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NEWS RELEASE

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RELEASE: February 26 1998



GOVERNOR SUBMITS ADMINISTRATION BILL TO KEEP SEX OFFENDERS BEHIND BARS AND PROTECT NEW JERSEY NEIGHBORHOODS

Gov. Christie Whitman today submitted draft legislation to legislative leaders that will keep New Jersey's neighborhoods safe by expanding the state's ability to keep sex offenders locked up under civil commitment laws. The Governor also announced that Assembly Member Guy Talarico (R- Bergen) will sponsor the bill.

"Megan's Law was an historic first step toward keeping our neighborhoods and our children safe from sexual predators. Expanded civil commitment for sex offenders is an important next step. You have my word: we are committed to doing all that we can to make it easier to keep sex offenders locked up and harder for them to prey on our children," said Gov. Whitman.

During her State of the State address last month, the Governor called for legislation to expand the state's ability to keep sexual predators in civil commitment beyond their initial prison terms. Under Megan's Law, the state has already employed civil commitment to keep more than 80 sex offenders behind bars beyond their initial sentence.

The proposed legislation will allow the state to involuntarily commit persons who have committed sexually violent offenses and who suffer from mental abnormalities or personality disorders which make them likely to engage in repeat acts of sexual violence. The legislation extends existing statute which allows civil commitment of sex offenders classified as mentally ill to also cover persons with mental abnormalities or personality disorders who may pose a risk to the community.

The decision regarding civil commitment will be made by the court. Following the initial civil commitment, the court would be required to conduct an annual review to determine if continued commitment is necessary.

During her budget address last month, the Governor announced that \$2 million will be included in the FY 1998 budget to back the expansion in the state's civil commitment law. The funding will help provide corrections and treatment staff for up to 150 sex offenders who could be civilly committed under an expanded law.

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