

June 24, 2005- Senator Bob Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee, and a prime sponsor of legislation to cut down on unhealthy emissions from diesel engines in New Jersey, issued the following statement at a State House press conference regarding the bill's pending consideration in the Senate and Assembly on Monday, and the bill's fate as a ballot question in November:

"New Jersey is on the verge of cleaner skies and better breathable air. But, the fight for stronger protections from diesel emissions does not end when the bill is signed into law, and we will continue to push for public support when the protections are posed to the voters as a ballot question during this November's election.

"Our legislative leaders in both Houses have indicated that they support the bill, S-1759, and its counterpart in the Assembly, A-3182. The bill is posted on the schedule to be considered by both the Senate and the Assembly on Monday, and accompanying legislation to provide for stable funding for diesel reduction programs, such as retrofitting diesel vehicles to produce cleaner-burning engines, has already been passed in the Senate, with a vote scheduled for Monday in the Assembly.

"We hope our colleagues in both the Senate and the Assembly will stand on the side of positive environmental reform, and will vote in favor of the future of the Garden State's clean air supply.

"If both Houses sign off, and the Governor signs the bill into law, New Jersey voters will then be asked to support plans to reduce diesel emissions by nearly half in the State. Given the dramatic impact of excessive emissions on the health of our State's residents, additional safeguards are both warranted and necessary, and we hope the voters will agree that the diesel reduction programs we are promoting are the best solution to cleaning up our air.

"Diesel pollution is by far the most dangerous form of air pollution congesting our skies today. According to statistics, diesel emissions result in 350 to 1,200 premature deaths each year in New Jersey, 68,000 asthma attacks, more than 6,000 visits to emergency rooms around the State, and cost State residents nearly \$70 million annually in health care expenses. We can no longer avoid the facts -- diesel pollution is quite literally choking us out of our homes, inflating the cost of health care, and killing our most vulnerable, including children and the chronically ill.

"Our legislation makes a very serious attempt to clean up the problem, reducing exposure to diesel pollutants for vulnerable children and shifting truck routes away from our most populated areas. It does not rely on new taxes to fund cleanup programs, but rather, reallocates a portion of the assessment that's already constitutionally-mandated on businesses in New Jersey. And diesel reduction efforts will save hundreds of lives each year from early death due to diesel-aggravated respiratory and cardiac illnesses.

"I'd like to thank my colleague, Assembly Environment Committee Chairman John McKeon, a true environmentalist who helped shepherd this legislation through the sometimes difficult legislative process, and Governor Codey, who has been very supportive of efforts to clean up New Jersey's air. I'd also like to thank Senator Leonard Lance, my co-sponsor in the Senate, for proving once again that New Jersey's environment is not a partisan issue, but rather a bipartisan one.

"In the coming months, we must raise public awareness of the need to do something to scale back lethal levels of diesel pollution in our skies, so that voters know how important their vote is in November. Through media exposure and enhanced public awareness, we can make an airtight case for the need for greater diesel pollution controls, and I am confident that informed voters will side with good environment policy come Election Day."