



American Planning Association  
**New Jersey Chapter**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

March 8, 2021

The Honorable Bob Menendez  
One Gateway Center  
11th Floor  
Newark, New Jersey 07102

Senator Menendez,

The 117th Congress convenes at an urgent moment in our nation's history. Together, we face the immediate challenge of building a sustainable recovery from the pandemic and recession and the demand to ensure our recovery lays the foundation for a stronger future. We must address the current crisis, and we must act to close the gaps and tackle the injustices that leave too many behind. We must adopt and implement policies and plans that prepare for the demands and opportunities of a better future.

The New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association and our 1,100 professional planners across the state stand ready to offer the expertise and innovative ideas of our members to you and your staff as Congress prepares to tackle today's daunting challenges.

Planning is essential to the nation's recovery. Federal relief and stimulus require local and regional planning for successful implementation. In New Jersey, our professionals have worked to keep development projects moving and support adaptations that helped local businesses. Local officials rely on the tools and information from planning for smart, effective decision-making. We help communities understand rapid changes, give all residents a voice, and find solutions to create thriving places.

Congress must act to support and empower a planning-led recovery that repairs today and rebuilds for a more just and equitable tomorrow. We have a unique and exciting opportunity to advance an agenda that leads the nation forward with hope and encouragement. Investing in people and places means we can restore our economy while seizing the opportunity to address social challenges and reinvent communities for a better future for us all.

**APA New Jersey supports an agenda for recovery and reinvention and urges Congress to act on four key priorities this session:**

**Support recovery of the nation's communities**

Job one for Congress is to act on recovery measures that meet immediate needs providing fiscal stability for the states and localities on the frontlines of pandemic response and economic recovery. Effective relief and recovery legislation should support essential local and regional efforts to meet needs for housing, transportation, education, support for businesses, and health.

**Advance recovery through smart investment in transportation and broadband infrastructure**

The most effective path toward long-term stimulus is infrastructure investment. Infrastructure legislation can

ensure that we are connecting people to opportunity. Infrastructure legislation should give cities and regions new tools and accelerated investment to increase access and innovation and plan for the demands of a rapidly evolving future. Congress should make climate change planning and resilience a central pillar of infrastructure policy; expand and improve safe biking, walking, and public transit; and provide sustainable funding with more resources provided directly to communities.

**Make housing opportunity and economic mobility central to the long-term approach to recovery**

Housing security is a cornerstone of recovery. COVID 19 has exacerbated an already perilous landscape for housing affordability and availability. Action is needed to support unmet housing needs, ensure access to housing and neighborhoods of opportunity, connect housing to infrastructure investments, and plan for community development that expands housing choice.

**Secure our future by acting on climate change, resilience, and environmental justice**

Climate change is not only a threat to our future but also a real and present danger as communities face accelerating risks now. Meeting these challenges is also an opportunity to create new jobs and advance long-term innovation and sustainability. Planning is central to adapting our infrastructure and built environment, curbing emissions from two primary sources – transportation and buildings – and mitigating harm from natural disasters. Federal policy should embrace a planning-led approach to the climate crisis that prepares for the future while ensuring a resilient present.

Each of these priorities – **recovery, infrastructure, housing, and climate change** – need the federal government to be a partner with local communities. Federal resources, incentives, and policy are vital to restoring our health, our economy, our environment, and our communities while building a foundation for a stronger, more prosperous future for all.

On behalf of APA New Jersey, we look forward to working with you to advance these important priorities. Beyond relief, New Jersey planners see investment in infrastructure as the next major priority that this Congress must address.

To that end, we would like to virtually meet with your staff member in charge of transportation issues at their convenience to discuss New Jersey planners’ transportation priorities for infrastructure stimulus and the next surface transportation reauthorization. Please contact APA New Jersey Executive Director Sheena Collum at [scollum@njplanning.org](mailto:scollum@njplanning.org) to setup a meeting.

APA has research and policy [materials](#) available on each topic and is ready to share our expertise and insights.

Thank you for your leadership and service at such a pivotal moment in our nation’s history.

Sincerely,



Charles W. Latini, Jr., AICP/PP  
President, APA New Jersey



Sheena Collum, MPA  
Executive Director, APA New Jersey