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Codey Signs Bills to Expand Voter Access, Improve Electoral Process

Bills will Move up the Date of New Jersey's Presidential Primary; Allow More Time to Register; Allow Anyone to Vote by Absentee Ballot; Require a Paper Ballot with all Votes Cast Electronically

(TRENTON) –Acting Governor Richard J. Codey today signed into law a package of bills that will improve the electoral process in New Jersey by expanding voter access and moving the state's presidential primary to the last Tuesday in February.

“Over the past eight months we have made reforms to restore accountability to state government, driven by the belief that government cannot function without the public's trust,” Codey said. “But improving the integrity of government also requires that we strengthen the electoral process itself.”

“Today we are achieving the goals I set out in the State of the State address: to improve every New Jerseyan's access, to make sure people have confidence in the voting system, and to make sure New Jersey's votes actually mean something in the presidential primaries,” Codey said.

Codey signed the four bills during a public ceremony at the Governor's Outer Office, in the State House. He was joined by bill sponsors including Senator Nia H. Gill (D-Essex, Passaic) and Assembly Majority Leader Joseph J. Roberts (D-Camden, Gloucester).

The four bills are:

A30/S550, which moves the presidential primary to the last Tuesday in February. The bill's sponsors include Senate President Codey as well as Senators Joseph F. Vitale (D-Middlesex), John H. Adler (D-Camden) and Wayne R. Bryant (D-Camden, Gloucester), and Assembly members Linda R. Greenstein (D-Mercer, Middlesex), Richard A. Merkt (R-Morris), Robert M. Gordon (D-Bergen), John F. McKeon (D-Essex) and Mims Hackett (D-Essex).

A 42 / S2387, which permits voter registration up to 21 days, instead of the previous 29 days, before an election. The bill's sponsors include Senator Wayne R. Bryant (D-Camden, Gloucester) as well as Assembly members Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-Mercer), Gerald B. Green (D-Middlesex, Somerset, Union), Jack Connors (D-Burlington, Camden) and Herb Conaway (D-Burlington, Camden).

A35 / S1133, which permits any registered voter to vote by absentee ballot if they so choose, without having to provide a reason for not being able to vote in person on the day of an election. The bill's sponsors include Senators Robert G. Smith (D-Middlesex, Somerset) and Stephen M. Sweeney (D-Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem), and Assembly members David R. Mayer (D-Camden, Gloucester), Joseph J. Roberts (D-Camden, Gloucester), John J. Burzichelli (D-Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem) and Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen).

A33 / S29, which requires that voting machines produce a voter-verified paper record for each vote cast. The bill's sponsors include Senators Nia H. Gill (D-Essex, Passaic), Shirley K. Turner (D-Mercer), Wayne R. Bryant (D-Camden, Gloucester), and Assembly members Reed Gusciora (D-Mercer), Peter C. Eagler (D-Essex, Passaic), Robert M. Gordon (D-Bergen) and Herb Conaway (D-Burlington, Camden).

Roberts said, "New Jersey's election laws are as out of date as the eight-track tape. These laws are the most ambitious changes to our election system since it was overhauled under Governor Woodrow Wilson nearly a century ago. These laws will promote access, accuracy and accountability in elections. They will strengthen the voting process and lend further credibility to future election results."

Turner said, "The American people have fought hard during our history to secure the right to vote for all adult citizens. When our constituents take the time to exercise this right, they deserve the assurance that their vote will be counted each and every time, without fail. It has become clear with the voting problems we have seen in other states, that we need to ensure that every vote is recorded on a piece of paper that can be verified by the voter before leaving the polling booth and can be manually counted by election officials if needed."

Vitale said, "The variety of issues that are debated during a Presidential campaign more closely mirror the interests that affect New Jersey's every day. New Jersey is in so many ways a microcosm reflecting the needs of the nation as a whole. In the next race to the presidency, candidates will need the support of the Garden State to cement their standing as either party's pick for the presidential nomination, if they are to truly represent the needs and wishes of the people."

Gill said, "As we move forward with more sophisticated methods of voting, we need to assure voters that their ballots are tamper-proof, and their votes will indeed be counted. A voter-verified paper trail, used in the event of a machine recount, will preserve the integrity of the voting process, and ensure that democracy does not become an unintended victim of the advance of technology."

Greenstein said, "The sad truth is that New Jersey has not been viewed by presidential candidates as fertile ground for growing support, but rather as a money tree to be shaken. New Jersey voters deserve the clout befitting a bellwether state. They deserve to have their voices heard when it comes to national politics."

Mayer said, “Voters should never have to lie about why they wish to vote by absentee ballot. Working parents whose hectic schedules may keep them from visiting the voting booth on Election Day and senior citizens who prefer filling out their ballots at the kitchen table should be given every ability to receive an absentee ballot with no questions asked.”

Congressman Rush Holt also praised the reforms, saying, “Anything of value should be auditable, especially something as precious as a vote. I applaud your commitment to ensuring that the vote of each New Jerseyan is counted in a verifiable way. I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that the results of every election in the State of New Jersey are verifiable and auditable.”