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For Immediate Release

Las Vegas Child Support Enforcement Office Reports Governor Bill Richardson's "Fresh Start" Program is Popular for Many

Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 19, 2005 – The Human Services Department's Las Vegas Child Support Enforcement office reports that 128 child support cases have either been closed or adjusted thanks to Governor Bill Richardson's Fresh Start Program. The program, piloted in Las Vegas, Raton, Santa Rosa, Taos and Tucumcari last April, continues to help parents come to agreement on their child support orders as the program is now being implemented state-wide.

"What makes Fresh Start popular for many is that it can benefit both custodial and non-custodial parents and often at the same time, which is what we want," said Gail Rains, who manages the program from the Las Vegas child support office. "This is truly a great opportunity for non-custodial parents — many of whom have been absent in their children's lives, both emotionally and financially — to make a fresh start."

The Fresh Start Program is a first for the state's Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED). It features amnesty-forgiveness as the first of three phases in the arrears management program. Amnesty-forgiveness is a way of getting non-custodial parents in the doors of the state's child support enforcement offices. From there staff begin to negotiate forgiveness of some of the child support owed, restore suspended licenses, or, possibly, decrease the interest rate being paid on arrears. Then, and perhaps most importantly, the non-custodial parent can get started again on a regular payment plan that he or she can stick with over time.

When Fresh Start began six months ago letters were mailed to prospective parents who might benefit from the program. "Some people receiving our letters called us asking if this was some sort of "sting" operation," said Rains. "We assured them that it was not, and since then, many have made a better life for themselves by getting on livable payment plans, having their interest rates reduced and not worrying anymore about having their driver's or professional licenses revoked or income tax refunds intercepted."

Here is what one non-custodial parent from Las Vegas said about Fresh Start, "The best part of participating is knowing that it's behind me," said Mark Dominguez. "I thought there was a catch at first, but once I realized it was real, I came up with the \$1,500 and the state waived \$5,332 in interest and closed my case. Now I can start saving money for my son."

In Las Vegas alone over \$1.2 million in arrears balances have been waved and lump sum payments of \$96,000 have been paid to custodial parents. Those wanting more information about the Fresh Start Program may call 1-888-293-0825.

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