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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Creates Council to Address Needs of Senior Citizens

Anticipating a boom in the percentage of New Jerseyans over the age of 65, Gov. Christie Whitman today created the New Jersey Advisory Council on Elder Care.

The council, which is established within the state Department of Health and Senior Services, will consist of 17 members. It will present a report of recommendations to the Governor and Legislature within six months of its first meeting.

"We are working hard to increase the options available to our seniors and their care givers. We are committed to promoting wellness, independence, choice, and dignity for all the seniors who call New Jersey home," Gov. Whitman said. "The New Jersey Advisory Council on Elder Care will be an important resource in ensuring that we are prepared to meet the needs of our older residents - now and in the future."

Gov. Whitman signed an executive order creating the council at the Reading Senior Center in Trenton, one of seven senior centers operating in the City of Trenton. More than 75 seniors each day participate in activities including painting, singing, bingo, dancing, sewing, sign language classes, card playing, cultural trips, and nutrition programs.

With 1.4 million senior citizens, New Jersey has one of the largest senior populations in the nation. One in seven residents is over the age of 65. In 30 years, one in four New Jerseyans will be at least 65 years old.

"We need to be prepared for the challenges posed by this demographic shift. We must be able to anticipate the needs of our aging population and provide responsible and caring solutions to these issues that touch us all," the Governor said.

The council will be made up of three members of the state Senate, three members of the General Assembly, the Commissioner and a Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Health and Senior Services, the director of senior services, and eight public members who have an interest or expertise in issues pertaining to the elderly. They will serve without compensation.

The council is charged with gathering and evaluated current and future needs of senior citizens and also those caring for them. Among the issues of focus for the council are:

- the kinds of support or choices that care givers needs now and will need in the future to help their patients, parents, or loved ones maintain their dignity and independence,
- the expectations that middle-aged persons currently have about the kind of care they will receive as senior citizens and how they expect to pay for that care,
- the service system that needs to be established or modified to meet anticipated elder care needs and the kinds of legislative or policy decisions necessary for this purpose, and
- the kinds of accomodations that need to be made for seniors who want to utilize various long-term care options.