



To: Probation Association of New Jersey

From: Elizabeth A. Meyers
Capital Impact Group

Date: November 22, 2009

Re: November 2009 Legislative Report

As the membership is aware, New Jersey's next Governor will be Republican Christopher Christie who will take the oath of office on January 19, 2010. The Democratic Party will retain control of the General Assembly at a 47 to 33 margin while the Senate, which was not up for re-election this year, will maintain a 22 to 19 democratic majority.

The current Legislature still has some unfinished business to tend to in the next couple months – commonly called the “lame duck session.” On Monday, November 23, 2009, the State Senate and General Assembly will return to begin this brief but likely very busy part of the session.

It is important to note that both the State Senate and General Assembly will vote on that same day to choose a new Senate President and Assembly Speaker for the coming two years. While leadership will be chosen this week, these individuals would not take their respective helms until the Legislature is sworn in on January 12, 2010. These individuals will then determine committee chairmanships, assignments and other posts.

There has been much speculation about topics that will be under consideration in the remainder of the lame duck session: helping offenders post-incarceration; finishing Speaker Roberts' agenda on autism; same-sex marriage; medical marijuana; local consolidation and shared services; and others top the list. Leaders from both houses have pledged to avoid outrageous spending as had been done during previous transition/lame duck periods.

We continue to strive to get the transfer legislation heard and voted on during the lame duck session, however, timing is a concern since there are few committee hearing and voting session dates. In addition, some members of legislative leadership have said that they are focusing on finishing up bills that have had some legislative activity whereas our transfer bill has not been voted out by either committee yet. If we are not able to have the bill supported this session, we will focus on having the bills introduced in both houses in January under the new Legislature. Our main legislative advocates have been re-elected and will return in January.

Under a Christie Administration, PANJ may have a better chance to address some of its issues with the Executive Branch. If members have not done so already, we urge them to review Governor-elect Christie's candidate questionnaire which is posted on the website. His responses were very much in line with PANJ's legislative priorities.

On Monday, the Senate Judiciary Committee will vote on the drug-free school zone measure that will allow courts to place certain drug offenders under probation. Essentially the bill allows for greater judicial discretion. We will be supporting the measure while raising concerns about how this bills and other may add to the caseload of probation officers. It is important that we continue to raise the issue of the burden on probation officers.

With respect to the gubernatorial transition, Governor-elect Christie has announced the leadership team of the committee which consists of about a dozen of his closest allies. Traditionally, topic area committees are then convened and asked to provide reports to the new governor within a month or so of his taking office. Former state attorney general David Samson will chair the subcommittee on law and public safety.

In particular, we are concerned about the possibility of the new governor declaring a financial state of emergency which would impact rules governing layoffs of state employees. During the gubernatorial campaign, Mr. Christie did support the concept of reducing the size of the state workforce. How that plan may go into effect will be discussed likely after he takes office. The crux of the attention thus far has been on how the new Administration will close a potential \$8 billion deficit in the current recession. We anticipate an extraordinarily difficult budget year and cuts to the size or state employees, pensions and benefits for state employees may very likely be looked at to close the budget hole.

Please feel free to reach out to PANJ leadership if you have any additional questions regarding our legislative agenda or program.