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**For Immediate Release**

## **Secretary Pamela Hyde Encourages New Mexicans to get Help with their Heating Costs this Winter – Apply for LIHEAP**

**Santa Fe, November 30, 2005** – As cold weather finally hits New Mexico, Human Services Department (HSD) Secretary Pamela Hyde is encouraging families to apply for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). “Applying for LIHEAP means an average \$450 one-time benefit for families to help pay their gas, electric, propane or even firewood bill this winter,” said Hyde.

Due to the high cost of natural gas this year, Governor Bill Richardson called a special legislative session and approved \$23 million in state funding for LIHEAP to help low-income families and seniors stay warm this winter. “New Mexicans shouldn’t have to choose between paying for prescriptions or heating their homes. They should have both,” said Governor Richardson. And LIHEAP can help.

Since Oct., nearly 18,000 families have applied for LIHEAP, resulting in the distribution of more than \$6 million in benefits. From Oct. 2004 to Sept. 2005, 55,000 families received a LIHEAP benefit. Qualifying households earn less than 150% of the Federal Poverty Level, for example, a family of three with a monthly income below \$2,011.

Part of the legislation that passed during the special session in Oct. includes a moratorium on disconnecting a customer’s energy service for nonpayment if the customer qualifies for LIHEAP assistance. The moratorium took effect Nov. 15, and extends through March 15, 2006. “This moratorium should encourage families to apply for LIHEAP, and help pay down their energy bill before the moratorium is lifted in March,” said Katie Falls, HSD’s Income Support Division Director.

LIHEAP applications can be completed at any of the department’s 35 Income Support Division offices. Applicants should bring with them the following information when applying for LIHEAP:

- Proof of household income for the past 30 days;
- Identification of the person filing the application;
- A Social Security Number (SSN) for all household members;
- Citizenship/resident status 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 the purchase of firewood;
- A disconnect notice, if you have received one, or the cost of starting utility service at your home.

**For more information on LIHEAP, please call 1-800-283-4465, or visit the department's LIHEAP website at <http://www.state.nm.us/hsd/liheap.html>.**

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