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**For Immediate Release**

## **Governor Signs Child Support Enforcement Legislation** (New Mexico's children will benefit from changes.)

*Santa Fe, March 2, 2004* – Governor Bill Richardson today signed into law legislation giving the Human Services Department (HSD) more flexibility in the way it handles often-complicated child support enforcement cases. “We owe it to the children in families now seeking or getting child support assistance from the Human Services Department for child support,” said Richardson.

Senate Bill 48 allows HSD's Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) to negotiate child support payments more freely with non-custodial parents; lowers interest rates on arrears payments from double-digit rates to four percent; creates an amnesty program for delinquent parents; and limits the number of years in which a mother can request paternity establishment and child support from a father to 12.

“Allowing the department to negotiate more realistically with both parents will make it easier to establish reasonable payment plans that can provide more support to children in the long run,” said Stephanie Gonzales, CSED Director.

The department is also allowed to forgive some interest on delinquent child support cases if doing so benefits the children growing up in split families. “It is our goal to ensure that ‘both’ parents support their kids,” said Gonzales. “These changes help us accomplish this by opening, not slamming, doors on non-custodial parents.”

The Child Support Enforcement Division has approximately 63,000 child support cases. In 2003, the division collected \$72 million in child support, up 12.6 percent from the previous year.

Sen. Manny Aragon sponsored SB 48, and Rep. Ken Martinez sponsored its duplicate bill in the House.

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