

Office of the Governor
NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Signs Bills Cracking Down on Sex Offenders

Gov. Christie Whitman today signed a package of bills that will ensure that sex offenders receive appropriate treatment and are not released into the community if there is a likelihood they will repeat their crimes.

"Earlier this year, I made a promise to the citizens of New Jersey. I said that we should make it easier to keep still-dangerous sex offenders away from our children, even after they have served their criminal sentences," the Governor said. "Megan's Law enabled us to keep more than 80 such predators in civil commitment beyond their initial prison terms. It is time to expand that authority."

Known as the New Jersey Sexually Violent Predator Act, S-895, sponsored by Senators Robert Martin (R-Essex/Morris/Passaic) and Anthony Bucco (R-Morris) and Assembly Members Guy Talarico (R-Bergen) and Rose Heck (R-Bergen), allows the state to involuntarily commit sex offenders who suffer from mental abnormalities or personality disorders which make them likely to re-offend.

Currently, only those offenders who meet the legal definition of "mentally ill" may be involuntarily committed.

Under A-2101, sponsored by Assembly Members James Holzapfel (R-Monmouth/Ocean) and Rose Heck (R-Bergen) and Senators John Bennett (R-Monmouth) and Louis Kosco (R-Bergen), sex offenders sent to the ADTC must be willing to participate in sex offender treatment. Those sex offenders who are not amenable to the treatment will not be sentenced to the ADTC.

The bill also requires that current inmates who are no longer participating or cooperating with sex offender treatment be transferred from the center into another Department of Corrections facility.

A-2102, sponsored by Assembly Members James Holzapfel (R-Monmouth/Ocean) and Rose Heck (R-Bergen) and Senators Louis Bassano (R-Essex/Union) and Louis Kosco (R-Bergen), will make it easier to keep a sex offender incarcerated if there is a likelihood that they will violate conditions of parole.

Under the current process, the standard for parole is that the offender must only "be capable of making an acceptable social adjustment in the community." The new standards will be that the offender has had progress in sex offender treatment and that the State Parole Board has determined there is not a reasonable expectation that the offender will violate conditions of parole.

The bills implement some of the recommendations of the Joint Task Force to Study the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center.

"When I first arrived in office, I knew that many changes had to be made in order to make New Jersey the safest and best place to start and raise a family," Gov. Whitman said. "To a community, crime is like a virus. If contracted and not attacked aggressively, it will devastate families and businesses alike, as well as weaken New Jersey's image."