles.

- Printing: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for printing costs specific to early voting. This category includes but is not limited to ballots and signage.
- Publications: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for required publications and notices to voters informing them of early voting opportunities. This category includes but is not limited to printing of notices and costs associated with publishing. This amount will be reimbursed on a pro-rata basis to the extent combined with other mailing requirements under the law.
- Network Support: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for expenses related to network support for early voting sites. This category includes but is not limited to: IT staff hours or consulting support.
- Software Upgrades/Support: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for expenses related to software upgrades and necessary support for early voting equipment. This category includes, but is not limited to staff OT hours, IT staff OT hours or consulting support.
- Training Materials: Counties are eligible to be reimbursed for expenses related to early voting training. This category includes but is not limited to supplies and printing expenses of training materials.
- Early Voting Supplies: This includes items with an original, per unit cost less than $250 each, but is not limited to: ballot card stock, provisional ballot envelopes, provisional and emergency ballots, tape paper rolls, seals, secrecy sleeves, smart cards, and USB sticks.

6. In August 2025, the Office of Inspector General, an independent division of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, released "Audit of the Administration of Help America Vote Act Grants Awarded to the State of New Jersey." An independent accounting firm under contract with the Office of Inspector General audited Help America Vote Act (HAVA) grants totaling $39.5 million administered by the New Jersey Department of State. This included federal funds, state matching funds, and interest earned on the Election Security and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) grants. The objectives of the audit were to determine whether the

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

Department of State 1) used funds for authorized purposes in accordance with applicable sections of HAVA and other applicable requirements; 2) properly accounted for and controlled the property purchased with HAVA payments; and 3) used the funds in a manner consistent with the informational plans provided to the Election Assistance Commission. The audit also determined if proper closeout procedures were followed for the CARES Act funds.

- *Question:* **What were the findings and recommendations from the audit and have all recommendations been implemented by the department?**

The audit found that DOS used funds for authorized purposes, consistent with the informational plans submitted to Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and followed appropriate closeout procedures for the CARES Act grant. The EAC noted two findings, both of which have been addressed through enhancements to internal procedures. The first finding indicated that the small number of invoices reviewed did not reflect an additional approval step aligned with updated DOS policy; this requirement had been implemented prior to the audit but was not in effect during the period under review. The second finding related to documentation, noting that some counties did not provide complete inventory records for purchased equipment. In response, DOS promptly conducted additional training with county election offices and updated grant forms and guidance to reinforce inventory documentation requirements.

Division of State Library

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

7. The State Freedom to Read Act requires boards of education and governing boards of public libraries to adopt policies on the curations of library material within school libraries and public libraries. The State Librarian, in consultation with the New Jersey Library Association, is to establish a model policy on the curation of library material within public libraries. The purpose of the curation policy is to provide standards for the curation of library material, establish criteria for the removal of existing library material or library material selected for inclusion in public libraries, and provide protection against attempts to censor library material. In response to an FY 2026 OLS Discussion Point, the department mentioned that larger libraries typically have existing policies that are expected to be in compliance with the requirements of the law while smaller libraries with fewer available resources are less likely, thus requiring them to adopt the model policy. This law took effect on December 9, 2025.

- *Questions:* **What is the progress of the State Librarian in developing the model policy required by the Act? What is the division doing to offset the difference in impact among libraries with different levels of resources? Can the division provide early trends seen with libraries updating their policies and procedures since the Act was enacted. How are libraries across the state handling the increased workload as a result of this Act?**

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

The model policy and related documents were released by the State Librarian in October 2025 following a nine-month development process that engaged the library community. The library community was engaged in the development to assure that the model policy reflects the needs of all sizes of public libraries and that its provisions are in line with best practices in contemporary library collection development.

For libraries with fewer available resources, the State Library held technical assistance sessions in October 2025 to provide additional guidance and answer questions on areas of the law that lacked clarity. A technical assistance document was released to provide ready answers to common questions. The State Library has also encouraged libraries with limited resources to submit draft policies for feedback prior to their Board's review. In an attempt to streamline the adoption process and forestall any potentially problematic areas of proposed policies, the State Library also created a compliance checklist for use by libraries. In order to facilitate the adoption of the model policy "as is," it was written to include sections found in typical collection development policies that were not required by the law but promote sound collection management practices.

Libraries have been actively engaged in updating documents, policies and procedures to align with the Act since its inception. However, relatively few have been submitted to the State Librarian for review and approval. We expect more submissions in the months ahead.

