



**Strengthening our
Democracy & Meaningful
Government Reform
in New Jersey**

STEVEN
Fulop 2025
DEMOCRAT FOR GOVERNOR

stevenfulop.com



Most people would agree that faith in our state government has eroded over the last several years, a direct result of legislators and elected officials taking repeated steps to undermine the public trust. Whether it's rolling back campaign finance laws, making it more difficult for the public to obtain government records, or fighting to hold on to a corrupt "county line" election system, Trenton has repeatedly demonstrated that its priority is pleasing power brokers over the public good.

Good government leads to more efficiency and ensures that elected officials prioritize their constituents over their own interests. When the government works on behalf of the people, it works for the people, resulting in policies that improve transportation, housing, education, healthcare, economic development, and affordability.

As Governor, Steve Fulop will go after corruption and ensure that those selected to serve, do so for the public good.

IN JERSEY CITY:

Notable Accomplishments on Government Reform



Only the State can enact many good government initiatives — from term limits to voting rights. Mayors, however, set the tone for how their administration will operate and their priorities. This section of the policy agenda will focus on the values and priorities Mayor Fulop brought to and implemented in Jersey City, giving insight into what he will bring to Trenton.



Abolishing The County Line System

Mayor Fulop's long career in public service has never been dependent on the establishment. In fact, he is a long-time advocate for abolishing the county line and has consistently stood by the principles of democratic and inclusive elections. Despite the support of the Hudson County organization for his gubernatorial run, which is generally regarded as one of the most influential lines in New Jersey, Fulop is unequivocal in his belief that the line is undemocratic and needs to be abolished.

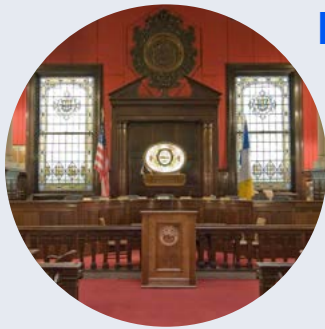
No other candidate - or potential candidate - for Governor has been as vocal in publicly taking the position that New Jersey must abolish "The Line"

Furthermore, the Fulop for Governor campaign is the only gubernatorial campaign to file an amicus brief in Federal Court to ensure fair elections in New Jersey.

Restoring Trust

Steve Fulop was elected Mayor of Jersey City when trust in its local government was at an all-time low due to the largest corruption bust in the history of New Jersey.¹

Since being elected, Mayor Fulop has run an administration focused on restoring public trust. This emphasis on transparency and good government is clearly resonating - demonstrated by the fact that Fulop is the first mayor elected by Jersey City residents to serve three full terms in 70 years.



Participatory Budgeting

Mayor Fulop is a huge proponent of directly engaging the public in the budget process and spending decisions. In 2022, he instituted a pilot program that creates a transparent process where residents in each ward directly vote on where to allocate funds within their ward.

Under Mayor Fulop's leadership, Jersey City established New Jersey's first Arts and Culture Trust Fund to support local arts organizations. The allocation of funds is decided by the residents.

Pay-to-Play Legislation

Under Mayor Fulop, Jersey City was the first municipality in New Jersey to enact the Citizen's Campaign Pay-to-Play reform legislation. The ordinance limits the influence of special interest on elected officials by not allowing businesses that make political contributions, in excess of a certain threshold, to receive government contracts. Jersey City's ordinance was often cited by the Division of Community Affairs in Trenton as the standard for other municipalities to replicate.²

Ranked Choice Voting

Mayor Fulop is a vocal proponent of Ranked Choice Voting. Under his leadership, Jersey City has enacted a trigger ordinance to allow ranked choice voting once the state allows it.

1. 2009 Operation Bid Rig resulted in the arrest of dozens of elected officials including then Jersey City Deputy Mayor Leona Beldini and Council President Mariano Vega.

2. In 2023, Governor Murphy signed the highly controversial New Jersey Election Transparency Act which replaced and weakened Jersey City's existing ordinance. [jcitytimes.com/state-pay-to-play-law-to-replace-stricter-jersey-city-ordinances/](https://www.jcitytimes.com/state-pay-to-play-law-to-replace-stricter-jersey-city-ordinances/)



Elimination of Tax Abatements

When Mayor Fulop took office, there was a sense of entitlement from developers that they would receive tax abatements for every market-rate large development project. While campaigning, Fulop promised to phase out the tax abatements and he has executed on that promise - Jersey City has not granted a market rate tax abatement in more than seven years.³

Open Public Records

Mayor Fulop has been a vocal opponent of the state legislatures' rollback of transparency. As the mayor of the municipality in NJ that has more OPRA requests than any other municipality Fulop has a great deal of experience with OPRA

OPRA requests per year for Jersey City:	Year 2022 = 4,665 requests
Year 2021 = 4,419 requests	Year 2023 = 5,165 requests

Despite all of the requests in 2023, the City only received five Government Records Council Complaints, of which 4 out of 5 were adjudicated. The last one is currently pending.

