To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 1210 with my recommendations for reconsideration.

The New Jersey “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” (“SNAP”), a joint federal-state partnership, provides thousands of lower-income individuals and families in New Jersey access to important food and nutrition supplies. Under federal law, individuals who have an actual energy expense may be eligible for additional SNAP benefits. For ease of administration, federal law authorizes SNAP enrollees to receive enhanced SNAP benefits when provided a benefit from another joint federal-state partnership, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”). LIHEAP distributes heating and cooling assistance to eligible households. To be eligible for LIHEAP benefits, individuals must be able to show some sort of actual energy expense.

This bill is identical to legislation I absolute vetoed last session, seeking to allow individuals to receive energy assistance benefits without regard to whether they can demonstrate actual heating or cooling expenses. This would be fraud and the Obama Administration has issued a directive that the practice advocated by this bill is strictly prohibited by federal law.

Since taking office, my Administration has enhanced the SNAP program by significantly increasing program eligibility to allow more individuals and families access to SNAP benefits. While I fully support the SNAP program and common sense reforms to increase eligibility and maximize benefits, I cannot sign
into law a practice deemed illegal by the federal government and prohibited specifically by the Obama Administration.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge the concern with wanting to maximize benefits for those individuals most in need and ensuring that energy assistance recipients receive the amount necessary to qualify for additional SNAP benefits under federal law. Therefore, I am recommending that this bill be amended to guarantee to those individuals eligible for energy assistance under the LIHEAP program a minimum $21 benefit, to ensure they are able to maximize the SNAP benefits available to them.

Doing this in a lawful way is paramount; breaking federal law, even in the name of obtaining additional federal benefits, is not something anyone in this government should permit.

Accordingly, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 1210 and recommend that it be amended as follows:

Page 2, Title, Line 1: Delete “nutrition and”

Page 2, Section 1, Line 9: Delete “benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance” and insert “low-income home energy assistance benefits issued under the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), established pursuant to Pub.L. 97-35, Title XXVI (42 U.S.C. s.8621 et seq.)”

Page 2, Section 1, Line 10: Delete in its entirety


Page 2, Section 1, Line 12: Delete “in order to”

Page 2, Section 1, Lines 13-17: Delete in their entirety

Page 2, Section 1, Line 18: Delete “that were in place as of July 1, 2013”

Page 2, Section 1, Line 19: Delete “Low Income”

Page 2, Section 1, Line 20: Delete “Home Energy Assistance Program (“

Page 2, Section 1, Line 20: Delete “), established pursuant” and insert “program”
Page 2, Section 1, Lines 21-22: Delete in their entirety
Page 2, Section 1, Line 23: Delete “applicable”
Page 2, Section 2, Line 28: Delete “Commissioner of Human Services, in consultation with”
Page 2, Section 2, Line 29: Delete “the”

Respectfully,

/s/ Chris Christie
Governor

Attest:

/s/ Thomas P. Scrivo
Chief Counsel to the Governor