



## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### NEWS RELEASE

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### **Gov. Christie Whitman Officially Opens South Woods Prison; Calls It A Sign Of Her Determination To Win the Fight Against Crime**

Gov. Christie Whitman today officially opened the new South Woods State Prison in Bridgeton, declaring that the facility is a "clear sign of my determination to win the fight against crime."

"The opening of this prison says that we will always make room for those whom judge and jury have sentenced to prison," Whitman said. "And it says that we take very seriously our commitment to keep the people of New Jersey safe."

"South Woods State Prison today takes its place as another weapon in our fight against crime," the Governor said. "This is a fight, I should point out, that we've been winning."

Whitman said that crime dropped by 7 percent last year, making it the steepest decline in 14 years and more than twice as large as the drop in crime nationwide.

"Our success is the direct result of what we have been doing since January 1994, to turn the tide of battle: tougher laws, stronger enforcement, and more time behind bars for criminals," Whitman said. "We've been working with police and prosecutors to give them the tools they need to win this fight and they have been winning it."

The Governor said since January, 1994, 300 new State Troopers have been hired and 80 will be added by the end of the current fiscal year in June.

"We've provided local law enforcement with specialized training, like the Top Gun Drug Enforcement Training program," she said. "We've made the modern crime-fighting resources of the State Police available to local police departments and county prosecutors in their investigations. And we've enacted the 'Cops Bill of Rights' so

that anyone who kills a police officer -- or a corrections officer -- will either lose their life or lose their freedom for the rest of their life."

Whitman said she has also signed laws to protect children, including Megan's Law, which provides notification of the presence of convicted sex offenders in a community; and the Zero Tolerance for Guns law, which is ridding schools of guns. She also signed a number of tougher drug laws on everything from marijuana to designer drugs.

She said neighborhoods and communities are also safer because legislation she signed has strengthened domestic violence laws to include stalking and date-related incidents, eliminated the five-year statute of limitations for prosecuting sexual assault, and stiffened the penalties on those who operate a motor vehicle and take a life while driving drunk.

"And we've enacted laws that keep criminals where they belong -- behind bars until they've paid their debt to society," the Governor said. The `Three Strikes and You're In' law mandates a life sentence without parole for anyone convicted of three violent first-degree crimes. The `No Early Release' law means that violent offenders must serve at least 85 percent of their sentence."

"And our parole reform package means that the days of criminals claiming parole as a God-given right are over," Whitman said. "The results of these efforts are not just reflected in our lower crime rate. They're also reflected in our incarceration numbers."

According to Whitman, since 1994, the number of criminals incarcerated has increased 13 percent and the average length of a prisoner's sentence has risen by eight percent. For violent criminals, sentences increased nearly 14 percent in the last four years.

South Woods Prison was built at a cost of more than \$230 million and completed on time and under budget. The 3,250-bed prison is a state-of-the-art penal institution, using sophisticated technology to increase security for both prison staff the general public.

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