



Public Policy Forum
The Road to Recovery: Business Leading the Way
Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Senator Nellie Pou, D-35

Ms. Pou was elected to the Senate in 2011 and re-elected in 2013 and 2017. She served in the Assembly from Jan. 29, 1997, when she was sworn to fill a vacancy, until her rise to the Senate. She was the first woman and the first Latina elected to represent the 35th Legislative District.

For over 23 years, Ms. Pou has sponsored an array of legislations, many of which she has navigated into law ranging from social justice and human rights, while also working with colleagues to ensure more diversity on the NJ Supreme Court. Additionally, since her former role as Chair of the Assembly Budget and Appropriations Committee, she continues to secure funding for much needed community programs.

Since stepping into the Senate in 2011, she secured a law that broadened the definition of human trafficking and increased penalties. She sponsored a 2013 law that allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities, and a 2014 law setting new standards, including background checks, for individuals working in the homes of seniors and people with disabilities. She sponsored 2015 laws reforming the juvenile justice system and expanding the geographic scope of restraining orders. Among their various provisions, she revised the prior limited circumstances when young offenders can be waived up to the adult court system or transferred to adult prisons, placed a cap on the use of solitary confinement to 8 consecutive waking hours and to a limited number of consecutive days based on the age of the minor, and placed an emphasis on rehabilitation of the minor; the latter added new protections for victims of sexual assault and created a central registry of protective orders accessible to police and child protection officers. A 2016 law sponsored by the Senator created an educational program for drivers on carbon monoxide poisoning.

In 2017, the senator sponsored laws allowing the National Guard and reservists to retain eligibility on civil service lists if called up for active federal military service, and allowing students enrolled at a four-year college who have earned a total of 66 credits between that school and a county college to be awarded an associate's degree by the county college. In 2018, she sponsored laws prohibiting marriage for individuals under age 18 to protect our children from forced marriages, allowing qualified undocumented immigrants to be eligible for state student financial aid programs, and extending health benefits coverage for newborn infants. In 2019, she sponsored laws restricting the use of isolated confinement in New Jersey's correctional facilities for adults and made further reforms to the juvenile justice system concerning incarceration and parole and worked to expand access to drivers licenses to undocumented immigrants to ensure



road safety for all and to increase accountability. At the start of 2020, she introduced legislation which if enacted into law, would provide automatic representation to juveniles by the Office of the Public Defender if they are under 18 years old. Legal representation will continue up to age 20, based on the financial means of the parents or guardians.

Since New Jersey's declaration of the Public Health Emergency in March of 2020, due to the COVID-19 virus, Senator Pou continues to play an active role in countless public policies signed into law or currently on the Governor's desk to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents. Most tackle the areas of education, health and human services, transportation, economic and criminal justice, increased employment opportunities and benefits, affordable housing and rental assistance for tenants and landlords, grants for small businesses among others. Moreover, she has championed the extension of Telehealth and Telemedicine, implemented moratoriums on evictions and foreclosure, reactivated professional and occupational licenses, as well as led the reciprocity law and allowed access to the same for eligible NJ residents regardless of citizenship status. Other policies signed into law include requiring health insurance coverage for certain refills of prescription drugs during a state of emergency, extends deadlines for certain Motor Vehicle documents, many set new standards for long-term care facilities, protect employee benefits during a temporary furlough, increase voter protections by way of established secure Ballot Drop Boxes throughout the state and adopted a Ballot Cure Act to ensure eligible votes are counted. In the realm of criminal justice, Senator Pou has worked to assist inmates set to be released with reentry benefits to help them transition into society and keep communities safe, while also proposing unprecedented legislation serving as a model for other states -- that was signed into law on October 19, 2020 -- thereby applying Public Health Credits of up to 8 months to certain inmates and parolees nearing release during a public health emergency related to a communicable disease, as in the case of the Coronavirus, to help mitigate the spread in state prisons and keep inmates and correctional staff safe.

Senator Pou has served as a panelist, keynote speaker or moderator for an array of national and statewide organizations, as well as featured on multiple media outlets for many prime-sponsored laws that have led NJ to serve as a national leader, including most recently as one of NJ Insiders 100 Policy Makers 2020. Senator Pou is Chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, Vice-Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Chairwoman of the New Jersey Legislative Latino Caucus. She is also a member of the New Jersey Complete Count Commission for the 2020 Census, the New Jersey Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission, Disparity in State Procurement Study Commission, and the Task Force for Continued Transformation of Youth Justice in New Jersey and the Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity. She serves as President-Elect of the National Hispanic Council of State Legislators, member of the National Council of State Legislators, Women in Government, the National Order of Women Legislators/National Foundation of Women Legislators, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, the Women's Political Caucus, Emerge New Jersey, and the Council of



State Government. Senator Pou worked for the City of Paterson for over three decades, including as Director of Human Services and Business Administrator and has served in many leadership positions throughout her years of service to our community.