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Poll of NJ Non-Profits Reveals Concerns of Volunteers to Drive: Supports Need for Legislation

Trenton, NJ (July 5, 2011) More than half of the respondents to a recent survey of non-profit organizations have difficulty in recruiting or retaining volunteer drivers due to volunteers' fears of an unwanted impact on their auto insurance coverage if they engage such activity. In addition, over half of non-profits which do not use volunteer drivers cited organizational liability concerns as the reason; and over 40% cited the liability concerns of prospective drivers in their rationale for not utilizing volunteer drivers.

These and other findings of a poll conducted by a working group including the New Jersey Foundation for Aging, the NJ State Association of Jewish Federations, Center for Non-Profits and other organizations, support the case for legislation that would help to remove some of these obstacles.

"With non-profits caught in a 'perfect storm' of rising demand for services and shrinking funding pools, volunteers are more important than ever to organizations' ability to provide needed services in our communities. It is crucial that we work to remove obstacles to volunteerism wherever we can," stated Linda Czipo, Executive Director of the Center for Non-Profits.

Over 130 organizations responded to the online "rapid response survey," with more than two-thirds citing volunteer drivers as important to accomplishing their missions, whether transporting people to appointments to transporting goods, such as meals. Organizations serving such populations as older adults, disabled or low-income people or children are all represented in use of volunteer drivers to help to stretch scarce resources and provide crucial community involvement.

The nature of the need for volunteer drivers varies considerably by agency and is reported to include access to:

- Soup kitchen, food pantry and clothing
- Senior Day Program – (nutrition, education and wellness)

- Home care services
- Services for frail, elderly homebound
- Programs for the blind and visually impaired
- Respite for caregivers
- One stop career center
- Services and access to healthcare for seniors and disabled
- Recreational and socialization activities
- Non-emergency medical appointments
- Employment

The survey findings reinforce the need for legislation to bring clarity and protection for volunteers who drive on behalf of a non-profit organization in fulfillment of its mission.

Specific findings include:

- 64% of non-profit respondents cite volunteer drivers as important to accomplishing their mission.
- 54% of non-profit respondents have difficulty in recruiting or retaining volunteer drivers due to volunteers' fears of an unwanted impact on their auto insurance coverage if they report such activity.
- 86% believe legislation that prevents insurance companies from basing auto insurance premiums on a driver's volunteer service would be helpful to recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- 84% believe legislation that prevents insurance companies from adding a surcharge to or cancelling auto insurance policies because of a driver's volunteer service would be helpful to recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- 82% believe legislation that establishes a limit to the volunteer's liability to the extent of their current vehicle coverage would be helpful to recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Grace Egan, Executive Director of the New Jersey Foundation for Aging stated, "The use of volunteer drivers takes on greater significance as we seek to implement cost-effective ways to address larger statewide concerns about community transportation for seniors. Transportation is a high priority across New Jersey and is often ranked the highest in community needs assessments."

Ruth Cole, President of the New Jersey State Association of Jewish Federations concurred, saying "The myriad social service agencies operated by Jewish communities throughout New Jersey rely heavily on volunteers in fulfilling their mission – and one of the key needs has been in securing transportation for populations in need, particularly seniors."

While organizations can't do anything about the high cost of gas, which was also cited as an impediment for some volunteers, efforts to remove a huge obstacle of the "fear of losing coverage or incurring surcharges for the automobile insurance" for potential volunteer drivers can greatly enhance volunteer recruitment. In the era of New Jersey's budget constraints this legislation offers budget *neutral* policy changes that will encourage volunteers to provide transportation services to meet critical human needs.

Legislation sponsored by Senators Robert Gordon and Robert Singer (S2249) and Assembly Members Ronald Dancer and Valerie Vainieri-Huttle (A3523) seeks to establish a public policy that recognizes the unique and invaluable service provided by volunteer drivers to the State's most needy people and to the organizations which serve them. By explicitly stating that volunteer driving is not to be used as a criterion in establishing rates or coverage, these bills would help to encourage individuals to volunteer and to eliminate any perception of risk to personal liability coverage.

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