



NEW MEXICO HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT
P.O. Box 2348
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-2348

Bill Richardson
Governor

Pamela S. Hyde, J.D.
Secretary

*For further information contact Betina Gonzales McCracken
Communications Director 505-827-6245 or 505-699-4675*
For Immediate Release

Governor Bill Richardson Calls on the Federal Government to Increase Low Income Home Energy Assistance Funding

Santa Fe, October 8, 2004 – Governor Bill Richardson has joined 16 other Governors urging Congress to increase the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) with \$600 million in emergency funding.

“The price of oil reached \$53 per barrel today, an increase of more than 60 percent just this year,” Governor Bill Richardson said. “New Mexicans who can least afford higher home heating costs are nevertheless being forced to make tough choices. Without more federal assistance, many New Mexicans will be forced to choose between keeping their families warm this winter and buying groceries, paying their rent or mortgages and buying prescription drugs.

“I urge Congress to increase emergency funding, and provide much-needed relief for working New Mexico families.”

Just this week the Energy Information Administration (EIA) released its *Winter Fuels Outlook: 2004-2005*, which warns that household heating bills are expected to rise 15% for natural gas, 22% for propane and 28% for heating oil. “The LIHEAP program can help low-income households pay one month’s heating bill, and last year the average LIHEAP payment was \$127,” said Pamela Hyde, Human Services Department (HSD) Secretary. HSD administers LIHEAP.

Last year, New Mexico received \$9 million in federal funding for the program, which helped 54,434 low-income, seniors and disabled with their energy bills. “We are expecting to receive the same amount as last year, however the request for emergency funding could really help if we have a colder than normal winter,” said Hyde.

Families earning less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level can qualify for LIHEAP. This means that a family of three earning less than \$1,958 per month could qualify. LIHEAP applications are taken at any of the 34 HSD Income Support Division offices located throughout the state, or by calling 1-800-283-4465.

Applicants will need to bring with them:

- Proof of household income for the past 30 days
- A photo ID for the person filling the application
- A Social Security Number (SSN) for all household members
- One of the following from the past 12 months:
 - Highest gas or electric bill for 30 days of service
 - Account history printout from a propane company, or receipts for two propane fills with the fewest days in between
 - A receipt for wood purchase
- A disconnect notice, if you have received one, or the cost of starting utility service at your home

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