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*Governor Phil Murphy ♦ Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver
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COVID-19 Press Information

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 26, 2020

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Governor Murphy Announces that Modified In-Person Graduation Ceremonies Can Begin on July 6

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today announced that the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) will issue updated guidance allowing school districts and colleges/universities to hold modified in-person graduation ceremonies beginning on July 6. The guidance will include requirements that ceremonies be held outdoors, adhere to social distancing protocols, and observe capacity restrictions in order to protect the health of students and families celebrating these milestones amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“I am proud to say that our graduates will have the opportunity to join their classmates and families to celebrate graduation,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Despite the uncertainty of these times, our students deserve to have their hard work acknowledged and celebrate safely. We have reached a point where we feel confident moving forward and giving our graduates the send-off they have so rightly earned.”

“New Jersey is taking a wise, sensible approach toward graduation ceremonies,” **said Education Commissioner Lamont O. Repollet**. “This plan balances our desire to recognize the accomplishments of our graduating students, while providing the necessary safeguards for their safety, as well as the safety of their friends, families and school staff.”

“We recognize that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted students’ plans to walk across graduation stages this year,” **said Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis, Secretary of Higher Education**. “We owe it to New Jersey’s students to celebrate their drive to overcome tremendous odds and complete their

degrees. With this new guidance in place, we will be working with institutions to help ensure healthy, safe celebrations for students and families.”

DOE and OSHE guidance, which will be issued in full on Wednesday, will include the following requirements for commencement ceremonies:

- Must take place on or after July 6, 2020;
- Must take place outdoors or be drive-in/drive-through (no indoor ceremonies will be allowed);
- Must adhere to the relevant capacity limitation in place at the time of the ceremony (this may require districts to hold multiple ceremonies held over a period of time to ensure capacity restrictions are not exceeded);
- Districts and institutions must determine the minimum number of staff and faculty necessary to facilitate commencement ceremonies and adjust attendance requirements accordingly;
- Caps, gowns, diplomas, and other materials must be mailed to individual student homes, sent electronically where possible, or otherwise distributed in a manner that complies with social distancing guidelines;
- All activities must be coordinated in consultation with municipal officials, such as the local Office of Emergency Management, local law enforcement, first responders, and local health officials.

Additionally, DOE guidance will stipulate that commencements must be held only for graduation from middle school or high school, and not for other ceremonies that mark promotion from one grade to the next. Districts and institutions of higher education can continue to opt for virtual or drive-through/drive-in ceremonies held in accordance with Executive Order 142. Only virtual ceremonies can be held prior to July 6.