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HSD is Following Dozens of Legislative Bills in '09 Session



This is the second regular legislative session Steven Randazzo has worked in his capacity as HSD's Legislative Liaison.

HSD's Legislative Liaison and Special Projects Coordinator, Steven Randazzo and the HSD Legislative Team have been busy. "Already there have been over 500 bills introduced, of which the HSD has been asked to analyze 65, about eleven percent of the early bills," said Randazzo just four days into the 60-day session that began on Jan. 20.

The department's role during legislative sessions is basically two-fold: First there are a set of bills that the HSD, with the approval of the Governor's office, is working hard to get passed in

both houses of the Legislature; there are 16 of these.

The department is also asked to look at other bills that may indirectly affect the HSD and/or the Executive Branch of government. In these situations, bills are analyzed from both cost and legal perspectives. The department's final analysis is then sent to the agency directly involved with the bill. "We are following 28 of these bills," said Randazzo. "They mostly involve the Dept. of Health, the Children, Youth and Families Dept. and the Aging and Long-Term Services Dept. These other bills also include those related to domestic violence and DWI prevention that cross agencies."

"We are also asked by the Legislative Finance Committee for bill analysis," said Randazzo. "When I receive one of these requests, I kick it to one of the four Program Divisions in the department. From there it goes to the Information Technology Division, then to the Administrative Services Division, then to our General Counsel and finally back to the Secretary's Office for a final look before we send our completed analysis back to the sender."

Remarkably, all this is usually done within 24-hours. Experienced staff in every division is prepared to quickly analyze proposed legislation as it come to them, then move it to the next

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More New Mexicans Coming to HSD for all Services

There have been reports of long lines in unemployment offices; now the same thing appears to be happening at many of our income support offices. "We are seeing people who we have not seen in several years and others who have never visited our office before," said Kim Whitney, a 'Greeter' at the SW Albuquerque ISD office.

"We first noticed an increase in the number of new people coming in back in November," said Whitney, who has worked at this office for three years. "Some people tell me they are embarrassed for coming in here, like one lady I recently spoke with who was making good money and now is laid off from work. I console them and tell them that it will get better – a lot of us working here now have been through what you're going through."

Food stamps cases in Bernalillo County have jumped by 28.7 percent in one year, from 26,391 in December 2007 to 33,960 in December 2008. Compared to the other four ISD regions in the state, Bernalillo County (Region III) has seen the greatest growth in the Food Stamp Program.

The northwestern part of the state, which includes Gallup and Farmington, has seen a 15.7 percent growth; the northeastern part of the state, which includes Santa Fe and Las Vegas, has seen a 22.4 percent growth; the southeastern part of the state, which includes Roswell and Hobbs, has seen a 6.8 percent growth; and the southwestern part of the state, which includes Las Cruces and Silver City, has seen an 13.5 percent growth in the program over the same period.

Overall in the state, the number of families receiving food stamps has grown by 18.5 percent (16,989 families), to 109,069.

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A TV reporter interviews a woman at the SW Albuquerque ISD office on Jan. 22. There have been several news stories about a growing number of people seeking income support services.

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This is the largest number of families on record receiving food stamps. Besides the economy, part of the growth has been from outreach efforts and program rules changes over the past several years to get more people to participate.

“Right now, some of the busiest income support offices are in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho and Santa Fe,” said Ted Roth, Deputy ISD Director. “Surprisingly the NE Albuquerque ISD office is seeing phenomenal caseload growth. There are 50 percent more families living in that quadrant of the city receiving food stamps today than there was one year ago.”

Like food stamps, the number of families receiving TANF has grown by 15.2 percent statewide over the same period, to 15,821. The last time that the TANF caseload was this large was in September 2006. “In the TANF Program, too, we are seeing the largest growth in Bernalillo County,” said Roth. “We were serving 5,158 families in Bernalillo County at the end of 2008, compared to 4,206 families in 2007.”

The third of the core ISD programs, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, has seen a 5.9 percent growth, to 65,960 families statewide over the same period. Unlike food stamps and TANF, the largest growth in this program has been in the cooler northern part of the state where participating families has grown by 10.5 percent.

