

Governor Christie Acts to Ensure School Districts Are Provided Comprehensive Information on Enrollment Eligibility Standards and Protections for Students

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Conditional Veto Goes Even Further to Ensure Better Compliance with the Law on Student Eligibility

Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie today conditionally vetoed A-718, recommending changes to the bill to better meet its intent of ensuring that districts are adequately reminded of their student enrollment obligations under the law and that all student protections are fully communicated to districts on a regular basis. Prior to the Governor’s recommended changes, the legislation would have required formal notice of only a single student enrollment eligibility requirement, rather than a complete list of the requirements a district must abide by.

“While I commend the sponsors’ intent to remind school districts of their enrollment obligations under the law, I believe the bill does not go far enough to ensure compliance with our laws on student eligibility standards by omitting a full list of enrollment eligibility standards. For instance, New Jersey also recognizes and protects the important rights of children to attend school regardless of race, creed, color, ancestry, or disability, among other factors,” said Governor Christie. “School districts are also obligated to follow other standards, such as domicile requirements. Rather than narrowly focus on any one single factor, the Department of Education should emphasize all student eligibility criteria in such notices to districts.”

As originally adopted by the legislature, the bill would require the state Department of Education to biannually distribute a letter to each school district reminding the district only of its obligation to provide public education to students regardless of their immigration status, consistent with the US Supreme Court’s determination on this matter 30 years ago and state regulation reflecting that opinion. State law, however, provides protections for students and standards for district enrollment practices across a multitude of student characteristics and factors that are not addressed in this legislation.

The Governor’s recommended changes in this conditional veto would require such notices to districts from the Department of Education to provide a full and complete list of student eligibility criteria to better ensure compliance with the law.

“This minor but important recommendation will ensure that school districts are adequately reminded of their existing obligations to our children, and serve as an appropriate supplement to our commitment to the education and improvement of all students,” said Governor Christie.

A PDF copy of the Governor’s conditional veto message and recommended changes [pdf 25kb]

A-718 was sponsored by Assemblymembers Marlene Caride, Gabriela Mosquera, Annette Quijano, and Ruben Ramos, and Senator Teresa Ruiz.

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