

July 21, 2017

**ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 31**

To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 31 without my approval.

The Work First New Jersey program, New Jersey's welfare reform program, provides cash assistance to low-income families and individuals. This bill would increase the maximum cash assistance benefit available through Work First New Jersey over three years and then institute annual cost of living adjustments.

This bill is identical to Assembly Bill No. 30, which I vetoed just last year. As I explained last year, expanding these payments and mandating cost of living increases will have substantial budgetary impacts. Responsible governance requires that any increase to program benefits be determined on an annual basis and in consideration of the costs associated with all State programs. Such a contemplative approach facilitates the identification of the State's fiscal priorities and ensures that the State will meet its constitutional mandate of a balanced budget. My position remains unchanged.

Since the beginning of my Administration, I have worked to ensure that New Jersey provides a safety net to individuals in need. While Work First New Jersey's cash benefit is one type of available assistance, it is only one component of the safety net. Work First New Jersey beneficiaries may also be eligible for: food and nutrition supplies through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; housing assistance through the State Rental Assistance Program or Section 8 voucher program; energy assistance through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program; and medical assistance through Medicaid and NJ Family Care.

I will continue my commitment to providing assistance to those individuals most in need. However, this bill, which fails to account for the substantial resources already available to eligible individuals, carries significant costs into not only this budget year but also future budget years. I cannot sign a bill that would perpetuate this irresponsible fiscal governance.

Accordingly, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 31 without my approval.

[seal]

Respectfully,  
/s/ Chris Christie  
Governor

Attest:

/s/ James J. DiGiulio  
Chief Counsel to the Governor