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Office of the Governor
NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Signs HMO Consumer Help Bill into Law

Governor Christie Whitman today signed legislation [**A-1088**] to create an HMO consumer assistance program.

"The legislation again supports my administration's commitment to creating strong HMO consumer protection measures like we did through the creation of the HMO patient's bill of rights and the HMO report card," said Gov. Whitman. "This supplemental assistance will further aid consumers in understanding the appeals process - so they will be even better equipped to challenge an HMO decision and appeal it, if that's the route they need to take."

"Many times consumers don't take advantage of the appeals process because of the complexity in understanding the bureaucracy of the process and making sense of all of the paperwork," added the Governor. "This bill will help consumers know their rights in a managed health care system and help them get the healthcare they so deserve."

A-1088, sponsored by Assembly Members Caraballo (D-Essex) and DiGaetano (R-Bergen/Essex/Passaic) and Senators Matheussen (R-Camden/Gloucester) and Sinagra (R-Middlesex), establishes the Managed Health Care Consumer Assistance Program and appropriates \$500,000 to fund it. The bill establishes the program in the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) in consultation with the Departments of Human Services and Banking and Insurance to educate and assist health care consumers about their rights in a managed health care system. In the legislation, the DHSS is directed to work with the Community Law Health Project and New Jersey Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (both independent, non-profit consumer advocacy organizations) and to operate the program on a one-year, interim basis until the DHSS creates a permanent program.