

Office of the Governor
NEWS RELEASE

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

A-2246, sponsored by Assembly Members Joseph Azzolina (R-Middlesex/Monmouth) and Samuel D. Thompson (R-Middlesex/Monmouth) and Senators James S. Cafiero (R-Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland) and Diane B. Allen (R-Burlington/Camden), amends the current stalking law and provides for temporary restraining orders to protect children and certain adults who are victims of stalking. The legislation amends the stalking statute to provide that a person is guilty of stalking when he or she purposely or knowingly engages in a course of conduct that would cause reasonable persons to fear bodily injury to themselves or family members. By removing the "subjective fear" requirement from the state statute, which required the victim to actually be put in fear, the statute now reaches circumstances where the victim, perhaps due to age or disability, is unable to perceive or understand the threat posed by the stalker. In addition, the bill expands the statute to reach circumstances where the stalker's intent may not have been to cause fear, but where the stalker knew that his or her conduct would cause a reasonable person to fear bodily injury or death. The bill also allows the parent or guardian of a minor or mentally-disabled stalking victim to apply for a temporary restraining order to prevent the stalker from having contact with the victim. The temporary restraining order may remain in place until a conviction is secured or the parent or guardian requests that it be lifted and the court finds just cause to do so.

S-1093, sponsored by Senators Gerald Cardinale (R-Bergen) and Raymond J. Lesniak (D-Union), amends the "Franchise Practices Act" in regard to motor vehicle franchises. The bill clarifies and reinforces existing law so that motor vehicle dealers will not be drawn into costly litigation in order to protect their rights and the consumer interest in the franchise system. The bill clarifies current aspects of the law that prohibit motor vehicle manufacturers from refusing a dealer the opportunity to sell all models manufactured for that line-make. In addition, the legislation prohibits a manufacturer from opening separate service centers, except in cooperation with an existing motor vehicle franchise. The legislation provides a number of protections for motor vehicle dealers, many involving warranty issues. Currently, the "Franchise Practices Act" requires motor vehicle manufacturers to reimburse their dealers for the warranty repairs made by the dealer. Dealers are reimbursed at the rate at which they charge their customers for similar work. However, dealers have been subjected to costly litigation when manufacturers challenged the method used to calculate the retail price. The bill clarifies this along with other warranty issues by (1) defining how a dealer's rate for parts reimbursement is to be calculated; (2) extending the retail reimbursement requirement to services and repair plans administered by manufacturers; (3) requiring the manufacturer to make payment equivalent to the dealer's average percentage markup when a warranty part is delivered in bulk (engine and transmission assemblies are the exception and the markup is specified at 30 % due to high cost); and (4) placing limits on the time within which the manufacturer must pay a dealer for an audit for warranty reimbursement claims.

A-2839, sponsored by Assembly Members Joseph V. Doria, Jr. (D- Hudson) and Paul DiGaetano (R-Bergen/Essex/Passaic) and Senator Edward T. O'Connor, Jr. (D-Hudson), allows local governments to participate in the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP) in a manner that is competitive with private insurers. Local governments will be allowed to participate in the SHBP in a competitive manner by negotiating health benefits for retirees. Currently, local governments are only allowed to negotiate health benefits for retirees with private insurers. Allowing the SHBP to be part of the competitive process will allow interested local governments to receive the benefits of the state's lower administrative costs.

A-1913, sponsored by Assembly Members John S. Wisniewski (D- Middlesex) and Christopher "Kip" Bateman (R-Morris/Somerset) and Senators Joseph F. Vitale (D-Middlesex) and Jack Sinagra (R-Middlesex), requires health insurers to cover anesthetic procedures associated with dental surgery and other procedures. The bill requires health insurers and health maintenance organizations to provide coverage for dental services provided to any covered person who is severely disabled or who is a child, age five or under, for (1) general anesthesia and hospital charges or (2) a medical condition requiring hospitalization or general anesthesia for dental services, regardless of where treatment is provided. The anesthetic procedures that would be covered by this bill are procedures that would not be required on a typical, healthy, adult, but, instead, would be necessary on a person with severe disabilities or on a young child that could not otherwise sit still for the dental procedure. The bill also provides that an insurer or health maintenance organization may require prior authorization of hospitalization for dental procedures in the same manner that prior authorization is required for other covered diseases or conditions.