Redundant Services

Since 2013, the Fulop administration has taken a multi-pronged approach to restructuring government for both efficiency and fiscal responsibility. This approach has allowed Jersey City to expand its services for residents.

One step has been to merge departments with overlapping functions and eliminating autonomous agencies. For example, Jersey City merged its police and fire departments into the Department of Public Safety and consolidated the Incinerator Authority into the Department of Public Works.

Under Mayor Fulop, Jersey City has set the bar with regard to shared services. One example is the implementation of millions of dollars in shared services with the local school district. Another example is Jersey City's coordination with neighboring communities of Guttenberg and Hoboken, to provide better and less expensive Animal Care and Control.

3. In 2023, Mayor Fulop and the Jersey City Council unanimously approved a 30-year PILOT for the Bayfront project that incorporates a 35% set aside for affordable, workforce housing. As Governor, Fulop would hold up Bayfront as the model for smart growth and the appropriate utilization of tax abatements to meet a community's needs.



AS GOVERNOR:

Areas of Focus in Government Reform

Conflicts of Interest Reform For Party Chairs & Elected Officials

New Jersey does not even have a bare minimum requirement that political party chairs receive mandatory ethics training. Worse, New Jersey lags behind many other states in enacting conflict of interest legislation restricting how party chairs can potentially monetize their positions. The lack of good government rules results in State and County Chairs actively assuming the role of lobbyists and profiting off their trusted positions. Compounding the problem, New Jersey party chairs have had a disproportionate influence over county commissioners and state legislators - meaning there is no check on this practice. The result is a direct connection between some of the chair's personal interests and suspect legislation that has been proposed or fast-tracked.



Essex County/NJ State
Chairman Jones

Beyond the monetary conflict, there is a clear ethical conflict where many of these Democratic party chairs/lobbyists assume clients who are in direct conflict to the core democratic principles they espouse to voters. The conclusion is that they are either lying to their clients or lying to the public.



Middlesex County
Chairman McCabe

Besides pushing for conflict of interest and ethics policies, as Governor, Fulop will look to replicate Maryland's law that prohibits fundraising by the Governor and Legislature while the legislature is in session.⁴

4. elections.maryland.gov/campaign_finance/documents/Fundraising%20During%20Session_guidance_final.pdf



Election Transparency Act

The ironically named “Election Transparency Act” overhauled New Jersey’s campaign finance rules to allow the doubling of contributions and gutted state and local pay-to-play ordinances. A little-noticed amendment in the law allowed outside groups to legally bankroll so-called phantom candidates — whose main purpose is to siphon off votes from “legitimate candidates,” — without disclosing their donors’ identities before Election Day.⁵

When Trenton introduced the Election Transparency Act (ETA), Mayor Fulop was the first potential candidate for governor to publicly say that he would not have signed the bill as governor. If elected in 2025, Fulop will amend the Election Transparency Act to reinstate strong pay-to-play laws and return to a 10-year look back for Election Law Enforcement violations.

When the Election Transparency Act was first introduced, Assembly leadership proposed a commitment of a \$1.5 million supplement for ELEC. It never moved in the Senate. A casualty of negotiations, the budget appropriated \$5.753 million for ELEC compared with \$5.467 million in the previous fiscal year — a \$286,000 increase, far short of the promised \$1.5 million. As Governor, Fulop will ensure that ELEC has the funds it needs to protect New Jersey’s election integrity.

5. Matt Friedman (Dec. 12, 2023), ‘More money, less disclosure’: N.J.’s new elections law fails a key test. From politico.com/news/2023/12/12/nj-campaign-finance-law-00131173



Financial Disclosure Forms

Transparency is essential for a government to be trusted, and in a climate where the public is often skeptical of elected officials greater clarity is essential. In New Jersey, the financial disclosure forms for elected officials have not been updated in decades. Case in point: the highest income bracket an elected official needs to disclose is “greater than \$50,000”. In a world where many of our elected officials have multiple jobs and some that overlap with elected responsibility, recalibrating these thresholds to include \$50- \$100k \$100k-\$150k, \$150k-\$200k, and greater than \$200k is long overdue.

More Robust Lobbying Disclosure

Countless unregistered lobbyists in Trenton operate under the pretense of “public relations”. As Governor, Fulop will require transparency as to who is representing whom and will call for full disclosure of advocacy by elected officials and unelected party leaders.



Move Municipal Elections to November

April school board elections and May municipal elections are costly and suppress voter turnout. In 2017, under Mayor Fulop's leadership, Jersey City successfully moved all of its elections to November. Fulop would encourage and provide incentives to municipalities to move all elections to November.

