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Office of the Governor
NEWS RELEASE

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**Governor Signs Bill Requiring Criminal Background Checks for Child Care
Center Employees**

Governor Christie Whitman today signed legislation at the Little Friends Child Care Center in Trenton to require criminal history background checks for all child care center employees.

"Today I am pleased to sign a bill that again puts the safety of our children first," said Gov. Whitman referring to the recent passage of the largest school construction plan in the state's history, another initiative that will have a positive impact on young people throughout the state.

"This bill responds to the fact that more and more families are turning to child care," said Gov. Whitman. "We owe it to them to make that a safe choice. We need to make sure that our children are in good hands."

"What's more, we are putting State dollars behind this moral commitment to our youngsters," added the Governor before mentioning that her current budget provides funding to cover the cost during the current fiscal year of providing background checks for every worker in every child care center in the state.

"New Jersey invests the most of any state in educating our children. We also lead the way when it comes to providing preschool and child care for our little ones. Today we take one more step to show our love for them - making sure they are safe and secure when they are under the care of others," said Gov. Whitman.

The bill, S-1170, was sponsored by Senators Donald T. DiFrancesco (R-Middlesex/Morris/Somerset/ Union) and Diane B. Allen (R-Burlington/Camden) and Assembly Members Charlotte Vandervalk (R-Bergen), Jack Collins (R-Salem/Cumberland/Gloucester), Barbara Buono (D-Middlesex) and Albio Sires (D-Hudson), and takes effect in 180 days from today's enactment.

Under the legislation, all child care workers in licensed child care centers will undergo thorough state and federal background checks. The legislation establishes a uniform standard for all child care workers in New Jersey.

Specifically, the bill requires that all child care center owners, sponsors, staff members and employment applicants undergo criminal history record background checks through the State Division of Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a condition of continued or new employment at child care centers statewide. No employee will be permitted to be alone with a child until the background check is completed. Staff members and employment applicants with a record of conviction for certain specified crimes will not be permitted to continue working or be hired at a licensed

child care center.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) will be responsible for the cost of processing and funding all criminal history record background checks required under the bill. For existing child care centers, checks shall be completed during their license renewal process. Checks for new employees at any child care center must be requested within two weeks after they begin employment.

The checks will cost the state around \$60 per employee - totaling about \$2.5 million for the first year and \$2.6 million in the second and third years, but dropping to \$1.5 million by the fourth year because only new employees will need to be checked at this point.

In New Jersey, there are more than 3,700 child care centers serving more than 250,000 children like the Little Friends Child Care Center where today's event was held. Little Friends Child Care Center is owned and operated by Sandcar, Inc. and parents must be employed by the State to enroll their children in this facility. This Center currently serves 68 children from six weeks to five-years old and employs about 16 child care workers. Other Little Friends' locations include Mercerville, West Windsor and the Hughes Justice Complex.

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