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Office of the Governor
NEWS RELEASE

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**GOVERNOR SIGNS LEGISLATION REQUIRING BACKGROUND CHECKS
FOR ALL HOME HEALTH AIDES**

Implementing an initiative she announced in her State of the State address in January, Gov. Christie Whitman today signed legislation that will better protect seniors by requiring background checks for all home health aides. The bill requires background checks for more than 50,000 workers certified before November, 1997 when legislation was enacted requiring background checks for all new home health aides.

"In my State of the State address this past January, I made a promise that I would work to enact a bill that protects all of our senior and disabled citizens who require home health care services. I am keeping my promise. With this bill we are requiring a criminal background check for every nurse aide, personal care assistant, and homemaker-home health aide," the Governor said in a ceremony at the Ocean County Vocational School in Lakewood.

"We have had a law on the books since 1997 that requires all new home health aides to undergo state and federal background checks. This law has served its purpose well, protecting seniors from criminals who might exploit the special situation of home health care and possibly put someone in danger," she said. "Until now, however, that law had not extended to the more than 50,000 home health aides already on the job."

The Governor said her proposed fiscal 2001 budget includes an allocation of \$1.1 million for the background checks. This amount, coupled with anticipated federal funds, will pay for the checks.

"This is one more way we are using our state's Prosperity Dividend to protect senior citizens who have contributed so much to New Jersey's success over the years. It also complements all of our other efforts to help seniors maintain independence at home or in the community as much as possible," Gov. Whitman said.

The Governor signed the bill at the Ocean County Vocational School before an audience that included seniors. The school offers a Culinary Arts Program which uses donated federal commodities from the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Food Distribution Program to produce prepared foods for distribution to community agencies that feed needy populations, including the elderly.

The legislation, S-116, requires criminal history record checks by the State Police for all certified nurses aides, personal care assistants, and homemaker-home health aides certified prior to November, 1997 as a condition of re-certification. In addition, the bill requires that these persons undergo a follow-up federal background check every two years as a condition of re-certification. Previous law required criminal background checks for all newly hired nurse aides, personal care assistants, and homemaker-home health aides.

The bill was sponsored by Senators Anthony R. Bucco (R-Morris), Bernard F. Kenny, Jr. (D-Hudson), Richard J. Codey (D-Essex/Union), John A. Girgenti (D-Passaic), Diane B. Allen (R-Burlington/Camden), John J. Matheussen (R-Camden/Gloucester) and Norman M. Robertson (R-Essex/Passaic), and Assembly Members Charlotte Vandervalk (R-Bergen) and Rose Marie Heck (R-Bergen).