



KEAN

John S. Watson Institute for
URBAN POLICY & RESEARCH



The Think and Do Tank, linking people to policy since 1991.







The John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research is dedicated to developing and delivering policy solutions that improve the lives of New Jersey residents in urban areas. We're committed to deepening the analysis around critical public policy challenges and broadening the range of policy ideas, perspectives and options available.

Our name honors the outstanding public service record of the late New Jersey Assemblyman John S. Watson, the nation's first African American chairman of a state appropriations committee. Building on his legacy, the Watson Institute has guided decision-makers across the Garden State on impactful public policy for over three decades.

In 2021, the Watson Institute transitioned to Kean University, New Jersey's first designated urban research university. This move has strengthened our mission through collaboration with a world-class university that shares our commitment to equity and service for the state's most vulnerable citizens.

Our Mission

The mission of the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research is to:

- Develop informed public policy that strengthens leadership in government, nonprofit and the private sectors.
- Build the capacity of local leaders, city governments and community-based organizations to address their most critical needs.
- Provide applied research, technical assistance, program development and policy analysis to advance healthy living and sustainable well being to create thriving communities.



Our Work

The Watson Institute is a premier “think and do” tank addressing critical public policy challenges across New Jersey’s urban communities. A nonpartisan resource for decision-makers, we deliver data-driven research, support policy development, and strengthen local government and nonprofit capacity.

Our team of experts working in education, health care, environmental justice, business, law and governance advances solutions through legislation, research and program innovation.

We design and deliver events, including workshops, symposia and convenings, focused on key public issues. Through research and engagement, we produce policy memos, white papers and reports that amplify community voices and inform decision-making.

To learn more, visit: kean.edu/watson-institute



Our Policy Centers

Watson Institute policy centers tackle key challenges in environmental justice, education, health, economic growth, workforce and urban policy.

- **The Center for the Urban Environment** addresses the disproportionate impact of pollution on low-income communities and communities of color.
- **The Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children** amplifies the voices of teachers, practitioners, families and advocates to improve the lives of urban children through strategic policy initiatives.
- **The Center for Health Policy Development** works with health organizations and elected officials across the state to advance public health policies.
- **New Jersey Urban Mayors Association/Urban Mayors Policy Center** supports urban leaders and utilizes critical insights to analyze policies, issues and opportunities facing New Jersey's cities.
- **The Center for Economic and Workforce Development, Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation / Kean USED A University Center** supports resilient businesses, living-wage jobs and entrepreneurial ecosystems in New Jersey's urban communities. As a federal (USED A) University Center, it connects Kean's expertise to local economies through advocacy, research and strategic partnerships.

■ **The Center for Urban Policy Research** applies an equity-driven lens to evaluate and analyze issues facing New Jersey's urban centers and provide data-driven solutions.

■ **The Center for Training and Capacity Building** strengthens public and nonprofit organizations through leadership development, customized training and strategic consulting. It equips changemakers with tools to enhance effectiveness, civic engagement and long-term impact.



Our policy centers serve as trusted partners to local and state government agencies, nonprofits and community organizations—offering expert guidance and hands-on support. Policy center leaders are among the brightest minds in their respective fields. Their combined expertise and connections result in deeper analysis, stronger solutions and better policy for the people of New Jersey.

Our Impact

For over 30 years, the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research has been a trusted convener and catalyst for change, bringing together policy leaders across local, state and federal levels with community-based organizations to advance equitable and sustainable solutions.

Rooted in a commitment to applied research, collaboration, community engagement and public service, the Watson Institute fosters dialogue, drives innovation and informs policy across critical areas such as economic development, health equity, education, housing and community revitalization.

Through its policy centers, the Institute provides customized training, technical assistance and strategic support to empower organizations and communities to utilize resources and shape their futures.



Publications

The Urban Mayors Press, edited by the John S. Watson Institute, features research and policy insights from the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA). These publications inform urban revitalization efforts and legislative priorities across the state.

Explore the full collection at: kean.edu/njuma-publications

Our work is disseminated through white papers and research reports, including those from the Trenton-based Maternal Infant Health and Innovation Project and the Community Conversation on Violence Reduction.

- MCH Report 2022
- Community Conversation

Explore the full papers at: digitalcommons.kean.edu

Our Partners

- Michael Graves School of Public Architecture
- Center for Cybersecurity
- NJ Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA)
- National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA)
- NJ Legislative Black Caucus (NJLBC)



Collaborate With Us

The Watson Institute draws from best practices across the country and around the world. We invite you to join us in being a voice in the room on our state's most critical issues.

Together, we can create a stronger, more equitable and overall better New Jersey where everyone can thrive.

Scan the QR code
to connect with our team.



Contact Us

For questions or inquiries about our work or how you or your organization can get involved, contact us at watson@kean.edu.

