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For Immediate Release

Governor Bill Richardson's "Fresh Start" Program for Non-Custodial Parents Kicks-off in Northeastern New Mexico

Santa Fe, New Mexico, April 4, 2005 - Today, Human Services Department Secretary Pamela Hyde announced that Governor Bill Richardson's "Fresh Start" Program has begun as a pilot project in northeastern New Mexico. "This is an 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 by working with our Las Vegas child support enforcement office," said Hyde.

The Fresh Start Program is a first for the state's Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) and it includes amnesty forgiveness as the first of three phases in an arrears management program. "Amnesty forgiveness is a way of getting non-custodial parents in the doors of child support offices where we can begin to negotiate forgiveness of some of the child support owed, restore suspended licenses or, possibly, decrease the interest rate being paid on arrears," said Stephanie Gonzales CSED Director. "Then we can get the non-custodial parent started again on a regular payment plan that he or she can stick with over time."

The northeastern part of the state, which includes Colfax, DeBaca, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, Taos and Union counties, has been chosen to pilot the project for 90 days before the program goes statewide. "We are currently handling over 70,000 child support cases statewide. We are starting in part of the state so that we can monitor the program closely and make adjustments before opening it up to the entire state," said Gonzales.

Letters have been sent to approximately 200 non-custodial parents whose cases are generated from the targeted counties. However, there are 2,786 cases in arrears. "We hope these parents will realize this is truly a great opportunity for them to talk directly with a caseworker who can get them back on track when it comes to child support and, hopefully, re-involve themselves in their children's lives," said Ben Marquez, CSED arrears management manager.

Other outreach efforts include a radio public service announcement narrated by Lieut. Gov. Diane Denish explaining how the program works and where to call to make an appointment with a child support enforcement caseworker. Overall, there are 4,500 child support enforcement cases in the nine target counties.

Anyone interested in learning more about Governor Bill Richardson's Fresh Start Program can call toll free 1-888-293-0825.

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