To date, no increase in workload for libraries as a result of the Act have been reported to the State Librarian. This is likely because there have not been any challenges to materials at a library that has adopted the provisions of model policy. Challenges have not necessitated the use of the Act's required Review Committee, which is expected to be the more time-consuming component of responding to a challenge under the Act.

Office of Faith Based Initiatives

8. The FY 2026 Appropriations Act includes a $2.0 million appropriation from the off-budget Cannabis Regulatory, Enforcement Assistance, and Marketplace Modernization Fund to the Department of State for the New Jersey-Based Children's

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

Defense Fund Freedom Schools grant program. New Jersey Freedom Schools provide educational and character-building support to elementary and high school students and their families by implementing an intensive academic summer program as well as continuous follow up and homework and tutoring services throughout the academic school year. In response to an FY 2026 OLS Discussion Point, the department said that the Office of Faith Based Initiatives partnered with a research team from Rutgers University, along with all 17 Freedom Schools, to design a framework for ongoing evaluation of the program.

The department also stated that in FY2026, the Office of Faith Based Initiatives planned to use the appropriation to onboard seven additional Freedom Schools for a total of 24, thereby expanding the program by almost 500 percent in under three years.

- *Questions:* **Can the Office of Faith Based Initiatives share its initial findings and comment on the launch and current progress of the evaluation program? What has been the progress of using the appropriation to onboard seven additional Freedom Schools?**

The evaluation is currently being conducted by the Office of Community Health Excellence and Empowerment of Rutgers University. To date, data are being collected regarding longitudinal academic records focusing on reading proficiency and social-emotional and

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

behavioral indicators from participating Freedom Schools. The DOS anticipates sharing preliminary results in December 2026.

There are currently four schools who applied for funding support through the planning grant for FY 2027. Should the funding necessitate, the DOS will offer a second notice of grant funding to award additional grantees who meet grant requirements. For FY 2027, DOS anticipates 25 Freedom Schools since the inception of the program.

Division of Travel and Tourism

9. MetLife Stadium in the Meadowlands is hosting eight matches during the 2026 FIFA World Cup, including the final in July, in addition to six matches being held in Philadelphia. The event is expected to be a major economic driver for the State and the region, and millions of tourists are expected to descend on the area. In response to an FY 2026 OLS Discussion point, the Division of Travel and Tourism mentioned challenges generating awareness for tourism-related opportunities, working closely with FIFA, and working with local Destination Marketing Organizations.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's international Trade Administration, in 2021 New Jersey was ranked as the 5th most visited state in the country by overseas visitors, with 490,000 international travelers (excluding Mexico and Canada).

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

- *Questions:* How has the Division of Travel and Tourism capitalized on the event's expected economic impact and ensured visitors were aware of tourism-related opportunities outside of the World Cup? How has the Division measured the engagement surrounding the event and how does it compare to the previous year?

The FIFA World Cup 2026™ "Need-to-Know" information is predominantly displayed on VisitNJ.org, for both residents and visitors to New Jersey. DOS's Division of Travel & Tourism has developed a $2.5 million dedicated marketing campaign to amplify the World Cup moment and inspire visitors to explore the Garden State beyond the New York New Jersey Stadium, East Rutherford.

Strategic objectives for the Division's World Cup marketing campaign include the following: positioning New Jersey as the "Home of the World Cup" and the best base camp for fans attending matches; driving incremental visitation from both domestic and international fans already traveling to the New Jersey/New York region; elevating New Jersey's global image through earned media, partnerships and experiential storytelling; and, engaging New Jersey residents and communities through statewide pride and local fan activations.

The marketing campaign is a strategy of "Play, Stay & Explore NJ," which showcases that in New Jersey, World Cup fans can experience more of the Garden State before, between and beyond the matches. The messaging of "Play, Stay & Explore NJ" includes the following: Play: celebrate the global spirit of soccer through New Jersey's energy, culture and entertainment; Stay: stay closer to the action with world-class accommodations, transit access and affordability; and, Explore: from the Meadowlands to the Shore, Princeton to Cape May, experience authentic New Jersey.

DOS's Division of Travel and Tourism cannot assess the impact and engagement of the World Cup 2026 games until the completion of the event. Following the event, various measures will be available, many of which can be compared to prior years, to imply the engagement and success of the event.

- Does the division have any more recent data about the number of international travelers that visit New Jersey annually? Has the division noticed any recent change in

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

international tourism to the State? If so, what has been the impact and what is the reason behind any change?

