

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Christie Whitman today signed the following piece of legislation:

Senate Substitute for SCS for S-1232 and 447 and A-1489, sponsored by Senators Edward T. O'Connor, Jr. (D-Hudson) and William L. Gormley (R-Atlantic) and William E. Schluter (R- Warren/Hunterdon/Mercer) and Assembly Member Leonard Lance (R- Warren/Hunterdon /Mercer), amends state law to create 12 additional Superior Court judgeships, increasing the total number from 416 to 428. Of the 12, five of the judgeships will be restricted and seven will be unrestricted. Restricted means the seat must be filled by a resident of a specific county. Unrestricted seats can be filled by residents of any county. One of each of the five restricted judgeships will be assigned to the following counties: Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Passaic and Salem. In addition to facilitating the reduction of backlogged cases, the judges will also help the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to handle the increase in workload expected to be created by the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. The act requires that hearings on the termination of parental rights be expedited. The bill appropriates \$3.3 million to the AOC for costs associated with the additional judgeships.