

November 16, 1998

ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 1517

To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section 1, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution. I am returning Assembly Bill No. 1517 with my recommendations for reconsideration.

A. SUMMARY OF BILL

This bill requires county colleges, county vocational schools and county technical institutes to allow active members in good standing of a volunteer fire company, volunteer first aid or rescue squad, or association to enroll, tuition-free, in these institutions. Such credits need only be given on a space available basis and upon the condition that tuition paying students constitute the minimum number required for the course. The bill also provides that the spouses and the dependent children of such volunteers are entitled to the same benefit

Following each year of volunteer service performed, the individual, the spouse, or the dependent children of the volunteer may receive tuition credit of up to \$1,000, not to exceed a maximum of \$4,000 collectively over a four year service period. The bill does not prohibit county colleges, county vocational schools or county technical institutes from requiring registration and tab fees for individuals receiving tuition credits.

B. RECOMMENDED ACTION

I commend the sponsors of this legislation for recognizing the important contribution members of volunteer fire companies and volunteer first aid and rescue squads make to their communities and throughout the State. In the face of an ever increasing shortage of such volunteers, the bill will assist in retaining as well as recruiting additional volunteers.

While I am mindful of the need to support these volunteers and appreciate their invaluable contribution to the State of New Jersey, I believe that the amount of tuition credits that can be earned under the bill would place too great a burden on post-secondary institutions. Currently, tuition credits are offered to a variety of groups, including New Jersey National Guard members, senior citizens and certain unemployed workers. have been advised that New Jersey's post-

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secondary institutions are already hard pressed to meet the needs of these groups. Indeed, space is often not available for such students and to the detriment of these individuals, attendance must be delayed until drop-add periods are concluded.

To better balance the needs of the affected educational Institutions and the volunteers, I recommend that the bill be amended to provide a tuition credit of \$600 per year, and a total of \$2,400 over four years of service. to be applied collectively to the volunteers. their spouses and dependent children.

Therefore, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 1517 and recommend that it be amended as follows:

<u>Page 2, Section 1, Line 13:</u>	Delete "\$4,000" and insert "\$2400"
<u>Page 2, Section 2, Line 28:</u>	Delete "\$1,000" and Insert "\$600"
<u>Page 2, Section 2, Line 29:</u>	Delete "\$4,000" and insert "\$2,400"

Respectfully,
/s/ Christine Todd Whitman
GOVERNOR

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Attest:
/s/ John J. Farmer, Jr.
Chief Counsel to the Governor