Based on the Tourism Economics "New Jersey Travel & Tourism Insights," report from January 2026, international visitation data to the United States and to New Jersey has declined. Year-over-year international visitor arrivals (January-December 2025) to the U.S. is down 2.5%. This inbound travel decline is attributed to weaker sentiment towards the U.S. from abroad, travel restrictions, and higher costs.

Canadian travel to the U.S. has declined 25.5%, while Canadian travel to other regions of the world has increased 9.2%. Canadian travel sentiments towards the U.S. are particularly impactful to New Jersey, as it is routinely the top source of international travelers to New Jersey.

Tourism Economics reports that U.S. inbound arrivals' recovery is delayed to 2029. The Official 2025 Economic Impact of Visitors to New Jersey study will be released to the public on May 7, 2026, during New Jersey Tourism Industry Association's Advocacy Day in Trenton with the full 2025 study data.

10. According to the 2024 Economic Impact of Visitors to New Jersey study published by the Division of Travel and Tourism in April 2025, the total number of visitors to the State is forecast to grow year over year by 3.0 percent in 2026 and 1.7 percent in 2027. In 2019, the number of visitors increased by 4.9 percent before falling 27.2 percent in 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

- *Questions:* **Does the division anticipate returning to pre-pandemic levels of year-over-year growth at some point? Has the division noticed any notable trends in people visiting the State?**

International visitation to the United States and New Jersey has declined, primarily attributable largely to political reasons, as well as growing global unrest, wars and economic concerns.

New Jersey led the country in recovery and nearly matched pre-pandemic tourism levels by 2022, and the state surpassed pre-pandemic tourism levels in 2023. Trend data and preliminary statistics, as mentioned earlier, suggest the decline in international visitation will continue for the foreseeable future until 2029.

Business Action Center

11. The New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC) is a business advocacy agency within the Department of State, dedicated to helping businesses get started, thrive, and grow by serving as a business-first resource for navigating the state's licensing and permitting laws, while also providing mentoring, technical training, regulatory assistance, site selection, and access to business recovery programs. It released its 2025 annual report in February 2026 and described 2025 as "a year full of challenges for businesses across the country". Mandated by three separate laws, the report highlights how NJBAC has added three new programs to its roster of no-cost services: 1. a referral program to assist eligible New Jersey businesses find a mentor, 2. a referral program to

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

assist small businesses establish or grow their online presence, and 3. a one-stop portal for manufacturing support called the New Jersey Manufacturing Network.

- *Questions:* **What metrics does the NJBAC use to measure the effectiveness of its business advocacy services, and how did those metrics trend in 2025 compared to prior years, specifically regarding permitting, regulatory navigation, and financial assistance cases?**

In 2024 the Office of Business Advocacy (OBA) in the DOS's Business Action Center used OBA's customer relationship management platform to record all projects and cases. OBA closed $495 million worth of projects, created 500 jobs and supported the retention of 750 jobs. OBA provided $9,250,000 worth of grants to companies. In 2025, OBA more than doubled Capital Expenditures to over $1 billion, created 1,000 jobs, retained 1,200 jobs, and created $111 million worth of grants. OBA still uses the customer relationship management platform and also created a spreadsheet with Metrics for projects. All OBA projects had some form of permitting, with over 50 companies needing municipal construction code permits or zoning board navigation. Over 20 projects required some form of assistance with State government regulators.

- **How is the newly launched New Jersey Manufacturing Network being funded and staffed, and what benchmarks has management set to evaluate whether the public-private partnership is achieving its intended goals?**

The New Jersey Manufacturing Network is a cooperative effort designed to bring together state departments and universities involved in workforce development to provide a uniform space where manufacturers can learn how to train employees. The New Jersey Manufacturing Network is in the process of developing a website to bring together all elements. The New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP), one of the organizations listed in P.L.

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

2023, c.268, volunteered to assist in website design to coordinate the organizations involved in the Network to list workforce development programs.

- **How does the new online mentor and digital presence referral service work in practice? What is the pool of mentors, how are matches made, and what follow up does the NJBAC do to ensure businesses are actually being served?**

In practice, a visitor to either website completes a form to determine eligibility for the no-cost service. Eligibility is determined through an internet presence, identifying as a New Jersey resident and less than five years in business. These businesses then "shop" for the kind of mentor or internet assistance they would like. After entering criteria the individual business is looking for, the organizations that best match search criteria appear on a screen.

