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*Office of the Governor*  
**NEWS RELEASE**

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Governor Christie Whitman today signed the following pieces of legislation:

**A-1292**, sponsored by Assemblyman Guy F. Talarico (R-Bergen) and Senator Anthony R. Bucco (R-Morris), confers specific authority upon the State courts to establish special needs trusts to assist disabled individuals and ensures that Medicaid eligibility is not affected by assets in the trust. The bill does not prevent the establishment of such trusts outside the courts. The bill also insures that upon the disabled person's death, funds remaining in the trust are repaid to the State in an amount equal to the medical assistance that was paid on behalf of the disabled person.

This bill was drafted in response to changes in federal law regarding special needs trusts, which are established to assist disabled individuals by paying for health-related items or services after Medicaid benefits have been exhausted.

**A-2550**, sponsored by Assembly Members Anthony Impreveduto (D-Bergen/Hudson) and Nicholas R. Felice (R-Bergen/ Passaic), amends the law governing criminal history record background checks for individuals working with the developmentally disabled in community agencies by adding a rehabilitation provision. The Governor had signed the law on January 14, 2000.

The bill provides that an individual, otherwise disqualified from employment because of a conviction disclosed by a background check, can qualify for employment if the individual affirmatively demonstrates to the agency director that he or she was rehabilitated. If the individual with the conviction were the agency director, then the agency's board would make the determination.

Also, the bill requires a criminal history record background check to be conducted at least once every two years for agency directors and their employees (as is required for State institutions and facilities for the mentally ill and developmentally disabled).

**A-2578**, sponsored by Assembly Members Charlotte Vandervalk (R-Bergen) and Francis J. Blee (R-Atlantic) and Senators Jack Sinagra (R-Middlesex) and Robert W. Singer (R-Burlington/Monmouth/Ocean), enables the New Jersey Health Care Facilities Financing Authority (HCFFA) to refinance outstanding bond indebtedness of hospitals that cease acute care operations or transition to alternative services. The Appropriations Act for the current 2001 Budget set aside up to \$8 million for this purpose.

This bill was drafted in response to recommendations made by the New Jersey Hospital Advisory Commission at the end of 1999 which found that the State's hospital industry faced a serious financial crisis because of an excessive number of underutilized beds.

**S-904**, sponsored by Senators Diane B. Allen (R-Burlington/Camden) and Joseph A. Palaia (R-Monmouth) and Assembly Members James W. Holzapfel (R-Monmouth/Ocean) and Joel M. Weingarten (R-Essex/Union) clarifies procedures with regard to the payment of filing fees by inmates in connection with appeals from administrative determinations. This bill clarifies legislative intent regarding the payment of partial filing fees by indigent inmates by requiring inmates to pay a partial filing fee to appeal administrative rulings.

**S-1116**, sponsored by Senators Henry P. McNamara (R-Bergen/Passaic) and John H. Adler (D-Camden) and Assembly Members John C. Gibson (R-Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland) and Larry Chatzidakis (R-Atlantic/Burlington/Camden), excludes federal and other public or private financial aid received by New Jersey for open space or farmland preservation purposes from the \$200 million annual appropriations cap for projects approved by the Garden State Preservation Trust. This bill amends the Garden State Preservation Trust Act.

**S-1320**, sponsored by Senators Joseph A. Palaia (R-Monmouth) and Robert W. Sinagra (R-Middlesex) Assembly Members Clare M. Farragher (R-Monmouth) and Joseph R. Malone, III (R-Burlington/Monmouth/Ocean), appropriates funds to the Department of Environmental Protection for environmental infrastructure projects. Specifically, the bill appropriates federal Clean Water Funds to the DEP for zero-interest loans to local governments and privately owned water companies for up to 50 percent of the eligible project costs for the approved projects. The bill also authorizes DEP to issue a federal hardship grant to Swedesboro Borough in the amount of \$415,000 for a clean water project. The bill, along with S-1321, comprises the annual New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Financing Program for Fiscal Year 2001.

**S-1321**, sponsored by Senators Henry P. McNamara (R-Bergen/Passaic) and Norman M. Robertson (R-Essex/Passaic) and Assembly Members Tom Smith (R-Monmouth) and Joseph V. Doria, Jr. (D-Hudson), authorizes the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Trust to make up to \$100 million in loans for environmental infrastructure projects. In addition, the bill authorizes the Trust to use unspent balances (in excess of \$44 million) from previously approved projects to finance loans for projects on the FY2001 Priority Project List. The bill, along with S-1320, comprises the annual New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Financing Program for Fiscal Year 2001.