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Codey Signs Law Strengthening the State Commission of Investigation

(TRENTON)—Acting Governor Richard J. Codey today signed the bill A-1514/S-537, amending the statutes governing the State Commission of Investigation.

The new law gives the SCI greater independence, authority, and power to conduct investigations, to fulfill Codey's commitment to restore accountability to state government. Codey signed the bill during a public ceremony in the Governor's Outer Office.

As Senate President, Codey is also a primary sponsor of the bill. The others are Assembly Members Herb Conaway, Linda R. Greenstein, Peter J. Barnes, Christopher J. Connors, and Senator Joseph F. Vitale. SCI Chair W. Cary Edwards, Commissioners Kathy Flicker, Joseph R. Mariniello Jr. and Patrick E. Hobbs, and SCI Executive Director Alan A. Rockoff attended the bill signing.

The SCI consists of four Commissioners charged with investigating organized crime, government corruption and waste, fraud and abuse of taxpayer dollars. The Commission is designed to conduct fact-finding investigations, bring the facts to the public's attention through reports and public hearings, refer findings to law enforcement agencies for possible prosecution, and make recommendations on how the laws and operations of government can be improved to prevent further abuse.

"The SCI was created in 1968 when New Jersey was known as the national headquarters of organized crime. The SCI's mission was to investigate, let the public know which government officials were too cozy with the mob, and recommend ways we could make the system better by improving New Jersey's laws," Codey said.

"The SCI branched out to become the original watchdog on public officials and the public interest. Now more than ever, New Jersey needs a strong and independent SCI. And the SCI needs us to give them the tools to fulfill their mandate," Codey continued.

The new law makes a number of changes in the SCI's governing statutes. They include:

- Increasing members' terms from three years to four years – and staggering the terms to prevent abuse of the appointment process.
- Giving the SCI power to subpoena records of phone calls and other electronic

information. This change does not give the SCI power to tap wires, listen to private phone calls or read private emails – but it allows the SCI to track the numbers an individual has called or the addresses to which they have corresponded by email.

- Clarifying certain of the SCI’s powers and requirements.

“The work of the SCI is invaluable in uncovering waste, mismanagement, and fraud,” said Assemblyman Conaway. “Now, this investigatory body will have its power and teeth restored so it can go after wrongdoers and hold them to public scrutiny.”

“The SCI must be a fully armed watchdog on behalf of the state, with every means at its disposal to get its job done properly,” Assemblywoman Greenstein said. “It is unconscionable that such an invaluable body could ever have its power diminished to provide cover for political wrongdoing. Now, that mistake has been corrected.”

“Time and again, the SCI has unearthed instances of dishonesty and corruption in state government,” said Assemblyman Barnes. “With this new law, the SCI will again be a vigilant and powerful protector of the public trust.”

“One aspect of this bill that will greatly improve the fairness of the SCI’s investigative process is the provision allowing the subject of these investigations an opportunity to respond to these charges and criticisms,” Assemblyman Connors said. “The SCI performs a vital service for the state’s taxpayers through its efforts to eliminate waste, corruption and criminal activity and this legislation will allow this organization to continue its important work.”

“New Jerseyans deserve better from their elected officials than a State reputation as the corruption capital of the world,” said Senator Vitale. “The SCI was created to serve as a watchdog agency to keep politicians honest, and to ensure that elected officials operate at the highest level of governmental integrity. With the new tools that we’ve made available to the SCI through this law, the organization will be better prepared to carry out that mission.”

“This is a major milestone for government oversight and accountability, and the citizens of New Jersey should be deeply gratified for the timely action of the Governor and Legislature,” said SCI Chair W. Cary Edwards. “Thanks to these statutory changes, the SCI will be stronger and better equipped to fulfill its unique mission as an independent ‘watchdog’ that not only investigates and reveals systemic problems but also formulates and suggests practical systemic reforms.”

The bill’s full text can be found by doing a “Bill Search” for A1514 or S537 at the Legislature’s website, <http://www.nileg.state.nj.us/>.

Today’s bill signing is part of Codey’s broader effort to restore accountability and the public’s trust in government.

Codey's other accomplishments toward that goal include:

- Sponsoring and then signing into law New Jersey's statewide pay-to-play ban, one of the strongest in the nation.
- A proposed Fiscal 2006 budget with the largest investment in public accountability in recent history, with nearly \$7 million in new funding for the Commission on Ethical Standards, Office of the Inspector General, State Commission on Investigation, Office of the Public Advocate and Election Law Enforcement Commission.
- Creation of the Special Counsel on Ethics Reform, which recently completed an unprecedented, thorough audit into the ethics codes that apply to employees of the state Executive Branch. The Counsel recommended sweeping reforms that will be enacted under Codey's investment in the Fiscal 2006 budget.
- The appointment of Mary Jane Cooper as New Jersey's first Inspector General, with a mandate to root out waste, mismanagement and fraud.