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PO BOX 004

CONTACT: Pete McDonough
(609) 777-2600
Laurie Facciarossa (DHS)
(609) 292-3703

TRENTON, NJ 08625

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Governor Enacts Program to Provide Health Care Coverage for New Jersey's Uninsured Children

Gov. Christie Whitman today ensured the health and well being of New Jersey's children when she signed legislation to establish New Jersey KidCare, a program that will provide health insurance coverage to more than 100,000 children from low-income working families throughout New Jersey.

"New Jersey's kids deserve our best: a solid education, a safe neighborhood, a clean environment and quality medical care, no matter what the cost," said Gov. Whitman. "And the New Jersey KidCare program will make sure that children across the state can get the medicine, see the doctors and receive the attention they need to grow up healthy and strong."

"The bill that I signed today enables us to use \$136 million in state and federal funds each year to meet the health care needs of more than 100,000 children from low-income families," said Gov. Whitman. "New Jersey KidCare is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do."

Beginning in early 1998, New Jersey KidCare will provide subsidized private health insurance coverage and other health care benefits for qualifying children from birth through 18 years of age. The program is expected to provide coverage for approximately 102,000 children who are currently ineligible for the existing Medicaid program. The program expands Medicaid to provide coverage for children of families earning up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level and provides managed care coverage for children of families earning between 133 and 200 percent of the poverty level.

The 1997 federal poverty level is \$16,050 for a family of four, thus families of four can earn up to \$32,100 and be eligible for the program.

The program will require co-payments and a premium contribution from families with incomes that exceed 150 percent of the poverty level (i.e. incomes up to \$19,995 for a family of three and \$24,075 for a family of four).

"New Jersey KidCare is one of the most exciting programs with which I've had the privilege to be associated during my three decades of Human Services experience," said Commissioner of Human Services William Waldman. "This program will touch the lives of thousands of children who would otherwise have no access to the type of affordable, quality primary health care that is vital to a child's overall well-being."

"NJ KidCare is essential to the health of our children today and tomorrow," said Commissioner of Health Len Fishman. "By treating children promptly and properly, we can make sure that minor sicknesses don't turn into tragic and costly illnesses."

The state will contribute \$47.6 million annually for New Jersey KidCare. These funds will be matched by \$88.4 million in federal funds. State funding for the program was authorized in the charity care legislation signed by Gov. Whitman last week. The program will be funded, in part, by proceeds from the newly increased tax on cigarettes and tobacco products.

The Governor encouraged families in need to call a toll free number for program and eligibility information. Interested individuals can call 1-800-701-0710. The state will launch an aggressive outreach program to provide information about the program to families, posting information at schools, healthcare facilities and social services centers.

The New Jersey KidCare program was proposed by Gov. Whitman in September in response to changes in federal law that authorized the creation of a children's health insurance program.

The legislation establishing New Jersey KidCare, S- 2269, was sponsored by Senate President Don DiFrancesco (R- Middlesex/Morris/Somerset/Union) and Senator Jack Sinagra (R- Middlesex) and Assembly Members Gerald Zecker (R- Essex/Passaic) and Marion Crecco (R-Essex/Passaic).

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