

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Announces Budget Initiatives to Aid in the Fight Against Youth Violence, Attends Meeting of NJ Commission to Deter Criminal Activity

Gov. Christie Whitman today attended a meeting of the recently reactivated Commission to Deter Criminal Activity and called on commission members to educate and raise awareness among children, one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. While meeting with the commission, the Governor previewed budget initiatives addressing violence among New Jersey's youth that will be part of her annual budget message on Monday.

The Governor told members of the commission that violence among young people is a growing problem and to end it, intervention and prevention will be key. The Governor's budget proposal, to be unveiled on Monday, will include the following initiatives aimed at deterring violent youth behavior:

- Expanding the jurisdiction of crisis intervention units in county family courts to include children identified as at risk for behaving violently.
- Provide training to emergency medical technicians, aiding them in the detection of violence, allowing young victims to get more immediate counseling, circumventing the likelihood that victims will become perpetrators in the future.
- The inclusion of funds for the Commission to Deter Criminal Activity to launch a campaign to steer young people away from violent behavior, stopping it before it starts.

Despite the fact that crime rates in New Jersey are at the lowest level in a quarter of a century, drug use is increasing according to the Department of Law and Public Safety and violence in New Jersey's schools is increasing according to the Department of Education.

The Department of Education today released a report that indicates violence and substance use in schools rose between 1996- 97 and 1997-98. A 1996 study of high school students and a 1995 study of middle schoolers, both conducted by the Department of Law and Public Safety also reflect the increase in drug use by teens.

"We have to help our teens fight peer pressure and say no to drugs," said the Governor. "We have to get the message out: if you bring a weapon into a school you will be punished. We have to help our young people understand that breaking the law has its consequences."

The Governor told the commission that one of their focuses must be to create public education and awareness campaigns to prevent youth violence and substance abuse. While addressing the commission, the Governor told members that it is integral to the future of our children that we redouble the efforts to get the message out to New Jersey's children.

"The importance of early prevention efforts cannot be overestimated. Experts say that public awareness messages, especially peer-based campaigns, are effective deterrents to drug use and violent behavior," the Governor said.

Department of Education statistics released today indicate that the number of incidents of violence, vandalism, and substance abuse rose by three percent between 1996-97 and 1997-98. By comparison, overall incidents rose by 7.7 percent between 1995-96 and 1996-97. Violent incidents rose by 7 percent according to the 1996-97 through 1997-98 report. Comparatively, violent incidents increased by 11 percent between 1995-96 and 1996-97. The report for between 1996-97 and 97-98 also shows that substance abuse in New Jersey's schools rose by around 4 percent. Vandalism decreased by 7 percent between 1996-97 and 97-98.

Governor Whitman said that while the increase in violence may indicate that schools are being more vigilant about reporting these occurrences, we must continue to do all we can to prevent youth violence and keep our schools safe.

Alcohol and drug use among high school students in New Jersey, is measured by a Law and Public Safety survey conducted every three years. The most recent survey will be released later this year.

Gov. Whitman called for the reactivation of the commission in September as part of her anti-violence initiative. The primary focus of the commission will be to address violence and substance abuse among the state's young people. The commission consists of 21 members: 12 public or government officials appointed by the Governor, two members each of the Senate and Assembly, the State Attorney General, and the presidents of various law enforcement groups. Attorney General Peter Verniero was recently named by Governor Whitman as chair of the commission.

"Whenever law enforcement has asked for a new or better tool to protect the public, whether it be technology or tougher laws, Gov. Whitman has responded," said Attorney General Peter Verniero. "This past September, she responded again when she asked for the rejuvenation of the Commission to Deter Criminal Activity. This commission- through its focus on education and public awareness- can be another powerful tool in fighting crime."

Attached is a list of commission members.

Members of the Commission to Deter Criminal Activity

Attorney General Peter Verniero, chair

Senator Louis F. Kosco

Senator Raymond J. Zane

Assemblyman Peter J. Barnes, Jr.

Assemblyman Larry Chatzidakis

Michael Madonna, President, NJ Police Benevolent Association

Prosecutor Stephen D. Moore, President, NJ County Prosecutor's Association

Rick Whelan, President, Fraternal Order of Police

Thomas Iskryzycki, President, State Troopers' Fraternal Association

Veronica Desmond, Victim/witness counselor, Union County Prosecutor's Office

Maureen Kanka, Founder, Megan Kanka Foundation

Walton W. Kingsbery, Retired executive, Price Waterhouse

Rosemary R. Jackson, Core consultant, Community Planning Advocacy Council

David C. Maxwell, President, R.C. Maxwell Company

Michael F. Moriarty, Director of police, Jersey City Police Department

James K. O'Brien, Chairman, Victims of Crimes Compensation Board

Joe Piscopo, Comedian, actor, businessman, and charitable organizer

Alberto Rivas, Senior associate, Goldstein Lite and DePalma and adjunct instructor of criminal law, Rutgers University School of Law

Morton Salkind, President and CEO, New Thermal Corporation, Triad Company Group, and Fox Development Company

Blondell K. Spellman, Director, EEO Compliance and associate counsel, Claridge Casino Hotel

Shirley M. Ward, Manager of Urban Initiatives, PSE&G;