To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 2866 with my recommendations for reconsideration.

This bill would establish a State Mental Health Facilities Evaluation Task Force ("task force"). Under this bill, the task force is required to study a wide range of issues related to the care and cost of persons who are currently patients in State psychiatric facilities, and to develop a plan that will ensure that the current and long-term needs of these patients are met in the setting most appropriate to their individual circumstances. In this regard, the task force would be charged with reviewing all relevant past and current patient data for the State psychiatric facilities, and examining issues related to care for persons with mental illness throughout New Jersey. The task force would be comprised of 21 members and would be required to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor, and the Legislature, no later than February 1, 2011.

I support the concept of the bill which provides for a study and assessment of New Jersey’s mental health facilities. I do, however, have concerns with the scope of this task force as it would require significant resources and duplicate efforts recently performed by a Governor’s Task Force on Mental Health established pursuant to Executive Order No. 1 (2004). I am advised by the New Jersey Department of Human Services ("DHS") that the Governor’s Task Force on Mental Health conducted a thorough examination of New Jersey’s mental health system and the task force established under this bill would largely duplicate that effort. Consequently, I believe the purpose of the task force should be narrowly tailored to focus solely on a
plan prepared by the Department of Human Services to close Senator Garrett W. Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital.

In light of our State’s limited resources, and the analysis conducted recently by the Governor’s Task Force on Mental Health, it would be more appropriate for this task force to limit its scope to a careful review and assessment of the Department’s plan, and the plan’s impact on New Jersey’s State psychiatric hospital system.

Accordingly, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 2866 and recommend that it be amended as follows:

Page 2, Section 2, Lines 25-37: After “shall be to” delete “study a number of specified issues relating to the care and cost of persons who are currently patients in one of the State psychiatric facilities and to develop a plan for the effective functioning of these facilities that will ensure that the current and long-term needs of these patients are met in the setting most appropriate to their individual circumstances, to which end the task force, in accordance with the provisions of subsection c. of this section, shall review all relevant past and current patient data for the State psychiatric facilities and examine those issues which serve the purpose of the task force and relate to the State psychiatric facilities, short-term care facilities, county psychiatric facilities, and community-based care for persons with mental illness throughout New Jersey” and insert “review and assess the viability of the Department’s “Plan for the Closure of the Senator Garrett W. Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital,” and its impact on New Jersey’s State psychiatric hospital system”

Page 2, Section 2, Line 39: After “at a minimum” insert “, advise the Department on the following issues”

Page 2, Section 2, Lines 40-43: After “(1)” delete “evaluate the current and long-term
needs for inpatient psychiatric beds in New Jersey, including those in the State psychiatric facilities, short-term care facilities, and county psychiatric facilities” and insert “the plan’s consistency with the United States Supreme Court Olmstead decision and the Department’s July 2009 Olmstead settlement agreement”

Page 3, Section 2, Lines 4-7:
After “(4)” delete “assess the long-term psychiatric care needs of special populations, including, but not limited to, the geriatric, forensic, and culturally/linguistically diverse populations, and persons with developmental disabilities” and insert “whether the State hospital system can accommodate patients with forensic
Page 3, Section 2, Lines 8-14:

After "(5)" delete “compare the readmission rates at State psychiatric facilities, short-term care facilities, and county psychiatric facilities, by category of facility, during Fiscal Year 2010 with the readmission rates for those facility categories during the prior three fiscal years, and compare the rate of referrals for treatment from screening services during Fiscal Year 2010 with the rate of referrals during the prior three fiscal years;” and insert “whether the plan adequately examines the allocation of State resources between the State hospital and community system of care, while considering how to yield the most savings from the State hospital system; and”

Page 3, Section 2, Lines 15-17:

After "(6)" delete “analyze and estimate projected cost savings that may be realized if ancillary services at the State psychiatric facilities are outsourced;” and insert “the impact on other State and private agencies that share state-owned campuses, as well as the impact on area hospitals and the community mental health system.”

Page 3, Section 2, Lines 18-30:

Delete “(7) provide a complete analysis of the costs of caring for patients at all State psychiatric facilities, including, but not limited to, a comparison among the State psychiatric facilities of their respective costs of care; staffing ratios; overtime costs; and costs of renovations and capital expenses projected over the next five years, including the total cost of bringing Ancora Psychiatric Hospital into compliance with federal standards; (8) examine the feasibility of partial closures at each State psychiatric facility and actions needed to allow for utilization of the most modern facilities; and (9) analyze The Joint Commission survey results for each of
the State psychiatric facilities and the cost-effectiveness of making changes recommended by The Joint Commission.”

Page 3, Section 2, Line 43: After “county” insert “mental”

Page 3, Section 2, Line 43: After “administrator;” insert “one person who is a county Human Services Director;”

Page 3, Section 2, Line 48 through Page 4, Section 2, Line 2: After “New Jersey;” delete “one person appointed upon the recommendation of a New Jersey affiliate of Mental Health America other than the Mental Health Association in New Jersey;”

Page 4, Section 2, Line 6: After “New Jersey Psychiatric” insert “Rehabilitation”

Page 4, Section 2, Line 46: After “contain” insert “an analysis of the issues set forth” and delete “the plan provided for”

Page 4, Section 2, Line 47: After “subsection” delete “b.” and insert “c.”

Respectfully,
/s/ Chris Christie
Governor

[seal]

Attest:
/s/ Jeffrey S. Chiesa
Chief Counsel to the Governor