Are you a NJ resident? (if yes, then eligible)
Have you been in business five years or less? (if yes, then eligible)
Enter zip code (we list every zip/town so they can choose)
How would you prefer to meet with your mentor? video/phone/in person
Select area in which you'd like to be mentored: Can choose from a dropdown list of about 40 options - from accounting to legal to sales and websites to work/life balance
Once they choose from these areas, the mentoring organizations appear.
Then, the person "shops" from the eligible selections that appear.
Make a selection - then that person enters all their information - First Name/Last Name/ Email/Address
The person hits send to select their mentoring organization of choice. An email is sent to the organization selected; a separate email is sent to the person to confirm their request and lets the individual know that they can reach out to the organization as well.

- **What specific challenges is the NJBAC referring to when describing the difficult business environment in 2025? What specific legislative or regulatory barriers did NJBAC identify as most damaging to New Jersey businesses, and what, if any, formal recommendations have been made to address them?**

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

The insinuation of a difficult business environment was because of Federal inconsistencies including, but not limited to, the implementation of tariffs and immigration policies.

12. The Administration's Economic Development and Innovation Action Team identified Minority, Veteran, and Women-Owned Businesses among its priorities. The Action Team also recommends launching a Statewide "Front Door" online portal for employers and learners, possibly within the Business Action Center, that could centralize workforce, education, and economic development resources, including career pathways, credentials, and partnership opportunities.

- *Questions:* **Please identify the initiatives the department is currently undertaking, or is planning to undertake, to implement the task force's recommendation for supporting, veteran, and women-owned businesses. For each initiative, please provide a timeline for implementation, anticipated one-time start-up and recurring operating costs, the need for additional staff, and expected outcomes or policy goals.**

Currently, certification requirements are published on the business.nj.gov site, and DOS's New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC) assists businesses seeking certifications by helping to identify necessary documents, and navigation through the certification portal in New Jersey Department of the Treasury. In addition, NJBAC assists businesses with accessing New Jersey Selective Assistance Vendor Information (NJSAVI) database listing certified businesses for the purpose of solicitation of vendors works closely with the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

The Business Action Center intends to develop a learning management system (LMS) portal by which learners will access training for entrepreneurs, for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations and business navigation volunteers. Certified through the LMS, business navigation volunteers will be scheduled to meet with individuals in need of support across the business development journey, including opening, expanding, exporting, and succession. The volunteers will meet with the interested individuals in one of four locations (north, south, central and shore) across the state, in addition to resources available in Trenton, to offer navigation and support. This would include supporting interested companies in understanding how to apply to become a veteran-, minority- and/or woman-owned business. The Business.NJ.Gov website will continue to be a central location for individuals to explore funding and economic development opportunities available for companies. NJBAC has begun to implement the project plan for this effort and expects this project to take about 18 months to complete.

- **Would the department be open to launching the recommended "Front Door" online portal? Could the department do so with current staff and resource levels?**

DOS would welcome the opportunity to launch the recommended "Front Door" portal. Further analysis would be necessary to determine staff and resource levels.

Development of Historical Resources

13. P.L.2018, c.103 requires the New Jersey Historical Commission to formulate and implement a program for the observance of the historical aspects of the 250th anniversary of the independence of the United States. To implement the law, the commission partnered with the Crossroads of the American Revolution Association to form an initiative called RevolutionNJ. Communities and organizations that register to participate in the RevolutionNJ initiative are able to use the RevolutionNJ Community

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

and Proud Partner Branding kits, add their programs to Statewide and national event calendars, and gain access to exclusive networking events and planning resources. In response to an FY 2026 OLS Discussion Point, the New Jersey Historical Commission stated it would be working closely with the Division of Travel and Tourism to monitor the impact of outreach and advertising efforts.

- *Questions:* **In what ways is the Historical Commission seeking to register more communities and organizations with the initiative, and does the Historical Commission expect that more entities will register with the initiative prior to the 250th anniversary? Please discuss trends in the type of communities and organizations that have registered so far. Please comment on the impact of outreach and advertising efforts during this past year.**

For the past eight years the New Jersey Historical Commission in the New Jersey Department of State has been preparing programs and resources for New Jersey's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States as part of RevolutionNJ, the State's official Semiquincentennial planning initiative. A diverse list of RevolutionNJ programs is now available to individuals, organizations, and local governments at RevNJ.org.

RevolutionNJ is intently focused on inspiring and supporting 250th commemorations and celebrations around the state. RevolutionNJ has worked consistently to add partners to our three outreach initiatives: RevolutionNJ Communities, RevolutionNJ Proud Partners, and Revolutionary Schools. The New Jersey Historical Commission continues to receive new recruits to each program and expects that to continue as New Jersey marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the Ten Crucial Days. Each program will continue as the eight-year commemoration lasts until 2033. All 21 counties have established RevolutionNJ liaisons, who gather for updates and networking events regularly.

