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SMITH-GREENSTEIN BILL TO REVIEW CLEAN CAR STANDARDS CLEARS COMMITTEE

Measure Would Create Commission to Evaluate State's Compliance with Standards Enacted in 2004 Clean Car Law

TRENTON – Legislation sponsored by Senators Bob Smith and Linda R. Greenstein that would create a commission to encourage the state to adopt incentives to purchase clean cars and to advise the state Department of Environmental Protection on low vehicle emission standards was unanimously approved today by the Senate Environment and Energy Committee.

"The state has been tasked with reducing vehicle emissions that can cause serious health problems to our residents as well as vastly damage our state's air quality. It is important that we take stock of where we are in the process and what steps we must take to ensure that we are doing all we can to improve New Jersey's air quality," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, and Chairman of the Environment Committee. "Additionally, with the creation of this Commission, we can encourage more New Jerseyans to purchase low and zero emission vehicles that will not only reduce our state's dependence on foreign oil, but also release fewer pollutants into the atmosphere, reducing our state's carbon footprint."

The bill, S-2198, would establish the Clean Car Commission, a 17 member body with representatives from the auto industry, zero-emission technology industries, utility companies, environmental and academic communities, and state government that would review the state's implementation of the California Low Emission Vehicle program and offer suggestions on ways the state can better follow the program standards. The Commission would also be tasked with suggesting incentives to encourage the purchase of – and the infrastructure needs for – low and zero emission vehicles such as natural gas-powered and electric cars.

The Commission would be required to submit a report with these recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature no later than December 31, 2013.

In 2004, the state enacted the Clean Car Program requiring the state to adopt the California Low Emission Vehicle program. The federal Clean Air Act allowed for states to comply with either their regulatory emission standards or to use California's more stringent standards. The California Low Emission Vehicle program sets average emission standards on fleets of cars sold by each car manufacturer in the state. The provisions of the program include a percentage of sales from low and zero emission vehicles in the marketplace that will continue to increase yearly.

"The California Low Emission Vehicle program provides the state with major opportunities to decrease our reliance on foreign oil and improve New Jersey's air quality by setting standards for how many low and zero emission vehicles that must be sold in the state each year," said Senator Greenstein, D-Middlesex and Mercer, and Vice-Chairwoman of the Committee. "Since these numbers will continue to increase in the years to come, now is the time when we must look at the standards to determine how we are going to continue to comply with them. This Commission will ensure that proper planning is taking place, from tackling infrastructure needs to increasing consumer acceptance of these vehicles."

Vehicle emissions and exhaust are known to cause serious health problems such as asthma, diabetes, respiratory problems, heart disease and cancer. They have also been linked to increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere putting the state's beaches, shore communities, and tourism industry at risk from sea level rise and threatening to cause dramatic and costly interruptions in vital transportation and shipping infrastructure.

According to a 2006 state Department of Transportation report, New Jerseyans drive a total of 75 billion miles each year. The Senators note that without strictly reviewing and enforcing our state's emission standards and without incentives for New Jersey residents to purchase low and zero emission vehicles, especially considering the high number of miles driven each year on New Jersey roads, the state will continue to have unhealthy air quality and will continue to contribute to worldwide climate change.

During the Environment and Energy hearing, members of the Committee also heard testimony on a package of more than twenty bills relating to electric, hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles. Senator Smith said that the goal of the hearing was to begin narrowing down the package of bills to those with the most merit and to vote on those bills at a future committee hearing.

The bill now heads to the full Senate for consideration.