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Governor Christie Sends the Message That No Life is Disposable and Announces Initiative to Help Reclaim Lives by Breaking Cycle of Crime and Addiction

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Expanded Drug Court Initiative to Provide Mandatory Treatment in 21 Counties

Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie today sent a clear message that no life is disposable by putting forward a plan of action to help New Jerseyans dealing with drug addiction reclaim their lives. The Governor's plan was first announced in his 2012 State of the State Address and reaffirmed in his Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Address when he called drug addiction a treatable disease and dedicated an additional \$2.5 million in funding. In today's announcement, Governor Christie called for expanding New Jersey's highly successful Drug Court program with mandatory treatment for non-violent, drug-addicted offenders throughout all 21 New Jersey counties. He went even further and requested legislation to identify appropriate offenders for inclusion in the process, as well as a programmatic component for the expansion of treatment services and drug court operations to meet the needs of the new client population. Today's commitment is part of Governor Christie's comprehensive re-entry initiative to reduce recidivism and provide non-violent offenders with the help they need to lead productive lives.

"The underlying cause of many crimes in our society is in many cases drug-addiction or addiction-motivated behavior and for too long our criminal justice system has left it unaddressed. Right now, New Jersey has a limited but nationally-acclaimed Drug Court program with a strong record of reducing recidivism and reclaiming lives by breaking the vicious cycle of crime and addiction. This small, yet effective program has reached only a fraction of the non-violent addicts who might be eligible to participate in it," said Governor Christie.

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Presently, drug courts in New Jersey accept approximately 1,400 new participants per year. New participants must volunteer for a sentence of drug court as opposed to incarceration. Under Governor Christie's plan, mandatory participation in a drug treatment program for a certain population of non-violent, drug-addicted offenders could be sentenced by a judge, regardless of whether they apply for admission to the Drug Court program.

"Today, I am proposing to expand this program throughout all 21 counties and allow judges to mandate drug treatment for non-violent offenders as a provision of their sentencing. This plan puts basic principles into action – that no life in our society is disposable, that drug addiction is a disease that can and must be treated, and that the biggest obstacle to dealing with addiction is denial," continued Governor Christie. "My plan will provide for treatment in a way that motivates addicted offenders to accept the rigors of rehabilitation, even though they may not volunteer for it. By doing so, we are striving to give these individuals the assistance they need to reform recurring habits in order to lead a better life and have a more productive future."

An October 2010 report prepared by the Drug Court Report, shows that the rate at which drug court graduates are re-arrested for a new indictable offense is 16% and the reconviction rate is 8%. This is compared to re-arrest rates for drug offenders released from prison that stands at 54% with a reconviction rate of 43%.

"We can continue to ignore addiction and send non-violent offenders to regular prisons, where they can interact with violent offenders and learn how to become more dangerous criminals. Or, we can instead send these non-violent addicts to highly-controlled treatment facilities where they can begin the long and difficult process of reclaiming their lives and becoming productive members of their communities," said Attorney General Jeffrey S. Chiesa.

The legislative component of the plan calls for:

- Increased identification of eligible drug addicted non-violent offenders. As part of this effort, information on drug addiction and treatment would be required to be given to those charged with second and third drug degree offenses.
- Court ordered clinical assessment to determine suitability for drug court. Pre-sentencing reports would be required to include information regarding drug addiction and recommendations regarding whether an assessment should be ordered for a defendant.
- Courts to make a finding regarding addiction for any offender having a clinical assessment. If offenders are found to be drug addicted, meeting present drug court eligibility factors and are prison bound, then those offenders would be sentenced to the drug court program regardless of their desire to enter the program.
- The court to consider a defendant's cooperation in the process of drug treatment and assessment in sentencing a defendant to encourage and leverage cooperation and participation in drug treatment programming.

The programmatic component of the expanded Drug Court program will require substantial coordination with the Judiciary, the Division of Addiction Services, Prosecutors' Offices, the Office of the Public Defender and the treatment community as a whole.

Legislation would become effective one year from enactment, but affected agencies could take any necessary

administrative action necessary to implement the program.

New Jersey is widely recognized as a national leader in reducing incidents of recidivism and reducing its prison population. The Pew Center on the States' State of Recidivism report, "The Revolving Door of America's Prisons," identified New Jersey's 11 percent recidivism decline as among the steepest declines for any state during the report's study period, from 1999-2002 and 2004-2007. Since 1999, New Jersey's prison population has declined more than 20 percent.

Just last month, Governor Christie announced his bail reform initiative that proposes a constitutional amendment to modify the right to bail in New Jersey. The move parallels the federal system and aims to provide courts with the ability keep dangerous offenders in jail and off community streets until trial preventing additional, senseless acts of violence before they occur.

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