Legislative Transparency

Too often, multi-page bills with significant implications are pushed through the legislature without time for public comment or even for the legislators to read the bill. As Governor, Fulop will not sign any bills or resolutions unless their final form has been made publicly available on the legislative website for a full 72 hours preceding the vote. Either branch of the state legislature would be able to waive this requirement in an emergency with a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote. This common sense measure closely mirrors a rule in the U.S. House of Representatives established by Speaker Nancy Pelosi in January 2019.

Voter Registration

Please print clearly in ink. All information is required unless marked otherwise.

It is a crime to procure a false registration or to furnish false information to the Board of Elections.

1

Are you a citizen of the U.S.? Yes No
If you answer No, you cannot register to vote.

2

Will you be 18 years of age or older on or before election day? Yes No
If you answer No, you cannot register to vote unless you are a member of the armed forces.



Election Changes⁵

Beyond formally abolishing the county line system and moving towards an office block ballot system, there are meaningful changes that the next governor should undertake to improve and update democracy in New Jersey.

Much of our election code was originally written between 1876 and 1920, and as such it is badly out of date. Below are some changes that the Fulop Administration will implement:

1. Centralize Election Management: Allowing each of the 21 counties to handle their own elections made more sense before the internet (and SVRS) connected us all. The Fulop Administration will remove inefficiencies by centralizing the County Board of Elections and Superintendents, and the County and Municipal Clerk's election role into the Division of Elections.

2. Open Access to Candidate Petitions: The procedures for challenging petitions should be standardized and go to a specific Administrative Law or Superior Court judge.

5. Reference: Scott Salmon, Esq. shareholder at Jardim, Meisner, Salmon, Sprague & Susser, P.C. and chair of the firm's election law practice group.

3. Remove Human Bias in Ballot Drawings: There is no reason to allow ballot draws to continue to have human interference when randomization software readily exists.



4. Same-Day Voter Registration: Before SVRS and electronic poll books, one could argue that same-day voter registration created a not insignificant risk of fraud. Technology, however, now exists to allow for instant verification leaving no legitimate reason to continue this archaic and undemocratic law. Mayor Fulop supports same-day voter registration for two main reasons:

- It would increase voter turnout, especially among Black, Latino, and young voters;
- It allows for more frequent and accurate updating of the voter rolls.

Twenty-one states currently permit same-day registration and as governor, Fulop would use his office to push for this to be the law in New Jersey.

5. Increase Access to Ballot Initiatives/Referenda: Ballot initiatives and referenda are Democracy in its purest form. New Jersey’s patchwork of various forms of municipal government creates a situation that limits where and how citizens can create ballot initiatives and referenda. As Governor, Fulop will work to develop standardized procedures for every municipality and the entire statewide ballot.

6. Ranked Choice Voting: Mayor Fulop has been an advocate for Senator Andrew Zwicker’s bill to implement this change in NJ and as Governor he will push for its implementation.



State Budget Process Reform⁶

Trenton’s budget process is the same every year: A massive budget is approved by lawmakers before stakeholders and legislators have had a chance to review the details. As Governor, Fulop will push for transparency changes in two major areas:

1. Set a June 1st deadline for the Legislature to finalize its own budget — just as the Governor is required to deliver their budget. Failure to meet the timeline should have significant penalties. This would prevent lawmakers from waiting until the last minute to finalize and vote on a budget bill that they may or may not have read.
2. Require 14 days between when the budget is released to the public and when it’s voted on, with a hearing somewhere in between. This would allow policy experts and members of the public to analyze and provide testimony on the full budget.

Term Limits

Mayor Fulop is a supporter of term limits at all levels of government and will work with the legislature to enact this reform into law to give local municipalities more flexibility.

6. Peter Chen NJPP



Open Public Records Reform (OPRA)

Public access to records should not be a partisan issue as access to information is a core component of government accountability.

As Governor, Steve Fulop will look to update OPRA, not roll it back, with the following changes:

1. State Legislators should be subject to OPRA in the same fashion that local elected officials are accountable. There is no reason for them to be excluded.
2. Fund a statewide system for all commercial requests so that this information is automatically uploaded and searchable on demand. This will free up the clerks to deal with the many other requests they receive.
3. Implement a mediation requirement before a lawsuit can be filed against a municipality or county. This will allow simple miscommunications to be rectified.
4. Fee Shifting is a key part of accountability. The process while not perfect creates an incentive for municipalities to be responsive.



CONCLUSION:

Restoring trust in our state government is one of the most significant challenges facing New Jersey's next governor. Steve Fulop is committed to looking at all proposed legislation and policies through the lens of whether it benefits the public good. Fulop has never been and will never be beholden to New Jersey's power brokers.

As Governor, Steve Fulop's first and only responsibility will be to the voters of New Jersey.

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