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John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University

Linking People to Policy for Over Thirty Years

1991	Institute renamed in honor of Assemblyman John S. Watson , the first Black state legislator in the nation to chair an appropriations committee.
1991 – 2001	The Honorable Douglas H. Palmer, first Black mayor of Trenton and inaugural president of the NJ Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) , supported by the Institute with best practices in municipal leadership and public policy.
2002	Institute launched the first charter class of Leadership Trenton , which graduated 243 Trenton-area alumni fellows over eight years.
2003	Historic first meeting of NJUMA , urban superintendents and urban schoolboard presidents on Abbott mandates.
2003 – 2005	Abbott Preschool Initiative advised early-childhood teachers on obtaining their preschool-to-third-grade certification.
2004	With funding from the NJ Department of State, Institute embarked on a faith-based initiative in support of nonprofit capacity building.
2005	Center for the Urban Environment (CUE) reactivated after student-led air-monitoring project overseen by Nicky Sheats, Ph.D., and the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA).
2006	Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children (CPDUC) provided leadership and oversight on economic impact study of the childcare industry.
2007	CPDUC launched first NJ Cultural Competency & English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program for early-childhood teachers.
	CUE participated in the establishment of the first Committee on Cumulative Impacts comprised of NJEJA and allies.
	NJUMA and suburban communities jointly released seven-point plan “Uniting Mayors to Strengthen NJ’s Urban Cities, Families, and Communities.”

2008	CPDUC and NJ League of Municipalities engaged non-traditional champions for children to increase early-childhood investments through hosted forums.
	CUE participated in the Coalition for Healthy Ports and an EJ Leadership Forum on Climate Change .
	NJUMA convened State of Our Cities Conference surrounding issues including healthcare, affordable housing, economic development and public safety.
2009	Center for Health Policy supported by RWJF conducted an environmental scan of childhood obesity risk factors and services in five identified high-risk cities, which led to the creation of the NJ Partnership for Healthy Kids.
	CUE participated in a policy task force in New Orleans that provided policy advice on recovery from Hurricane Katrina .
2010	CUE participated in the establishment of the second NJEJA Committee on Cumulative Impacts .
	CUE director became a member of the NJ Clean Air Council and the EPA Clean Air Act Advisory Committee .
2011	Institute hosted the Nuts & Bolts of Social Enterprise conference on generating social-economic value in underserved communities through residential talents.
2012	NJUMA hosted the Spring Economic Development Summit: The Future of Economic Development in the New Economy .
2013	Institute designated a FEMA point of contact after Hurricane Sandy for disaster-specific state/federal recovery programs & NGO/corporate giving programs.
	CUE director served as co-author of the public health chapter of the National Climate Assessment .
	CPDUC NJ Cultural Competency Institute featured on Constant Hine's " Coaching Connections ," a national radio show with 30,000 listeners.
2014	With grant funding, CPDUC duplicated the NJ Cultural Competency Institute for 65 teachers in 33 classrooms in Paterson and Newark .
	CUE critiqued the EPA's Clean Power Plan from an EJ perspective with several other EJ colleagues.

2015

Institute commissioned to develop the nation's first **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)** to improve urban communities.

NJUMA hosted the **Academy on Resilience Design Mitigation** with state agencies and city planners to guide development and redevelopment in municipalities.

CPDUC presented at the **67th World Assembly and Conference** sponsored by the World Organization for Early Childhood Education.

NJUMA hosted **Federal Policy Roundtables** on available resources and urban issues with NJ congressional delegation and directors of federal agencies.

Institute and partners hosted the **New Directions for Addressing Problem Properties** conference featuring experts from DC, MD, MN and NJ.

**2015 –
2017**

Institute collaborated with The White House and city staff to bring **My Brother's Keeper**, a national initiative for young men of color, to the city of Trenton.

2016

CPDUC worked with Trenton schools' **bilingual/ESL** teachers to offer the **NJ Cultural Competency Institute** to **23 teachers** in **12 classrooms** with K-4 students.

CUE and partners planned and presented at national forum on the EPA **Clean Power Plan** sponsored by the Building Equity and Alignment Initiative.

Institute co-authored **Cost of Poverty** report exploring disparities between the tax base in four **NJUMA** municipalities as compared to suburban/rural cities.

2017

CUE director published article on climate change policy from an EJ perspective.

CPDUC adopted 700 students and provided mentoring to teachers, administrators and literacy/math coaches working with diverse children and families.

NJUMA partnered with the NJ Brownfields Interagency Working Group to host a conference on redeveloping brownfields and abandoned properties.

NJUMA released **Designing Urban Policy for a Thriving New Jersey: The New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) Urban Policy Agenda**.

Institute staff co-authored the **City of Passaic Master Plan on Economic Development**.

Institute staff advised the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs on various municipal projects.

2018	CUE, NJEJA and the Center for American Progress organized a conference on EJ policy held in Trenton at which the CUE director spoke.
	CUE director participated in establishment of the Equitable and Just National Climate Platform .
	CPDUC NJ Cultural Competency Institute featured in a blog based on O'Neill and Brinkerhoff's <i>ECE Organization: Unlocking Your Team's Natural Gifts</i> .
2019	Institute staff commissioned by NJ Dept. of Community Affairs to research for the NJ Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) assessment.
2020	CUE contributed leadership, technical and educational support for a landmark cumulative-impacts law adopted by the New Jersey State Legislature.
	CPDUC offered virtual mentoring/coaching to K-12 teachers in Trenton and sessions on culturally-responsive pedagogy to 25 teachers/administrators.
2021	John S. Watson Institute transitioned to Kean University. Center for Economic and Workforce Development, Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation designated as a USEDA University Center .
	Institute launched the Center for Urban Policy Research (CUPR) , which provides policy analysis and research to the Legislative Black Caucus (LBC) legislative collaborative .
2022– 2025	Center for Health Policy Development conducted an environmental scan and community-engagement initiative on Black maternal-infant mortality to inform the development of a Maternal/Health Institute in Trenton.





**Cougars Climb
HIGHER**



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