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SMITH BILL TO ESTABLISH SICK LEAVE BANKS FOR SCHOOLS **APPROVED**

TRENTON – A bill sponsored by Senator Bob Smith which would permit the creation of sick leave banks for school employees was approved by the Senate today by a vote of 38-0, receiving final legislative approval.

“Often, when employees get sick or hurt, and are forced to take extended leave from their jobs, their families may face a serious economic crisis, trying to balance mounting health care bills against the lack of income,” said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset. “Sick leave banks give employees the added security that, should they need extra time, they have a tool to protect themselves and their families. New Jersey’s school boards should pave the way for the adoption of sick leave banks, and stand as an example for private business to follow.”

The bill, S-548, would allow for the establishment of sick leave banks for employees of a board of education. With a sick leave bank in place, employees could draw needed days of sick leave in addition to any days to which they would otherwise be entitled. Under the bill, a sick leave bank could only be created with the approval of the board of education and a majority or union representative, and it would be prohibited from requiring employees to participate.

“This program is strictly voluntary, and must be agreed upon by both the school boards and the employees’ unions before a sick leave bank is established,” said Senator Smith. “Sick leave banks exist as a labor tool to provide cover for catastrophic illness or injury, but we don’t want to force people to live by these agreements where they’re not wanted. This bill tempers employees’ rights with a fair collective bargaining process to ensure democratically-arrived at results for the school district.”

The bill was approved by the Assembly last week, and now heads to the Governor to be signed into law.