Fortunately, most of the Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Rio Rancho income support offices have changed the way they receive people walking in their doors. In the past, those approved for services were given a caseworker who did everything from A to Z for the family. Now people are welcomed by a Greeter, like Whitney whose job is to determine what the visitor needs and then get him/her to the right worker or ensure any routine paperwork dropped off is expeditiously routed.

“What we are doing in Albuquerque has never been done before in New Mexico,” said ISD ROM Rita Espinosa. “We seriously began looking at changing the way we do business in our larger offices a year ago. After receiving input from clients, staff and advocates and looking at other states’ models, we chose this approach, which we believe will be most efficient for everyone, especially during these extraordinary times.”



The NE Albuquerque ISD office has seen the greatest growth in food stamp recipients.

Increases in ISD's TANF Cases Adds to Child Support Enforcement Caseload

Increases in the number of people applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) at ISD offices also means an increase in the number child support cases. And the number of families receiving TANF has grown by 15.2 percent, statewide, over the past year to 15,821. According to Valerie Powers, the CSED's Performance and Reporting Manager, the divisions IV-D (TANF clients) increased by 14.3 percent last year, to 11,552 cases, about the same as the ISD TANF caseload.

An indicator that this upward trend will continue is that most of the increases came during the last six months of 2008: “We had 538 new TANF IV-D cases per month during the last two quarters,” said Powers. “This is nearly double the number of new cases per month we saw during the rest of calendar year 2008.”

Conversely, the average number of new cases per month from non TANF customers applying for child support enforcement services for the last three months of 2008 was 245, a 40 percent decrease when compared to the first three months of the year. Overall, the CSED has seen a six percent increase in child support cases this past year to 58,000.

In response to this, CSED offices throughout the state are applying meaningful measures to expedite customer services. Some offices are teaming up with their ISD counterparts to have TANF and Medicaid recipients walked over to child support offices for an initial interview. Other offices are hosting custodial parent (CP) parent group interviews and using fill-in-the-blank petitions or immediately interviewing the CP when they bring in an application for services.

Another indicator of people facing hard times noted by Powers, is the amount of money the CSED is now collecting from non-custodial parents' unemployment compensations: In the last three months of 2007, \$286,292 was received by the CSED compared to \$555,856 received in the last three months of 2008, an ominous 94 percent increase.

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agency within the department.

In the Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED), the HSD this year is asking legislators to amend two statutory provisions: One lets custodial parents retain more of the money paid back to the state by the non-custodial parent for the months his/her children were not receiving TANF cash assistance. If passed, this would have the effect of transferring over \$300,000 a year in collections from the CSED to families.

The other measure will require the CSED to obtain child support orders that include medical support provisions that order either, or both, the custodial parent or the non-custodial parent to provide health care coverage for their children. This is accomplished by either ordering private medical insurance coverage, or if private medical insurance is not available or is inadequate, to provide for the payment of cash medical support.

The bill affecting the ISD this year would allow the division and the Taxation and Revenue Dept. to share information about New Mexico taxpayers for outreach to thousands of families who may qualify for services offered through HSD, as well as create a solely state funded cash assistance program.

The rest of the legislation (14 bills) directly involving the HSD primarily affect the Medical Assistance Division/ISD the Behavioral Health Services Division and the Office of Inspector General. "Some of these bills are nothing more than 'technical bills' that seek to cleanup HSD's role in state government; the other, more important bills focus on health reform," said Randazzo. "If these make it into law we will definitely see an increase access to coverage and quality health care for all New Mexicans."

These initiatives are parts from the single health care reform bill introduced last year that continue to advocate for much needed health care reforms, such a electronic medical records and the consolidation of healthcare agencies.

While not all of these pieces of legislation have purse strings attached to them, there are other bills that focus on the department's budget's for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2009 and all of 2010. One of these priority initiatives is replacement of the ISD2 system (see below for fresh information about this project).

