

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Signs Bills Expanding NJ KidCare Program to Thousands More Children; Spends Day Touring Monmouth County

New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman today signed legislation to expand the NJ KidCare program, making affordable health insurance available to tens of thousands additional New Jersey children.

"NJ KidCare was established to ensure that uninsured children get the medical care they need," said Gov. Whitman.

"Today we are expanding the NJ KidCare program to assist hard- working families who are struggling to pay for their own individual health insurance plan. We are ensuring that New Jersey families earning the maximum annual income allowed under federal law qualify for the program. And we are increasing our efforts to contact each and every family with children who could be eligible to benefit from NJ KidCare," the Governor said.

Gov. Whitman signed the expansive health care legislation at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft during a day-long tour of Monmouth County.

The legislation, a package of four bills, is intended to increase the number of children in NJ KidCare by expanding the eligibility requirements and by expanding public awareness of the program eligibility and benefits. **S-1659**, sponsored by Senators Richard Codey (D-Essex) and Joseph Vitale (D-Middlesex) and Assembly Members Herbert Conaway (D-Burlington/Camden) and Charlotte Vandervalk (R-Bergen), removes the unintended obstacle of a six-month uninsured waiting period before becoming eligible for NJ KidCare for working families who are struggling to pay their own individual health insurance costs.

S-1758, sponsored by Senate President Donald DiFrancesco and Senator Jack Sinagra (R-Middlesex) and Assembly Members Tom Smith (R-Monmouth) and Steve Coredemus (R-Monmouth) increases the eligible income to include families making between 200 and 350 percent of the federal poverty level. Under these expanded guidelines, a family of four with an annual income of \$58,450 would qualify for NJ KidCare, up from the former limit of \$33,400.

In addition to the expansion of who is eligible for the NJ KidCare, the new legislation is intended to increase public awareness of the program.

Gov. Whitman said, "The expansion of NJ KidCare will be wasted if we don't increase awareness of the program. These bills specifically address the need for increased enrollment efforts."

S-1756, sponsored by Senate President Donald DiFrancesco and Senator Norman Robertson (R-Essex/Passaic) and Assembly Members John Kelly (R-Bergen/Essex/Passaic) and Paul DiGaetano (R-Bergen/Essex/Passaic) allows certain children who are eligible, but not yet enrolled in the program, to receive NJ KidCare benefits for needed medical services at acute-care hospitals, federally-qualified health centers and local health department facilities. The family must be evaluated in an interview and, if the family income appears to meet the qualification of up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, they are given "presumptive eligibility" for benefits. This must be followed up with a completed application and income evaluation to continue receiving NJ KidCare benefits.

S-1757, sponsored by Senate President Donald DiFrancesco and Senator Diane Allen (R-Burlington/Camden) and Assembly Members Samuel Thompson (R-Middlesex/ Monmouth) and Joseph Azzolina (R-Middlesex/Monmouth) establishes partnerships between NJ KidCare and schools, childcare organizations and health care entities to actively reach out to families to identify children eligible for NJ KidCare. The designated community organizations will receive \$25 for each household enrolled in the program. The bill provides \$75,000 to carry out the enrollment program.

The bill signing in Lincroft was one of many events the Governor attended around Monmouth County today. She began the day at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Holmdel to participate in the unveiling of a US Postal Service stamp commemorating Vietnam War Veterans.

During a stop at the Hall of Records in Freehold Borough, Gov. Whitman presented a ceremonial check for \$430 million to the Monmouth County Freeholders. The check represents a combination of school aid, municipal aid, various special appropriations, open space preservation funds and the first phase of the New Jersey SAVER property tax rebate program.

The Governor also visited the newly-constructed Aberdeen-Matawan train station in Aberdeen. The station serves 3,400 travelers daily and is one of five in the NJ TRANSIT North Jersey Coast Line slated to receive high-level platforms, accessible by stairs and ramps, to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The station project costs \$7.1 million, Ofunded by the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority and Transportation Act Fund monies. It is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 1999.

And in Allenhurst, the Governor presented a \$350,000 ceremonial check to the Deal Lake Commission for the lake restoration project. The state funds, from the 1996 bond act approved by voters for the revitalization of New Jersey's ports and lakes, will be matched by in-kind services from the Deal Lake Commission, the Colonial Terrace Protective Assoc., and Ocean Twp.

The Governor concluded the day's events visiting with local residents on walking tours, first through historic Red Bank, home of author and critic Edmund Wilson and jazz great Count Basie, and then through the 95-year-old Keansburg Amusement Park.