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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 11, 2007

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GOVERNOR OUTLINES REENTRY ASPECT OF CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY

*Names retired Chief Justice to reform committee charged
with evaluating sentencing, corrections and parole practice and policy*

CAMDEN – Governor Jon S. Corzine today outlined the third phase of his three part plan to combat crime and create safer streets and neighborhoods throughout New Jersey. This component of the strategy will further public safety by helping former prisoners become productive members of their community and deter them from falling back into a life of crime.

In addition, the Governor also announced a Government Efficiency and Reform (GEAR) Corrections/Sentencing Task Force that will be chaired by retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Deborah Poritz. The Task Force will be charged with examining corrections and sentencing practice and policy with a particular focus on assessing the extent to which they contribute to recidivism reduction and represent an effective and efficient use of state resources.

“The plan I am unveiling today is an aggressive, innovative and comprehensive approach to addressing this issue,” Governor Jon S. Corzine said. “By focusing on the factors that can help prevent recidivism, such as education, treatment, housing, gainful employment and healthcare, we can help to reestablish those who have gone astray and in turn create safer communities.”

According to recent studies, every year in New Jersey approximately 14,000 adult inmates and 1,600 juvenile offenders are released from correctional facilities. Unfortunately, many of these individuals fall back into a life of crime shortly after release. In fact, 65 percent of adults released will be re-arrested within five years and 37 percent of juveniles will return to correctional facilities within two years.

“The overwhelming majority of our inmate population will be released into the community at some point,” said NJDOC Commissioner George Hayman. “Our initiatives at the Department of Corrections, in tandem with the other components of Governor

Corzine's Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods, will help more ex-offenders to transform themselves into productive, law-abiding citizens."

"This re-entry plan is a necessity in our fight for safer neighborhoods. Ninety-seven percent of incarcerated offenders will return to New Jersey communities," said Parole Board Chairman Peter J. Barnes. "That alone shows the importance of intensifying our partnerships across State government, to prevent new crimes and victims, and protect our families. We applaud Governor Corzine for his steadfast leadership and engagement of re-entry issues."

To begin the process of implementing and evaluating a multi-department collaborative approach to reducing recidivism, the state will launch a demonstration project. The project will provide comprehensive reentry services that begin at incarceration and continue after release. These services will be provided to a test group of 1,300 inmates who will be returning to the cities of Newark, Camden and Trenton.

Outside of the prison walls a broad range of state agencies will work together to ensure that when an inmate's sentence ends, that inmate is ready to become a law abiding member of society. Upon admission, each inmate will be individually assessed to determine their needs and risks of re-offense. Each inmate will also be assigned a job coach to who will assist with job placement and remain involved after placement to assist with any on-the-job problems. This training will continue throughout their period of incarceration. Inmates will also undergo a comprehensive reentry course known as the Successful Transition and Reentry Series or STARS focusing on employment readiness, and job interviewing skills. With help from the Department of Community Affairs and the Parole Board, the project will ensure that ex-offenders have temporary housing while they work with assigned job coaches to gain employment.

Among recently released youth reentering society, the most likely time for recidivism is in the first months after release. To ensure a support for juvenile offenders the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) will establish a pre-release center at the New Jersey Training School for Boys. During this pivotal time in the youth's life, family support is critical in order to ensure a successful transition home. While the JJC does give families the opportunity to be involved in the youth's discharge planning meetings, these meetings are often thwarted by long travel distances. To eliminate this problem the JJC is outfitting each of its 27 Community Based Transitional Services Offices with video conferencing, so that parents can participate in the meetings from their local office.

While breaking this cycle of recidivism is not easy, the key factor to success is recognizing that reentry is not solely the responsibility of the corrections system. Successful reentry programs involve collaborative efforts between agencies that can meet educational, treatment, housing employment and healthcare needs for offenders during incarceration and in their preparation for reentry into society. To assist in the collaboration between each of the agencies providing these services, the Governor will create a Reentry Coordinating Council and the Attorney General will appoint a full-time director to oversee the state's reentry efforts.

