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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR SIGNS INFANTILE AUTISM RESEARCH ACT TO PROMOTE RESEARCH INTO AUTISM DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Gov. Christie Whitman today signed into law the New Jersey Infantile Autism Biomedical Research Act, which will establish the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Infantile Autism in the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

"The council will be comprised of experts devoted to autism research and includes four members designated by autism organizations with our state," the Governor said. "The council will work to establish New Jersey's own Center of Excellence for Autism. This center will be an important new resource not only for researchers, but for those with autism and their families and caregivers as well."

"Our Center of Excellence for Autism will fund research into the diagnosis and treatment of autism and also provide information to families and individuals coping with this disease," she said.

"Infantile autism is the third most common developmental disorder in children," Gov. Whitman said. "It is more prevalent than Down's syndrome, childhood cancer, or cystic fibrosis. In New Jersey alone, it is estimated that 12,000 people have autism or an autism spectrum disorder."

"Little biomedical research has been done on autism, despite that fact that scientists consider autism to be one of the developmental disorders most likely to benefit from the latest scientific advancements," the Governor said. "Today's legislation will help get that critical research under way."

Gov. Whitman said to ensure that the most promising studies are funded, the council will rely on a Scientific Advisory Committee made up of scientists with demonstrated achievement in autism-related research.

Under the legislation, the UMDNJ, upon recommendation of the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Infantile Autism, will make awards of grants and contracts to public and nonprofit private entities to pay all or part of the cost of planning, establishing, improving and providing basic operating support for the Center of Excellence for Autism where basic and applied biomedical research, diagnosis and treatment for autism will be conducted.

The center will use the facilities of a single medical facility or higher education medical institution, or be formed from a consortium of cooperating facilities or institutions, and meet any requirements as may be prescribed by the council.

The Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Infantile Autism will consist of the president of UMDNJ or his designee; the director of the center, and the director of one other treatment center at UMDNJ devoted to biomedical research on autism appointed by the president of UMDNJ. These three members will serve in an ex-officio capacity. The council will also include four public members from autism organizations in the state, to be appointed as follows: one representative designated by New Jersey Cure Autism Now, one representative designated by the National Alliance for Autism Research, one representative designated by the Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community, Inc., and one representative designated by the Autism Autoimmunity Project, Inc. The president of UMDNJ or his designee shall serve as chairman of the council.

The Scientific Advisory Committee, to be established by the council, will include three biomedical research scientists with demonstrated achievements in autism-related biomedical research and two medical clinicians whose practice is primarily devoted to the treatment of individuals with autism. The committee will identify and make recommendations to the council regarding grants for the most promising pilot studies for biomedical research, diagnosis and treatment of autism and autism spectrum disorders and establish the procedures for soliciting research proposals and applying for grants for pilot studies.

The council will also provide a mechanism that would permit the public to obtain information, and the council to receive the public's comments, regarding the existing and planned programs and activities being conducted through the centers and pilot studies.

The bill appropriates \$1.5 million from the General Fund to the Department of State for a grant to UMDNJ for the establishment of the council. Of this amount, the council will provide \$600,000 for the center for basic and clinical research; \$600,000 to the center for training, information and continuing education programs as well as the participant research and stipends for health care professionals; \$200,000 for research pilot studies; \$50,000 for the council administrator's salary and \$50,000 to provide information and education to families, to establish a mechanism in the development of policies and programs to improve the outcomes of individuals, and establish a mechanism to share information among researchers and clinicians in the state.

The bill, S-1406, was sponsored by Senators C. Louis Bassano (R-Essex/Union) and Robert W. Singer (R- Burlington/Monmouth/Ocean) and Assembly Members Nicholas R. Felice (R-Bergen/Passaic) and Joseph V. Doria, Jr. (D-Hudson).