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## Governor Christie Acts on Violence Prevention with Comprehensive Review of the Intersection of Gun Control, Addiction, Mental Health and School Safety Issues

Thursday, January 17, 2013

Tags: [Task Forces](#)

**Trenton, NJ** – Acting on his commitment to take a full and comprehensive look at the intersection of gun control, addiction, mental health and school safety in New Jersey, Governor Christie today created the NJ SAFE Task Force. The Task Force will be chaired by two former attorneys general of New Jersey, a Democrat and a Republican, with a membership of individuals with expertise in the fields of mental health diagnosis and treatment, addiction services and treatment, gun control and law enforcement, and school safety. The task force's review comes in the context of a state with among the toughest gun laws in the nation, including an existing assault weapons ban. Nonetheless, Governor Christie wants a full assessment to consider whether additional common sense measures are appropriate for New Jersey.

"Violence in our society has never been solely about firearms, and we would miss an opportunity to better prevent heinous crimes if we didn't look at the complete picture," said Governor Christie. "If we are truly going to take an honest and candid assessment of violence and public safety, we have to look more deeply at the underlying causes of many acts of violence. That means removing the stigma and evaluating issues of mental health, addiction, prevention and treatment services alongside the effectiveness of our firearms laws, enforcement mechanisms, and our school safety measures.

"My commitment has always been to evaluate public safety, criminal policy, and behavioral science with an approach that recognizes that these issues cannot be separated from one another. The SAFE Task Force will further my commitment in that regard as we look at how we can better guarantee violence control," continued Governor Christie.

The creation of the NJ SAFE Task Force follows the Governor's public commitment to engage in a vigorous and complete look at the root of violent crime in our society, including but not narrowly limited to gun crime, ownership and trafficking. The Task Force will convene immediately and will quickly deliver a report containing recommendations for the Governor within 60 days.

"I'm proud that at this important moment, this group of qualified, experienced public servants with expertise in each of these important fields have agreed to serve their state and fellow citizens on this task force," said Governor Christie.

"There may never be a more appropriate time in our state's history to undertake this kind of review. The intersection of crime, access to firearms, mental health and the impulses that spark extreme acts of violence is ripe for in-depth understanding and appropriate change in our public policy if warranted," said former Attorney General Peter Verniero, Co-Chairman of the NJ SAFE Task Force. "I am grateful Governor Christie has selected me to be a part of this critical endeavor, and I look forward to working with such a distinguished, qualified group."

"As former chief law enforcement officers for New Jersey, we were immersed daily in the issues of guns and drugs and trafficking of both, as well as development, enforcement and prosecution of some of the strictest firearms laws in the nation," said former Attorney General John Degnan, Co-Chairman of the NJ SAFE Task Force. "It is time for a full consideration and expansion of our understanding of the causal relationship between acts of gun violence and mental health and treatment that can help us anticipate and prevent tragic results like we saw in Connecticut."

The membership of the NJ SAFE Task Force includes:

### **Co-Chairmen:**

#### **Former Attorney General and Associate Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court Peter G. Verniero** (Clinton Township, Hunterdon County), Co-Chairman, NJ SAFE Task Force

Peter Verniero is a former Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court and a former New Jersey Attorney General. Presently, Mr. Verniero works in private practice at the firm of Sills Cummins & Gross, P.C. as Chair of the Firm's Corporate Internal Investigations and Appellate Practice Groups. He has served in senior positions within the executive and judicial branches of state government. Appointed by Governor Christine Todd Whitman as her Chief Counsel, Mr. Verniero served in that capacity from January 1994 to February 1995, when he became the governor's Chief of Staff. He remained in that position until July 1996, when he became Attorney General of New Jersey. As Attorney General, he personally argued cases before the New Jersey Supreme Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. Mr. Verniero was appointed to the Supreme Court of New Jersey in 1999. As an associate justice for a five-year period

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from September 1999 to August 2004, Mr. Verniero authored and signed 124 judicial opinions touching on a wide array of civil and criminal areas, including employment, corporate, and constitutional law.

**Former Attorney General John J. Degnan (Chester Township, Morris), Co-Chairman, NJ SAFE Task Force**

Former Attorney General John J. Degnan currently serves as Senior Advisor to the CEO of The Chubb Corporation. Prior to assuming this role, he served in various leadership capacities at Chubb including, COO, Vice Chairman, Chief Ethics Office, and President. Prior to joining the private sector, he served as Attorney General from 1978 – 1981 after serving in the Office of Governor Brendan Byrne. While in the Office of the Governor, he served as Chief Counsel to the Governor (1977-1978), Executive Secretary to the Governor (1976-1977) and Assistant Counsel to the Governor (1974-1976). Additionally, Mr. Degnan clerked for New Jersey Associate Justice John J. Francis. His current board service includes seats on the boards of trustees for the Saint Barnabas Medical Center, St. Benedict's Preparatory School in Newark and serving as a Fellow for the American Bar Foundation. General Degnan is a graduate of both Harvard Law School in Cambridge, MA and St. Vincent College in Latrobe, PA.

