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NEWS RELEASE

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

S-51, sponsored by Senators Walter J. Kavanaugh (R- Morris/Somerset) and Robert J. Martin (R-Essex/Morris/Passaic) and Assembly Member Marion Crecco (R- Essex/Passaic), creates the "Parents Education Program," a mandatory education program for all parties filing an action for divorce. The program will be designed to assist and advise divorced parents on issues concerning divorce, separation and custody and to provide the parties with a better understanding of the legal process, costs and financial responsibilities both parties would most likely face during the divorce, as well as the effect of divorce on children.

The bill embodies a recommendation in the 1995 report of the Commission to Study the Law of Divorce. Failure of a party to participate in the program would be considered as a factor by the court in making any custody and visitation determinations. The bill requires all participants to pay a registration fee of \$25, which would be deposited in the Parents Education Fund, a separate, nonlapsing, revolving fund in the state General Fund. This fund would be dedicated to the development, operation and maintenance of the Parents Education Program, which would be administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The bill allows the court to exempt a party from attending the program for good cause. It also exempts parties who are protected by or restricted by a temporary restraining order. The bill also authorizes the creation of a temporary nine-member advisory committee, appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, consisting of professionals in the area of divorce and child care as well as a custodial parent and a non-custodial parent. The committee will be required to develop a specific curriculum, determine the program length, establish guidelines and qualifications for the program moderators and develop any other necessary program requirements.

S-942, sponsored by Senators John O. Bennett (R-Monmouth) and Andrew R. Ciesla (R-Monmouth/Ocean) and Assembly Member Carol J. Murphy (R-Essex/Morris/Passaic), requires the Victims of Crime Compensation Board (VCCB) to establish maximum payment rates and service limitations for medical expenses paid on behalf of crime victims. The VCCB, which is in but not of the Department of Law and Public Safety, is authorized to pay compensation to crime victims for losses they sustained as a result of the crime. The VCCB is funded through a \$50 penalty imposed upon all criminal defendants for each crime of which they are convicted. losses to victims or their dependents. The bill requires that the VCCB adopt payment rates reflected in the medical fee schedules established by the Commissioner of Banking and Insurance for automobile insurance personal injury protection coverage. The bill prohibits a medical care provider who accepts payment at the maximum rate from the VCCB from seeking additional monies from the victim for the same services.

S-1060, sponsored by Senator William L. Gormley (R-Atlantic) and Assembly Members Francis J. Blee (R-Atlantic) and Joseph R. Malone, III, (R-Burlington/Monmouth/Ocean), provides that the district of residence for children who are placed by a state agency in a skill development home will be the present district of residence of the parent or guardian with whom the child lived prior to placement. Previously, the Department of Education considered the school district in which the skill development home is located to be the student's district of residence for funding purposes because the child's residence is considered to be the skill development home. The bill will assign the responsibility for funding to the home district of the child's parent or guardian which, but for the placement, would be responsible for educating the child.

A-210, sponsored by Assembly Members Francis L. Bodine (R-Atlantic/Burlington/Camden) and Nicholas R. Felice (R-Bergen/Passaic), and Senator John J. Matheussen (R-Camden/Gloucester), provides immunity from liability to professional engineers in certain circumstances. The bill is in response to the Supreme Court case of *Carvalho v. Toll Bros. and Developers*, 143 N.J. 454 (1996), which held a professional engineer liable for a worker's personal injury arising from the collapse of a trench at a construction site. The bill codifies the *Carvalho* decision and provides a limited immunity to professional engineers from workers' personal injury suits for which compensation is recoverable under the Workers' Compensation Act. The immunity will apply only if the engineer did not assume contractual responsibility for workplace site safety and if the engineer was retained to perform only professional services on the construction project.

AJR-29, sponsored by Assembly Members Christopher "Kip" Bateman (R-Morris/Somerset) and Peter J. Biondi (R-Morris/Somerset), establishes "Human Potential Week" to promote a greater awareness of the needs and concerns of people with disabilities and to highlight the significant contributions these individuals have made to their families, communities, and society as a whole. The resolution calls upon the Governor to annually issue a proclamation establishing the second week in May as "Human Potential Week" and to encourage appropriate activities and programs throughout the state to celebrate the week.

SJR-12, sponsored by Senator Peter A. Inverso (R-Mercer/Middlesex), designates May of each year as "Kindness Awareness Month" in New Jersey. It urges all citizens to engage in educational programs and activities to foster kindness. The resolution recognizes the role of kindness in fostering social responsibility, happiness and harmony, particularly among children. Students, teachers, and parents, as special agents of kindness, are encouraged to bring this message to young people across the state.