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

Recruitment for programs has been an ongoing process including, but not limited to, participation at events including the New Jersey League of Municipalities conferences with exhibitions and presentations. Articles and newsletters have been published in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Education Association, New Jersey Council for Social Studies, social media campaigns and the RevolutionNJ website.

Encouraging engagement with the commemoration statewide is a constant priority for RevolutionNJ. County convenings have been enthusiastically supported by county partners and have resulted in partnerships, sharing of ideas, and increased planning activity. County representatives also continue to request regular meetings around the state highlighting the unique elements of each county.

America's 250th anniversary celebrations present a unique and significant opportunity for New Jersey to enhance its tourism sector by capitalizing on its rich historical heritage. In the summer of 2025, New Jersey Travel and Tourism, in conjunction with REV250, set the stage for New Jersey's 250th anniversary celebration with an integrated campaign titled, "New Jersey Revolutionary in 1776 and Ever Since."

Department Wide

14. The Governor proposes increasing State funding for the New Jersey Innovation Authority by $13.3 million in FY 2027. According to the FY 2027 Budget in Brief, the recommended funding level would "support the Governor's efforts to improve customer experience, reduce administrative burdens, and make government more responsive and accountable."

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

- *Questions:* Please describe the current and past collaborations between the New Jersey Innovation Authority and the Department of State. What have been the objectives and outcomes of the joint projects? Please detail the associated impacts on departmental performance metrics, as well as expenditures and revenues.

DOS has collaborated with the New Jersey Innovation Authority in the design, development, and implementation of the New Jersey Public Notice Hyperlink Submission Portal, a legislative compliance initiative required under P.L.2025, c.72, signed into law by Governor Murphy in July 2025.

The statute requires all public entities, including State agencies, local government units, public authorities, and other political subdivisions to publish legal notices online and submit the hyperlink(s) to their legal notices' webpages to the Secretary of State for posting on a centralized, publicly accessible directory. The Secretary of State is required to maintain this directory free of charge on the DOS's website.

DOS partnered with the New Jersey Innovation Authority to meet the legislative mandate efficiently and within the prescribed timeline. The objectives of the joint effort included: the design and deployment of a secure, user-friendly online submission portal enabling public entities across New Jersey to supply secure hyperlinks; leverage the existing myNJ authentication infrastructure administered by the New Jersey Office of Information Technology (NJOIT) to ensure secure, role-based access for authorized entity representatives; reduce administrative burden on both staff and submitting entities by automating the intake, confirmation, and directory population process; ensure the resulting public directory is freely accessible to all New Jersey residents and meets the statutory requirement for conspicuous placement on DOS's homepage; and, support the Governor's broader goals of improving customer experience and making government more responsive and accountable.

The Public Notice Hyperlink Submission Portal launched on March 1, 2026. The portal was built on the SimpliGov Automation Platform (SGAP), which the DOS already uses in partnership with the New Jersey Office of Information Technology (NJOIT), enabling rapid deployment without the need for new infrastructure procurement.

Discussion Points (Cont'd)

- What additional collaborations is the department planning or implementing with the New Jersey Innovation Authority? What are the objectives of the new initiatives and their anticipated impacts on the department's revenues and expenditures? How are the new initiatives anticipated to improve the department's performance and administrative efficacy? Please use any available metrics that will be used to assess the success or failure of the initiatives.

The DOS is planning a new statewide entrepreneurial support model, built around four regional anchor communities to be uplifted through trained volunteers, that will require expanded collaboration with the New Jersey Innovation Authority, specifically as it pertains to enhancements and integrations with Business.NJ.Gov. The program will provide in-person and digital support to entrepreneurs at every stage of business development, from idea through maturity and succession. The program will serve for-profit entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, and aspiring business owners across New Jersey, with an emphasis on underserved communities.

The objectives of the initiative are to: increase the number of New Jersey entrepreneurs receiving structured support from 1:1 NJBAC staff interaction to a scalable volunteer-assisted model; improve the customer journey from initial inquiry to business formation and growth, reducing time-to-launch for new businesses; expand geographic reach of NJBAC services by placing resources in underserved communities across the state; and, reduce per-constituent administrative costs by deploying a tiered service model (self-service LMS → volunteer navigator → NJBAC staff).