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JOHNSON / DeANGELO / EVANS / CONAWAY / COUTINHO **BILL TO PROMOTE FOOD PANTRY DONATIONS NOW LAW**

Bill creating check-off for food pantry donations signed by Gov. Corzine

(TRENTON) – Legislation sponsored by Assembly members Gordon Johnson, Wayne DeAngelo, Elease Evans, Albert Coutinho and Herb Conaway to address recent shortages and closings at food pantries was signed into law Tuesday by Gov. Jon S. Corzine.

The law establishes the “Community Food Pantry Fund” in the Department of the Treasury and allow taxpayers to voluntarily donate a portion of their income tax refund to it..

The bill passed the Assembly in October and the Senate in June.

“The global economic meltdown means hunger isn’t being limited to the poor,” said Johnson (D-Bergen). “New Jersey is a generous state, and we can and should make it easier to spread that generosity and do whatever we can to ensure no one in this state goes to bed hungry.”

“The global economic crisis hit our state hard and may get worse,” said DeAngelo (D-Mercer). “People who never thought they would ever visit a food pantry are now relying on them to put food on the table for their families. These are tough times, and anything we can do to make it easier for people to help those less fortunate is a good thing.”

Money donated to the fund will be distributed to community food pantries through the state’s food purchase program. All the money is to be used exclusively to buy food.

“More and more people are struggling just to get by,” said Evans (D-Passaic). “The combination of higher grocery bills and a colder winter could push some over the brink. We can’t let that happen. Everyone deserves to be able to feed their family.”

State statistics from earlier this year estimated 250,000 new clients were seeking help from New Jersey's food banks. That represented a 25 percent increase, and that increase came with a 20 percent decrease in food supplies and donations.

"Need is rising just as many are finding it difficult to give," said Coutinho (D-Essex). "This plan will make it easier for those fortunate enough to be able to give to help those who need it most, and that's a good thing."

"The global economic meltdown has clearly brought tough times to many New Jerseyans," said Conaway (D-Burlington/Camden). "This is a simple but gracious and decent step that will help ensure those hit hardest by this crisis won't go hungry."

The law also allows taxpayers interested in animal population control to donate to a Cat and Dog Spay/Neuter Fund in the Department of Health and Senior Services, which funds a low cost spaying and neutering program.

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