Education and job skills have been strongly correlated to reentry success upon release. The JJC will work with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to

establish one-stop career centers in all JJC facilities for use by inmates who will turn 18 prior to their release. These centers will support job readiness, career exploration and job placement.

“While employment is one of the most effective antidotes to crime and recidivism, it also makes a real difference for the employers who hire these workers and for our state’s economy,” said Labor Commissioner David J. Socolow. “When we help workers overcome barriers to employment, it puts talented people into productive jobs, it helps employers thrive and it supports our state’s economic growth.”

In addition, the JJC will also partner with outside organizations, such as unions, community colleges and vocational schools. This will allow youths to begin training in certification programs to earn a degree in high demand occupations such as barbering and cosmetology, culinary training and utility technology. Youths taking advantage of these opportunities while residing in JJC facilities will continue their training upon release.

One example of the hurdles that can be overcome through collaboration involves the issuance of a valid photo ID. Many times the inability to obtain a driver’s license or state identification card hinders an ex-offender’s ability to secure housing and employment. With this in mind the Governor called on the Department of Corrections and the Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC) to find a way to alleviate the problem. As a result of this coordination, offenders can now more easily obtain a photo identification card from the MVC when they are discharged.

The Legislature is an important partner in the fight against violent crime. In order to enhance the employability of previously convicted offenders, the Administration will work with the Legislature and interested stakeholders to provide measured relief from collateral sanctions in appropriate cases. Additionally, with the Attorney General and the Legislature, the Governor will also call for a broadening of the successful drug court program to allow more individuals to undergo treatment in lieu of imprisonment, thus breaking the cycle of addiction and criminal activity. The Administration will also explore allowing judicial discretion in imposing or remitting certain fines and penalties and allowing expungement of records in a broader variety of cases for ex-offenders and juveniles who have successfully reintegrated into society.

The Governor’s crime strategy takes a comprehensive approach, addressing issues of enforcement, prevention and reentry with an emphasis on gang violence and recidivism. The strategy follows several fundamental principles. First, every component will use data and analysis to both identify problems and eliminate them. Second, the state will serve in a support role to help identify problems and assist communities in applying appropriate solutions. Third, involved parties must communicate fully with one another in the development, delivery and assessment of strategies and programs. Finally, all programs will be critically evaluated through data driven analysis and adjusted appropriately to ensure maximum effectiveness. This reentry component of the Governor’s strategy will help to ensure ex-offenders have the skills necessary to reenter society without falling back into a life of crime.

The tactics will be increasingly effective when implemented along side the initiatives outlined in the recent enforcement and prevention plans presented over the past two days by Governor Corzine.

Additionally, the Governor named the following individuals to serve on the previously mentioned GEAR Corrections/Sentencing Task Force:

Deborah Poritz, Chief Justice. (Retired)
John Degnan, Chubb Corporation (former Attorney General)
Dr. Bill Rogers, Rutgers University
Mark Murphy, Fund for New Jersey
Hazel Gluck, MBI-GS.
Ed Stier, former Director of Criminal Justice
Ralph Rivera (former State Police Major/JJC administrator; current Under Sheriff Bergen County)
Paula Dow, Essex County Prosecutor
Prof Eddie Glaude, Princeton University
Dr. Anne Piehl, Rutgers University
Kathleen DiChiara (Founder & Director, Community FoodBank)
Dan Lombardo (President & CEO, Volunteers of America)
Darryl Hooper, Tully House, New Brunswick
Adam Graycar, Dean, Rutgers School of Criminal Justice
George Hayman, (with Assistant Commissioner Peter Roselli)
Peter Barnes (with ED Joe Shields)
Anne Milgram (with AAG Ron Susswein)
Michellene Davis, Acting Treasurer
Honorable Philip Carchman, Director Administrative Office of the Courts
Justice James Coleman (Retired), Porzio, Bromberg and Newman
Larry Lustberg, Gibbons, DelDeo in Newark

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