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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR VISTS COVENANT HOUSE; RECEIVES AWARD FOR HER COMMITMENT TO AIDING HOMELESS YOUTH

Gov. Christie Whitman today emphasized her commitment to aiding homeless youth when she toured the Covenant House in Atlantic City, a social service agency serving homeless youth, ages 17 to 21.

The Governor, along with Senators William L. Gormley (R- Atlantic) and Joseph F. Vitale (D-Middlesex) and Assembly Members Francis J. Blee (R-Atlantic) and Kenneth C. LeFevre (R-Atlantic), received the Covenant House's Lizzy Award for their commitment to homeless youth and support of the Homeless Youth Act. The act, signed by the Governor on September 22, appropriates \$1 million to the Department of Human Services to contract with organizations and agencies to provide street outreach, basic center shelter and transitional living programs for homeless youth.

"With this legislation, we will help ensure that all of our homeless youth get the attention they deserve," the Governor said. "The Department of Human Services will work with licensed organizations to provide street outreach, emergency shelters, and transitional living home programs to homeless youth."

"The first component, the street outreach program, takes a community-based approach to putting homeless children in touch with the people and programs that are out there to help," she said. "It will help them find the shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and counseling they need to build full, successful lives."

"The second component, our emergency shelter program, will provide homeless youth with 24-hour, seven-day-a-week access to a stable out-of-home placement. This will help us ensure that there are no children living on the street for a lack of adequate shelter," the Governor said.

"Along with a bed, these shelters will provide counseling, medical care, and educational services. And the shelters will help reunite the family when its in the child's best interests," Gov. Whitman said.

"What's more, shelters will be required to notify the Division of Youth and Family Services within 24 hours of a child's admission to determine if the child is in the legal care of that agency." "If the child is not under the care of DYFS, the shelter must notify a Family Court juvenile-family crisis intervention unit within 24 hours. This will help us make sure that once a homeless child is identified, that child gets the help and services he or she needs," the she said.

"The third component, the transitional living home program, will help prepare young people between 16 and 21 for independence and self-sufficiency. It will

help give them help with job placement, career planning, money management, and finding housing," the Governor said.

"Finally, the New Jersey Homeless Youth Act changes a current law that required homeless young people to obtain a court order or a guardian's permission before they could legally obtain emergency shelter. With this change, New Jersey joins 20 other states - including New York, Pennsylvania and Connecticut - in expressly giving homeless young people the right to seek shelter on their own," Gov. Whitman said.

"All of these components are designed to do one thing; help our homeless young people get off the streets and get on with their lives," the Governor said.

The legislation, S-1789, was sponsored by Senators Gormley and Vitale and Assembly Members Blee and LeFevre (R- Atlantic).

The Covenant House's Lizzy Award is presented to individuals who have demonstrated a strong commitment to homeless youth and to employees who have exhibited exemplary service to the agency for at least five years. The award is generally presented to Covenant House employees. The only previous non-employee to receive this award was Adrian "Bud" Foley of the Roseland law firm of Connel, Foley & Geiser for his advocacy of a \$1 million federal grant for construction of a Covenant House crisis shelter in Atlantic City.

The award statue was designed by a formerly homeless youth and represents a former Covenant House resident named Lizzy.

