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NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Christie Whitman Kicks Off NJ EASE System in Union County

Gov. Christie Whitman today announced that Union County has become the fourth New Jersey county to implement a streamlined system for seniors to receive information and services under the New Jersey Easy Access, Single Entry (NJ EASE) project. The Governor also signed legislation to establish an osteoporosis prevention program that will focus on public education and access to treatment of this disease which mostly affects seniors.

"For Union County's seniors, life is about to get a lot easier," said Whitman. "NJ EASE will help put an end to the confusion and frustration experienced by those seeking services while promoting wellness, independence, dignity and choice for New Jersey's older adults."

NJ EASE is a state initiative developed in partnership with a number of county governments to create a new and easy way for seniors and their family members to learn about services within their communities. Union County is among the first of 14 participating counties to complete the planning stage and fully implement NJ EASE.

Instead of contacting many agencies, individuals can now call one telephone number in their community to receive help in learning about and applying for services.

"NJ EASE will make it easier for the nearly 100,000 seniors who call Union County home to get the information and services they need to remain independent," said State Health and Senior Services Commissioner Len Fishman.

"Union County has worked diligently to provide far-reaching services for its senior citizens," said Freeholder Chairman Linda Stender. "We are proud the state has recognized our efforts and has made us an integral part of NJ EASE, thereby enabling us to serve our seniors even more quickly and efficiently."

Fishman called the effort to put NJ EASE in place in Union County, "a true case study in what can be accomplished when officials from the public and private sectors share a common vision and work in partnership to see that vision turned into reality."

By calling Union County's new toll-free number, 1-888-280-UCAN (8226), seniors and their families can obtain:

- Information about a wide range of vital services and programs, such as Pharmaceutical Assistance to the Aged and Disabled (PAAD), Lifeline and Medicaid
- Referrals to other agencies and help in contacting them
- Assistance in a local office or their homes to complete applications for services
- One-stop benefits screening for programs with income and resource limits

- Home visits to help with paperwork or to check on seniors who may be having trouble taking care of themselves
- In-home comprehensive assessments to determine an individual's need for supportive services
- Development of a care plan to identify and arrange for services
- The assistance of care managers to obtain and monitor services and to periodically review and adjust an individual's care plan to ensure it continues to address the person's changing needs.

Also today, the Governor signed A-891, sponsored by Assembly Members Barbara Wright (R-Mercer/Middlesex) and Francis Blee (R- Atlantic), which establishes the "Osteoporosis Prevention and Treatment Education Program" in the Department of Health Senior Services. The program will include public education and outreach, a campaign to promote prevention, education for health care professionals and a listing of providers of specialized services for osteoporosis prevention and treatment.

The bill also establishes an Interagency Council on Osteoporosis and requires the Commissioner of Health and Senior Services to report to the Governor and Legislature within 18 months and on an annual basis on the achievements of the program.

In addition to Union County, Atlantic, Morris and Ocean counties previously began serving seniors through the NJ EASE program. Bergen, Camden, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Monmouth, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, and a county soon to be named are among the other counties now planning to implement NJ EASE.

In addition to establishing a toll-free senior information and assistance telephone number, Union County has enhanced its information and assistance and care management partnerships to ensure efficient and effective services and established 11 access points for NJ EASE services.

State planning for NJ EASE is supported by a \$238,251 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant and \$400,592 in matching state money.

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