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Office Of The Governor

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GOVERNOR CHRISTIE ANNOUNCES THE DEPARTURE OF DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSIONER VELEZ

TRENTON, NJ – Governor Chris Christie today announced the departure of Department of Human Services Commissioner Jennifer Velez. Velez was first appointed in February 2007 under then Governor Jon Corzine and reappointed by Christie in March 2010. She is the longest serving commissioner at the department. Under her leadership, the State advanced a number of critical reforms that strengthened the safety net, and improved health care delivery, including the recent implementation of managed long term services and supports for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

During her tenure, Velez and her team closed one State psychiatric hospital and two developmental centers, resulting in an historic investment in community based services and supports. She also led the effort to successfully settle long-standing Olmstead and Waiting List lawsuits, and advanced important reforms that support the Governor's priorities to serve individuals with mental illness and combat the disease of addiction. She leaves, having laid the groundwork for behavioral health reform and to fundamentally change the delivery system of Medicaid and social services benefits, to become the Senior Vice President of Strategy and Planning for Barnabas Health in West Orange, NJ. Velez has enjoyed a positive working relationship with legislators on both sides of the aisle.

"Jen Velez has been one of the smartest and most dedicated people I have had the honor of knowing during my time as governor. She has been a tremendous advocate in our efforts to deliver effective, cost-efficient, and high quality services to the most vulnerable New Jerseyans, and has done so with a genuine fervor and compassion to help make people's lives better," said Governor Christie. "I thank Jen for her service and for the passion and effort she has poured into this job for nearly a decade and wish her well as she moves on to her next endeavor."

"Serving this department under the Governor's leadership has been one of the most gratifying and fulfilling roles I've ever had," said Velez. "I have worked alongside an incredibly talented team of subject-matter experts who really understand and are committed to positive reforms that improve the lives of some of New Jersey's most vulnerable residents. I'm grateful to have been a part of this Administration and to have enjoyed unwavering support from the Governor."

Elizabeth Connolly, the department's current Chief of Staff, will become acting commissioner. Connolly has worked in various roles at the department for 26 years. She began her career with the department's Division of Family Development, continued her work in child welfare reform as Director of Data Analysis and Reporting in the Office of Children's Services. She was the department's Director of Research and Evaluation and Special Assistant to the Commissioner. Ms. Connolly led the department's Sandy recovery initiatives and emergency preparedness activities related to Ebola Virus Disease. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and Masters in Public Administration from Seton Hall University and lives in North Brunswick.

Commissioner Velez leaves at the end of the month. Governor Christie will make a nomination for Commissioner at a later date.