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Governor McGreevey Enacts Sweeping Child Welfare Reforms

Legislation Provides Better Protection to New Jersey's Most Vulnerable Children

(TRENTON) – Governor James E. McGreevey today enacted child welfare reforms that will afford children better protection, provide families greater support and reduce bureaucracy within the Division of Youth and Family Services.

“Today is a day to be proud,” McGreevey said. “These reforms will fundamentally change the culture at DYFS and the way we help and protect our children. We now have a plan that reforms the child welfare system from top to bottom – a plan that shows the death of Faheem Williams and the tragedy of Bruce Jackson did not go unnoticed.”

The Governor signed A2985 during a ceremony at St. Matthew AME Church in Orange. He was joined by Department of Human Services Commissioner James Davy and Assemblyman William Payne, one of the bill's primary sponsors along with Assemblywomen Mary T. Previte, Joan M. Voss and Nilsa Cruz-Perez.

“For the better part of a decade, New Jersey failed to protect its most vulnerable children.” Davy said. “With the support of Governor McGreevey and the Legislature, we have corrected this injustice by implementing an unprecedented reform effort. We must learn from our past mistakes and remain diligent in our efforts to fulfill our noble purpose – protecting our children and strengthening our families.”

The legislation provides the statutory changes necessary for the state to fully implement the five-year reform plan entitled “A New Beginning: The Future of Child Welfare in New Jersey.”

Under the plan, DYFS will add 1,000 new caseworkers and supervisors to bring caseload ratios in New Jersey to among the lowest in the nation. In addition, DYFS will recruit 1,000 new resource – formerly known as foster – families to serve those most in need, including adolescents.

The plan also creates a clear chain of command within DYFS adding a deputy commissioner to oversee the new Office of Children's Services. It also establishes one, centralized child abuse hotline that will screen child abuse and neglect calls 24 hours, seven days a week.

The hotline number – 1-877 NJ ABUSE – has received at least 18,500 calls were taken in July, the first month of operation.

The plan also places a renewed emphasis on prevention, creating a new Division of Prevention & Community Partnerships and calling for the expansion of much needed intervention programs addressing substance abuse, domestic violence and housing.

Under Governor McGreevey's leadership, New Jersey settled the Children's Right's litigation, created the position of Child Advocate and increased state funding for DYFS to a record \$452.3 million.

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