

Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Pete McDonough
Jayne O'Connor
609-777-2600

RELEASE: February 18, 1999

Whitman Accepts Health Commissioner's Resignation

Gov. Christie Whitman announced today that State Health and Senior Services Commissioner Len Fishman will be leaving the administration to accept a position as president and chief executive officer of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging.

"Len has been a strong voice in my administration for the health of our citizens and the needs of our seniors. He leaves with a solid record of achievement and my gratitude in performing his job with compassion, insight, and the willingness to be bold and creative," Gov. Whitman said.

Fishman is expected to leave office in mid-March. The Governor said she will announce his replacement in the near future.

The Governor called Fishman "a tireless advocate for public health and an expert in understanding and providing for the needs of the state's 1.4 million seniors." Fishman is the first commissioner of a state department devoted to senior citizens.

Fishman presided over a number of initiatives that underscore the administration's commitment to consumers. He enacted tough new HMO regulations and published the state's first HMO performance report card. Fishman updated the New Jersey Cancer Registry, directed a statewide campaign to stop the sale of tobacco to youth, and oversaw the expansion of cardiac services, and published the state's first report card on mortality rates in cardiac surgery. Fishman also started the annual Day of Learning for Youth to help young people learn about HIV/AIDS.

"I could always count on Len to bring a fresh perspective to any issue and a desire to bring all parties together to find better ways to do even the routine things. He not only wanted to get the job done. He wanted to get it done well," the Governor said.

In 1996, Gov. Whitman consolidated more than 20 programs for seniors and a more than \$1 billion budget for senior programs into one department, the Department of Health and Senior Services. Fishman helped mold the department into a leading voice for seniors, especially in the area of long term care.

Fishman supported increasing long term care options for seniors, such as assisted living and alternate family care (adult foster care). To help seniors and their families avoid the frustration of dealing with a multitude of agencies for information and services, Fishman presided over the creation of NJ EASE, a statewide single-entry system for senior services that is now operating in 13

counties. By the end of this year, all 21 counties will be part of the system, which can be accessed through a toll-free number, 1-877-222-3737.

Fishman was named "Person of the Year" in 1996 by *New Jersey Medicine*, the health care and health policy journal published by the Medical Society of New Jersey. It was the journal's first such award.

He was also given the "Distinguished Citizen Award" in 1998 by *New Jersey Health Decisions* for accomplishments in the field of bioethics.

Fishman, 47, is an attorney and the first non-physician to become health commissioner, is married to Susan Schnur, a writer and rabbi. They live in Hopewell with their two children, Lincoln and Anna.