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Governor Chris Christie Signs Legislation to Help Young New Jerseyans Avoid Drug Use

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"Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs" Program Will Provide School Children with Access to Fishing and Outdoor Activities

Trenton, NJ – Encouraging young New Jerseyans to avoid the dangers of drug use by engaging in positive, safe and life-building group activities, Governor Chris Christie signed A-638, creating the "Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs" Program across the state. The program will provide students with access to extracurricular outlets that utilize New Jersey's incredible outdoor recreational assets. Established within the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of Fish and Wildlife, the statewide implementation of the "Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs" Program will also be funded through an appropriation of \$200,000 from the Drug Enforcement and Demand Reduction Fund and provide students with the opportunity to embrace positive life skills as an alternative to the pitfalls of drug abuse.

"We have a responsibility to guide young New Jerseyans away from the dangers of drug use and other illicit activities that too easily take hold of lives and tear apart our families," said Governor Christie. "The 'Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs' Program will help steer young men and women away from the pitfalls of drug abuse by utilizing our great outdoors to create educational, recreational and mentorship opportunities. I thank the sponsors of this legislation for investing in the future of New Jersey's children and young adults, as well as the Department of Environmental Protection for helping move forward with this important priority."

Established within DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife, the "Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs" Program is based on a national program developed by the Future Fisherman Foundation, and will use Division staff support to assist school districts and other public service organizations in implementing the program throughout the state. To improve and maintain the effectiveness of the program, the Division will collect and maintain data on the program and provide an annual report to the legislature. Information detailed in the annual report will include the number of participating school districts, students and municipalities, as well as data used to determine the rate of drug avoidance or incidence among students participating in the program.

"I'd like to thank Governor Christie, state legislators, and those in the Department of Environmental Protection, for their bipartisan support of a program designed as a gateway to teach youth about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle," said Anthony P. Mauro, Sr., chairman of the New Jersey Outdoor Alliance. "It is heartening to see that in spite of our increasingly sophisticated world, there remains recognition of the benefits of a 'back to basics' approach in dealing with the challenges facing our state's youth. In the end, exposure to, and understanding of, the natural world by our children is what will ultimately save it. 'Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs' is a giant step towards this end."

The legislation also appropriates funding for the "Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs" Program through the appropriation of \$200,000 from the Drug Enforcement and Demand Reduction Fund to DEP to cover the cost of implementing the program statewide, and sufficient appropriations from the Drug Enforcement and Demand Reduction Fund, or other appropriate sources, will be reserved annually to maintain the operation of the program. The Division of Fish and Wildlife will also work with educational, public safety and environmental groups, including sportsman groups and local merchants, to promote volunteerism in the form of mentoring young adults within the program and to encourage the donation of technical, material and financial assistance to the program.

Primary sponsors of the legislation include Assemblymembers Brian E. Rumpf (R-Atlantic, Burlington and Ocean), Herb Conaway, Jr. (D-Burlington), DiAnne C. Gove (R-Atlantic, Burlington and Ocean), and Nelson T. Albano (D-Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland).

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