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NEWS RELEASE

PO BOX 004

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
Julie Plocinik
(609) 777-2600

TRENTON, NJ 08625

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Christopher Wolf (DCA)
609-292-6055

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES GRANTS FOR RAPE CARE SERVICES

Gov. Christie Whitman today announced the awarding of more than \$1 million in grants for services to sexual assault victims and highlighted the importance of keeping sexual predators off the streets and making our neighborhoods safer. The Governor also announced she will include \$2 million in her upcoming budget to keep sex offenders locked up under expanded civil commitment laws.

"I'm here today to reaffirm our commitment to the people across New Jersey who provide care and support to victims of a truly heinous crime: rape," said Gov. Whitman. "Today we are committing \$1.3 million to support the crisis centers and counseling programs that provide caring services to rape victims and their families during and after their time of tragedy."

The Governor was joined by Community Affairs Commissioner Jane Kenny for the grant announcements. The Department of Community Affairs' (DCA) Division on Women administers the program, which awards state, and federal funds to local and county agencies. The services provided include: 24-hour hotlines; crisis intervention, hospital, police, and court accompaniment; individual and group counseling; victim advocacy; and outreach and education in the schools and community. In 1996, rape care programs served over 27,500 survivors and families of victims throughout the state.

"While it is important to announce the awarding of the grants, it is more important to look beyond the money to consider those women who suffer through these terrible crimes. With the help of our Rape Care Program and with their own strength, they persevere and find a way to continue their lives," said Commissioner Kenny.

The Governor also announced that \$2 million will be included in her upcoming budget to back an expansion in the state's civil commitment law. The funding will provide corrections and treatment staff for up to 150 sex offenders who could be civilly committed under an expanded law. During her State of the State address last month, the Governor called for legislation to expand the state's ability to keep sexual predators in civil commitment beyond their initial prison terms. Under Megan's Law, the state has already employed civil commitment to keep more than 80 sex offenders behind bars beyond their initial sentence.

"Megan's Law was an historic first step toward keeping our neighborhoods and our children safe from sexual predators. Expanded civil commitment for sex offenders is an important next step. You have my word: we are going to make it easier to keep sex offenders locked up and harder for them to prey on our children," said Gov. Whitman.

During the ceremony, the Governor also discussed policies currently being implemented at the Adult Diagnostic Treatment Center (ADTC) to keep criminal sex offenders from repeating their offenses if they are ever released. The facility will now be limited to inmates who demonstrate cooperation and willingness to participate in treatment, and those who are judged appropriate for treatment by mental health professionals. The ADTC will also be requiring prisoners to work or provide a community service - from behind bars - as part of their punishment and to combat prisoner idleness.

Throughout her administration, Gov. Whitman has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting victims of sexual assault and keeping violent sexual predators behind bars. The Governor has:

- Enacted legislation to prohibit testimony about what a victim was wearing or what her sexual history involves, protecting victims of sexual assault from further trauma during trial;
- Created legislation strengthening the state's stalking laws to allow victims to obtain permanent restraining orders;
- Significantly increased the penalties for using dangerous drugs that incapacitate victims to make sexual assault easier; and
- Eliminated the statute of limitations for prosecution of sexual assault.

"The services we are supporting today and the laws enacted by this Governor are vital in giving victims and their families the opportunity to continue their lives and to not be held down by fear and the other feelings which typically haunt them," said Linda Bowker, director of DCA's Division on Women.

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