Plans for ISD2 Replacement Gaining Momentum

The department began Phase 1 implementation of ISD2R\YES-NM last month. "This phase will deliver three foundation components that include YES-NM eligibility screening and application submission, Electronic Document Management and Business Intelligence," said HSD/ITD's ISD2R\YES-NM program manager, Jan Christine. "Delivery of additional features depends on funding from the New Mexico Legislature in this legislative session."

If funding is provided in the amount requested, the replacement system and additional YES-NM features will be on track to be available by 2014. The department is asking for \$6 million this year that will be matched by about \$7 million in federal money.

In all, ISD2R\YES-NM is projected to cost \$84 million, but its benefits to the 270,000 families (670,000 people) – about one in three New Mexicans – now enrolled in income support programs has exceptional potential. For example, it will enable any family to access the web-based system from any personal computer to see if they qualify for programs. Application submission will allow people to complete and file an application for programs including cash assistance, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, food stamps, Medicaid, childcare assistance, and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program. When an application is submitted, the applicant will be provided with information on how to complete the application process. This option alone will save people time and money and reduce congestion at ISD offices that have people lined up outside on some mornings.

The second component or ISD2R is a computer platform for ISD workers. This platform will support worker functions such as intake, interviewing, case assignment, scheduling, eligibility determination, benefits calculation, benefits recovery, and various quality control and reporting functions.

"The old ISD2 system has been in operation in the state of New Mexico for 22 years and was constructed several years earlier for another state," Chris Hayes, ISD's program manager for ISD2R\YES-NM. "Programming, support, and maintenance for this system is not only becoming more costly, it is also very inefficient; some program additions or changes are becoming impossible to support. Continuing to rely on the aged system puts HSD at risk of catastrophic system failure and the subsequent inability to provide benefits in a timely manner."



Program Manager, Jan Christine, foreground, chats with Patricia Anders, of the Center on Law and Poverty, following the public meeting in Santa Fe on Jan. 16.

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“The selection of this application for New Mexico (YES-NM, eligibility screening and application submission) was made because code from a government-to-government transfer can be obtained at no cost to the state,” said Christine. “Also the selected application meets all of the state’s requirements and other states that have implemented this application are highly satisfied with their implementations.”

On Jan. 16, the department held a meeting in Santa Fe to get citizen and stakeholder input on the ISD2R\YES-NM replacement system and to update the public on its progress to date. “We encourage input from the public in every step of the process,” said Betina Gonzales McCracken, HSD’s Communication’s Director. “Soon we will have a link on the HSD website that will provide relevant information, such as when and where public meetings will take place, questions and input received from each meeting and information on the overall progress being made in the design, testing, verification and final validation of the system.”

HSD Supports BH Day at 2009 Legislative Session

Besides the HSD following and providing input to hundreds of bills introduced this legislative session, the department’s Behavioral Health Services Division (BHSD) is assisting the Behavioral Health Collaborative and the Behavioral Health Planning Council in organizing Behavioral Health Day at the Legislature. The event takes place on Thursday, Feb. 26.

This will be the third year the event has been held at the Capitol during the legislative session. Again this year, a Senate Joint Memorial (SJM22), sponsored by Senator Mary Kay Papen, will be read. She also plans to speak during the formal part of the event, scheduled to begin at noon during the daylong event.

“We’ve also invited the Governor and the Lt. Governor to speak,” said Leticia Rutledge, of the Behavioral Health Planning Council. “We also have dozens of exhibits including those sponsored by: the National Alliance on Mental Illness-New Mexico (NAMI-New Mexico), Navajo Nation-Crownpoint Behavioral Health Services and the new behavioral health services contractor, OptumHealth New Mexico.”

Highlighting the event again this year will be the presenting of STARS certificates, signed by Governor Bill Richardson, commending people from around the state who have overcome personal behavioral health issues and barriers to become leaders, mentors and peer-advocates in their communities. “We have invited 18 people, representing the 18 Local Collaboratives to attend the awards ceremony,” said Rutledge.



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**Can you name the four
 US president's on
 Mount Rushmore?**