

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR **ASSEMBLY, No. 889**

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: APRIL 4, 2016

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 889 ACS.

This bill revises eligibility restrictions for receiving general assistance benefits under the Work First New Jersey program for persons who have been convicted of an offense involving the use, possession, or distribution of a controlled dangerous substance.

Currently, persons convicted of offenses involving the use or possession of a controlled dangerous substance must enroll in or complete a licensed residential (inpatient) drug treatment program to be eligible to receive general assistance benefits. The bill permits enrollment in, or completion of, a licensed outpatient drug treatment program to satisfy this requirement.

The bill removes the lifetime ban on eligibility for general assistance benefits for individuals who have been convicted of offenses involving distribution of a controlled dangerous substance. The bill makes these individuals subject to the same requirements for drug treatment as individuals with convictions related to drug possession or use.

The bill clarifies that an individual who has a past drug conviction may receive general assistance benefits without enrolling in or completing a drug treatment program if either: (1) an appropriate treatment program is not available; or (2) the person is excused from enrolling in a treatment program for good cause pursuant to regulation. Such exemptions from the treatment requirement are currently provided by regulation, codified at N.J.A.C.10:90-18.6(c).

As reported, this bill is identical to Senate Bill No.601 SCS, as also reported by the committee.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) estimates that this bill will increase State expenditures by a minimum of \$3.9 million annually. This estimate is based on fiscal year 2014 information presented by the Department of Human Services during the fiscal year 2016 budget process that 1,381 general assistance claims denied for drug distribution convictions. The department further estimated that if these 1,381 claims received general assistance for an entire year the

estimated cost would be \$2.3 million in basic general assistance payments and an additional \$1.6 million in emergency assistance.

The bill may also result in minimal increases in expenditures by the county welfare offices for increased administrative costs, a portion of which will be reimbursed by the State. The amount of this increase or the State contribution to the increase cannot be quantified.

The bill may also increase the number of individuals who are eligible for rehabilitation programs funded by the State through the Substance Abuse Initiative.