

State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

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Governor Richardson Signs Bill to Speed Home Heating Relief to New Mexicans

(Santa Fe, NM) – Governor Bill Richardson today signed House Bill 8, a bill specifically designed to help New Mexico’s neediest citizens, schools, police and fire officials cope with high energy costs this winter.

“I called the Legislature in for a special session to provide immediate energy price relief for New Mexico’s citizens,” Governor Richardson said. “This bill does exactly that. Because of this session, nearly 1.7 million New Mexicans will see real relief. In particular, the people who really need it: working families, low income households, and senior citizens. The neediest households could receive as much as \$700 in assistance.”

House Bill 8 appropriates \$23 million to the state’s Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This program will help an estimated 60,000 lower income and elderly New Mexicans cope with high energy prices this winter. With this funding the state will pay an average estimate of \$450 toward heating bills for its most vulnerable citizens. The Governor originally proposed to increase LIHEAP assistance when he called this special session last month.

“This funding more than triples the amount of assistance available to this vital program,” Governor Richardson said. “I encourage anyone with questions about this program or with any other rebate questions to call our toll-free Gasoline and Home Heating Relief Helpline after Tuesday at 1-866-285-2996.”

LIHEAP is a once-a-year benefit that helps reduce the costs of heating or cooling homes of low-income individuals or families by paying a gas, electric, propane or even firewood bill. In order to qualify for LIHEAP, families must earn less than 150% of the federal poverty level.

House Bill 8 also includes:

- \$2.5 million to address long term heating costs by repairing, insulating, and weatherproofing homes.
- \$3.5 million to help police and firefighters with fuel costs.
- \$5 million to help public schools with gasoline and heating costs.

“Part of the basic necessities in our schools is to make sure that children have a safe and healthy learning environment,” Governor Richardson said. “This includes ensuring that our schools are properly heated.”

The Governor has 20 days to act on the rebate bill, House Bill 10. While he reviews the bill, he has directed the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department to ramp up the processing of the rebate checks so that they can be in the mail within three weeks.

“I will use this time to review the bill in detail and review its impact on our fiscal position,” the Governor stated. “Later this month, we will get updates on the state’s fiscal status and we will have a better idea of where we stand, and what we can afford. I will continue to govern in a fiscally responsible way. That’s what the people of this state deserve, and that’s exactly what they’ll get from me.”