

Mar-21-07 Governor Signs Legislation Enhancing Counseling Support for Law Enforcement Officers Wounded in the Line of Duty

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: March 21, 2007

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Anthony Coley
Brendan Gilfillan – 609-777-2600

GOVERNOR SIGNS LEGISLATION ENHANCING COUNSELING SUPPORT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS WOUNDED IN THE LINE OF DUTY

TRENTON – Governor Jon S. Corzine today signed legislation establishing the Blue Heart Law Enforcement Assistance Program to provide counseling support for wounded law enforcement officers.

“New Jersey’s law enforcement officers have made the choice to shoulder the risk and responsibility that comes with the job of protecting our state and its people,” Governor Jon S. Corzine said. “We must make it our responsibility to ensure that these officers get the proper counseling care and support that they need if they are wounded in the course of performing that task.”

The bill expands an existing law enforcement officer crisis intervention services program that is maintained by the Department of Personnel to include law enforcement officers wounded in the line of duty. The bill gives the program authority to refer participants to group therapy, peer counseling, and debriefing. Additionally, the legislation authorizes the Personnel Commissioner to develop rules and regulations to establish a confidential registry of wounded officers. The legislation takes effect immediately.

The legislation (S1374/A2878) was sponsored in the Senate by Senators Ron Rice (D-Essex) and Fred Madden (D-Camden/Gloucester). It was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblypersons Peter J. Barnes (D-Middlesex), Jeff Van Drew (D-Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland) and Linda Greenstein (D-Mercer/Middlesex).

“Without question, the job of a law enforcement officer can be dangerous, and sometimes these brave men and women are injured on the job,” said Senator Rice, D-Essex. “The road to recovery can be a painful, confusing and perhaps frightening one, but it can more easily be navigated with help from their own.

These law enforcement officers risked their own lives for us, and we need to see that they are taken care of and given all the help needed to fully recover. The new program will provide wounded law enforcement officers with peer counseling, debriefing, and therapy as part of a coordinated support plan."

"As it stands today, the 24-hour toll-free crisis hotline receives calls from law enforcement and sheriff's officers who have been involved in any incident that caused depression, anxiety, stress, emotional trauma, or disorder for the officer," said Senator Madden, D-Camden and Gloucester. "The operators who will answer the calls will be trained in counseling services and provide referrals to officers who need further counseling services. It's important that we provide counseling for wounded officers because there comes a time when people need a place to turn for help in overcoming tragedy."

"The services the 'Blue Heart Law Enforcement Assistance Program' will provide are essential to helping law enforcement personnel cope with the physical and mental trauma associated with being wounded in the line of duty," said Assemblyman Barnes, Jr. (D-Middlesex), chairman of the Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee and a retired FBI special agent.

"First responders who are trained to lay their lives on the line to protect the public's safety will now have someplace to turn when they themselves are the ones in jeopardy," said Assemblyman Van Drew (D-Atlantic).

"The people who work every day to protect our lives now have a safety net to help protect theirs when injuries received in the line of fire become too much to handle alone," said Assemblywoman Greenstein (D-Middlesex).