**Members:**

**Dr. Manuel Guantez, LCADC, Chief Executive Officer, Turning Point, Inc. (Fairfield, Essex), Member, NJ SAFE Task Force**

Since 2001, Dr. Manuel Guantez has served as Chief Executive Officer of Turning Point, Inc., an organization in the field of alcohol and drug addiction treatment in New Jersey. Each year, Turning Point provides more than 2,400 men and women with the services and treatment they need to end their addiction. He has served the fields of addiction and mental health treatment for more than 20 years in a variety of capacities, including work in residential and outpatient addiction treatment conducting individual, group and family therapies, and coordinating programs for adolescents and individuals with co-occurring mental disorders.

Dr. Guantez has served as the Coordinator of Addiction Studies at Montclair State University and, as Assistant Professor, taught all core graduate and undergraduate courses in addiction and mental health. In addition, Dr. Guantez has served on the New Jersey Division of Addiction Services' Residential Licensure Standards Revision Committee, the Residential Treatment Services Committee and the Quality Standards Substance Abuse Treatment Committee. He holds a Psy.D. and a M.S. in Clinical Psychology from Long Island University and his undergraduate degree from Montclair State University.

**James Romer, Monmouth County Services Director, Monmouth Medical Center (Howell, Monmouth), Member, NJ SAFE Task Force**

James Romer is a mental health professional with more than 30 years of experience. He currently serves as the Monmouth County Services Director for Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch, New Jersey. He previously served for nearly 20 years as Director of Screening Services for Ocean County at Kimball Medical Center in Lakewood, between 1991 and 2009. Romer is President of the Mental Health Emergency Screening Association, was the first certified screener in New Jersey and serves on the Monmouth Youth Council. Romer has been proactive reaching out to law enforcement regarding issues of kids in crisis. His current work includes health screening for individuals, providing evaluations for the danger they pose to themselves or others, kids and adults alike. Romer has also experience working with school populations on youth suicide issues. He obtained his Bachelors of Arts from Seton Hall University.

**Evelyn Sullivan, Managing Director, Daytop Village of New Jersey (Manahawkin, Ocean), Member, NJ SAFE Task Force**

Evelyn Sullivan currently serves as a Managing Director of the Pittsgrove office of Daytop New Jersey, Inc., a comprehensive substance abuse treatment and education program. Sullivan has worked in many aspects of drug and alcohol prevention and treatment, including residential, outpatient, development, planning, supervision and training. Evelyn previously served as the Director of Substance Abuse Services at Preferred Behavioral Health of New Jersey for 15 years and as the Director of the Central Intake Unit for the Newark Target Cities project. Additionally, she has worked for the Elizabeth General Medical Center – Department of Psychiatry, the Monmouth County Department of Human Services and as a counselor in private practice for individuals and families.

Sullivan earned her undergraduate degree from the City University of New York and graduated with honors. Ms. Sullivan holds a Master's Degree in Social Work from Rutgers University.

**Dr. Brian Zychowski, Superintendent of North Brunswick Township Public Schools (Mendham, Morris), Member, NJ SAFE Task Force**

Dr. Brian Zychowski currently serves as the Superintendent of the North Brunswick Township Public Schools, which includes 6 schools and approximately 6,200 students. Prior to assuming that role in 2007, he served as the Superintendent of the Clark Township Public Schools. Dr. Zychowski previously also was Superintendent of the Henry Hudson Regional School District, a regional 7-12 school district serving the communities of Atlantic Highlands and Highlands. In addition to his various roles in educational administration, Dr. Zychowski is an adjunct professor at Seton Hall University and previously one at Monmouth University. In 2010, Dr. Zychowski chaired the New Jersey Educators Effectiveness Task Force, which delivered recommendations to Governor Christie in March 2011 that served as a blueprint for remaking public education in the state and refocusing the fundamental goals of the system to center on high student achievement and results for children.

Dr. Zychowski holds a Doctor of Education in Education Administration from Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey as well as a Bachelor of Arts in History and Masters of Arts in Educational Administration, both from Kean University in Union, New Jersey.

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