To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 3659 (Fourth Reprint) (Corrected Copy) without my approval.

As is widely known, New Jersey already has the second strictest gun laws in the United States as reported by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. Controlling violence in our communities, however, demands that we continue to evaluate our laws to make certain that fundamental rights and public safety are equally respected. To that end, in early 2013, the NJ SAFE Task Force set forth a comprehensive and common sense plan to strengthen New Jersey’s existing gun laws by, among other things, responsibly expanding the State’s already stringent gun laws in certain key areas. One recommendation was to limit future sales of one specific type of firearm: the Barrett 50 caliber long-range rifle. Their proposal was a narrowly crafted, prospective limitation.

This bill, however, goes well beyond that recommendation and would instead criminalize the ownership of a whole class of firearms that are technically capable of firing any ammunition of 50 caliber or greater. Indeed, this legislation would ban many of the firearms currently and lawfully used by competitive marksmen for long-range precision target shooting that, due to their size (approximately four to five feet in length) and weight (approximately 35 pounds), are not used by criminals. Tellingly, the Legislature points to no instance of this class of firearms being used by even a single criminal in New Jersey. The wide scope of this total ban, therefore, will not further public safety, but only interfere with lawful recreational pastimes.

Moreover, while the bill purports to allow current owners of these guns to continue their possession, drafting errors in the bill actually eliminate all lawful possession of the firearms in this classification. As a result, I am advised by the Office of the
Attorney General that this bill would instead impose criminal liability on all current owners of these weapons, including those individuals who had properly registered their guns with law enforcement officials.

As Governor, and the former chief federal prosecutor for our State, I recognize that the threats to our safety and security demand vigilance, deterrence, and a tireless enforcement of our criminal laws. This bill, however, will not further our collective fight against crime, but serve only to confuse law-abiding gun owners with the threat of imprisonment for lawful recreation. I cannot approve of that result, and I encourage the Legislature to instead take immediate action on the dozens of commonsense improvements I have proposed that will truly deter criminals.

Accordingly, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 3659 (Fourth Reprint) (Corrected Copy) without my approval.

Respectfully,

/s/ Chris Christie

[seal]
Governor

Attest:

/s/ Charles B. McKenna
Chief Counsel to the Governor