



NEW JERSEY

# Association of State Colleges and Universities

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**QuickTakes!**

## **Lesniak Institute at Kean Hosts its Inaugural Event: “Youth Against Gun Violence: Keep the Movement Going”**

April 4, 2018

Building on the national movement to stop gun violence intensified by students at Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, New Jersey college and high school students are gathering at a roundtable at 7 p.m. on Thursday night, April 5 at Kean University.

Attending will be students from Kean University, Union County College and Elizabeth, Linden, Roselle, Union, Westfield, Cranford and Scotch Plains-Fanwood High Schools. The roundtable will give New Jersey students an opportunity to join the national youth movement to stop gun violence and to plan the next steps for student action in our own state.

“Seventy percent of crimes committed with guns in New Jersey are with guns from states with weak gun control laws,” explained Senator Lesniak. “Our students have a state in the national Youth Movement Against Gun Violence.”

Senator Lesniak is Chair of the Institute and will be among the dignitaries participating in Thursday’s roundtable. Others include:

- ◆ Dr. Dawood Farahi, President of Kean University
- ◆ Dr. Lamont Repollet, New Jersey’s Acting Commissioner of Education
- ◆ Jeremy Feigenbaum, Counsel to Attorney General Gurbir Grewal
- ◆ Steven Goldstein, Executive Director and Senior Fellow, Lesniak Institute for American Leadership
- ◆ Reginald Bledsoe, Newark Board of Education Member
- ◆ Maria Carvalho, Elizabeth Board of Education Chair
- ◆ Olga Hugelmeyer, Elizabeth Superintendent of Schools
- ◆ Jim Russo, SWAT Officer and Iraq and Afghanistan veteran, who will speak on President Trump’s proposal for teachers with guns
- ◆ Brett Sabo and Patti Wilson-Fico, NJ Moms Demand Action Leaders
- ◆ Lenny Ward, New Jersey Parole Board
- ◆ Patricia Perkins-Auguste, NJ Civil Rights Commissioner

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Kean University  
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Rowan University*

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William Paterson University*

The Lesniak Institute for American Leadership is a nonprofit think tank and training institute designed to develop the next generation of American leaders, and to partner with grassroots leaders from across the country to advocate for social justice. The Institute is named for Senator Raymond J. Lesniak, who, over a 40-year career in the New Jersey Legislature, authored and sponsored hundreds of laws that have advanced civil rights and the quality of life for millions.

Among Senator Lesniak's laws are the repeal of the death penalty, making New Jersey the first U.S. state to abolish the death penalty in 30 years. For his historic work, he is the winner of the International Human Rights Competition at Le Memorial de Caen in Normandy, France.

Throughout his 40 years in the legislature, Senator Lesniak was the architect of landmark laws in environmental justice, racial justice, criminal justice reform and animal rights, among many other policy areas. He is also the author of numerous laws to increase opportunities for students at the college and pre-college levels.

"Across the country, people are dissatisfied with quality of American leadership, from the White House on down," said Senator Lesniak. "We are starting a new institute to do something about it. We're going to train students who want to enter leadership either through advocacy or public office. No issue energizes youth more than stopping gun violence – with good reason, they are often the victims of gun violence whether in school or in their communities."

The Lesniak Institute marks a reunion of Senator Lesniak with Steven Goldstein, the founder and former longtime leader of Garden State Equality, who will serve as the Lesniak Institute's Executive Director. Goldstein is moderating Thursday night's roundtable.

Senator Lesniak and Goldstein, along with Senator Loretta Weinberg, were the triumvirate behind many of New Jersey's path-breaking laws for LGBT rights, including marriage equality. Goldstein recently served as Executive Director of the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect and is in rabbinical school at the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York, where he will continue his studies. Steve Carell played Goldstein in the 2015 movie "Freeheld," based on the 2008 documentary.