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NEWS RELEASE

Gov. Christie Whitman today signed the following pieces of legislation:

S-1640, sponsored by the late Senator Wynona M. Lipman (D- Essex/Union) and Senator Garry J. Furnari (D-Bergen/Essex/Passaic) and Assembly Members Rose Marie Heck (R-Bergen) and Nicholas Asselta (R-Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland), increases the requirement for court and State Police reporting of statistical information concerning domestic violence incidents. The bill is one of several pieces of legislation that implement recommendations made by the Assembly Task Force on Domestic violence in a July, 1998 report. Currently, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and law enforcement officers are required to compile certain information with respect to domestic violence matters. The requirements generate statistics that allow for appropriate policy responses to domestic violence issues and provide for accountability on the part of the courts, prosecutors and police.

The AOC, with the assistance of the Attorney General and county prosecutors, is required to maintain a uniform record of all applications for relief in domestic violence matters. The record must include information about the number of criminal and civil complaints filed, the sex and relationship of the parties, and the relief sought and granted, including child custody and support. Under S-1640, the AOC must also record any specific restraints ordered by the court, along with any specific requirements or conditions imposed upon the defendant, such as counseling or psychiatric evaluations. The bill also requires the AOC to create and maintain uniform forms to record sentencing, bail conditions and dismissals in domestic violence matters. In addition, the bill expands the categories of data to be included in domestic violence offense reports which are prepared by law enforcement officers whenever they respond to domestic violence calls.

A-1989, sponsored by Assembly Members Richard H. Bagger (R- Middlesex/Morris/Somerset/Union) and Alan M. Augustine (R- Middlesex/Morris/Somerset/Union), establishes the Blue Star Memorial Highway Council in the Department of Transportation. The Blue Star Memorial Highway Council was created in 1948 to advise the State Highway Department (now the Department of Transportation) concerning the development of the landscaping, arboreal ornamentation, and incidental facilities of the Blue Star Memorial Highways. The legislation codifies the council within the permanent statutes of the state. The bill updates the council's membership to reflect current state department designations. Accordingly, two of the seven members of the council will be chosen from the Department of Transportation and the Department of Environmental Protection. Additionally, the member representing the Department of Health will be replaced by a member from the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs because the Blue Star Memorial Highway system was originally intended to serve as a living memorial to state veterans.

