

Mental Health Proposals from Acting NJ Gov Codey

In his Tuesday, January 11, State of the State address, acting Gov. Richard J. Codey proposed: "a \$200 million dollar housing trust fund for individuals with mental illness and other disabilities... forgive up to \$20,000 dollars in student loans for any college graduate who works in a state, county, or non-profit mental health or social service agency."

Gannett State Bureau, Trenton, Wed 12 Jan 2005

Text of State of the State address

Following is the full text of the State of the State address delivered Tuesday by acting Gov. Richard J. Codey. The speech ran roughly 41 minutes and was interrupted by applause more than 40 times(full article (<http://www.courierpostonline.com/news/southjersey/m011205i.htm>)):

"Reverend Clergy, Mr. Speaker, Madam Chief Justice, justices of the Supreme Court, members of our Congressional delegation, members of the Legislature, members of the Cabinet, Governors DiFrancesco and Florio, honored guests and fellow New Jerseyans.

"We have witnessed nature's fury on a historic level. Millions of lives have been devastated in Southeast Asia. Violence in Iraq and Afghanistan continues. Our servicemen and women have spent their holidays in harm's way, so we can spend ours safely at home...

"Now in my first two months in office, I have worked hard to demonstrate that working together, we can make a fresh start. Together, we are building something *new*, right here in New Jersey. "We brought the struggles of the mentally ill to the forefront of the public's attention...

"For too long we have swept the problems of mental illness under the carpet and hoped they would go away. Well, that is not going to continue. Not on my watch.

"The problems of mental illness are difficult and expensive. They're not the type of issues we champion at our fundraisers or in our campaign brochures. But how we handle the challenges of mental illness will speak volumes about how we handle ourselves as human beings. Now one in every five New Jersey residents will suffer from a mental illness in their lifetime.

"There are some who have said that mental health is my personal agenda. Now let me make it clear. I couldn't be prouder of the dignity and courage my wife has shown through her struggles and her advocacy. (Standing ovation.) But this is not my agenda - it's everyone's agenda. And if it's not, well then it should be!

"Individuals with mental illness, they're our brothers and our sisters, our mothers and our fathers. They're our sons and our daughters, our neighbors, our colleagues. And, yes, our husbands and our wives.

"And they all deserve better.

"To begin with, their basic need for decent housing is not being met. There are 8,000 chronically homeless people in New Jersey, the vast majority of whom suffer from mental illness. Fifty percent of

adults with severe mental illness live at home with their aging parents.

"And the wait for housing for an individual in the state system can be five years. The housing shortage destroys their quality of life. It puts unnecessary and extraordinary costs on the citizens of this state. And it makes their recovery from mental illness even harder.

"Meeting this crisis has been a top priority of the Governor's Task Force on Mental Health. And so today, I am proposing a \$200 million dollar housing trust fund for individuals with mental illness and other disabilities.

"This will help create 10,000 affordable places to live over the next 10 years. It will bring decency to the lives of individuals with mental illness. And it will bring relief to their families who have cared for them. And it will let New Jersey begin to do better.

"Now our mental health facilities are facing a personnel crisis. These jobs are difficult and salaries start as low as \$25,000 a year. On average, 38 percent of recent college graduates in community-based provider agencies will leave their job after just one year.

"Now if we can't retain quality people then we can't provide quality care. So today I am proposing a new incentive to attract and retain mental health workers. The state will forgive up to \$20,000 dollars in student loans for any college graduate who works in a state, county, or non-profit mental health or social service agency.

"Now these are only two initial recommendations from the Mental Health Task Force, and I look forward to their full report in March.

"Now postpartum depression is a very real and very serious problem for many mothers. It can happen to a first-time mom or a veteran mom. It can occur a few days or a few months after childbirth. It leaves mothers feeling sad, anxious, confused and afraid.

"For too long, it has been difficult for women to talk openly about this form of depression, and the medical community has been slow to understand and to treat its symptoms.

"And my family was fortunate. My wife recognized what was happening and we were able to get the help she needed. Unfortunately, my family was more the exception than the rule. Too many mothers battle this disease alone, unsure of what's happening, and afraid to ask for help. We can't leave them alone.

"We need to increase awareness among women and medical providers so the symptoms can be quickly recognized. And we need to facilitate treatment so women can get the help that they truly deserve.

"Therefore, I have directed Commissioner Jacobs to organize an education campaign on postpartum depression. And I am asking the Legislature to work with me so we can make New Jersey the only state to offer free mental health screenings for uninsured new mothers...

(full article (<http://www.courierpostonline.com/news/southjersey/m011205i.htm>))