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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor's Urban Summit Kickoff Convened; Continues Effort To Build Healthy Communities In The Garden State

Governor Christie Whitman today stressed her commitment to ensuring that New Jersey's cities are strong and vibrant places to live, work and play while attending the kickoff for the state's Urban Summit. Joined by Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Jane M. Kenny and Secretary of State DeForest B. Soaries, Jr., the Governor continued her commitment to New Jersey's cities stressing the importance of continuing the dialogue between the state and local organizations, leaders and community members.

"Strong cities are important to all of us," Governor Whitman said in her FY 2000 Budget Address when she called for the Urban Summit. "If our cities fail, we all pay for it no matter where we live. It's just good economic sense to make them safe, productive, and prosperous."

"I hope you make this dialogue something powerful and productive because, as I have said before, we need our cities to be great cities," the Governor told urban leaders and community activists as well as representatives from the Urban Coordinating Council. "We need them to be centers of culture and commerce. We need them to be exciting places to visit. Most important we need them to be safe, affordable, productive places in which to live."

The Governor's Urban Summit Kickoff launches a series of regional conferences, scheduled throughout the next ten months. The four regional conferences will focus on urban revitalization efforts and progress being made in New Jersey's cities. Topics to be addressed at the regional conferences include: Safety, Health, Housing and Economic Development, and Youth. At the conclusion of the regional conferences, work will culminate with The Governor's Urban Summit to be held in June 2000.

"The Urban Summit Kickoff begins a ten-month process of critically examining what has been done, and what still needs to be done, to build healthier neighborhoods and stronger cities," said Commissioner Kenny.

In an effort to bolster New Jersey's cities, Governor Whitman has assembled an urban tool kit complete with programs and initiatives such as the Summit. Such tools include the Urban Coordinating Council (UCC) and a Faith-Based Development Initiative program which has already invested \$5 million in more than 60 neighborhoods, many of them urban.

In addition, over two thousand families have gained the opportunity to become homeowners due to the state's commitment to bring affordable and attractive housing to the cities. The Summit series will identify areas that need to be strengthened and encourage replication of models that have proven successful.

"Our strength as a state is intrinsically linked to the strength of our cities," Secretary Soaries stated. "This Urban Summit is a great opportunity to improve public-private partnerships and give our cities the focused attention that they deserve."

Former congressman and community leader, the Honorable Reverend Dr. Floyd H. Flake delivered the keynote address.

