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For Immediate Release

HSD Secretary Pamela Hyde Announces Successful Child Support Collection Program Will Expand Statewide

Governor Bill Richardson's "Fresh Start" initiative gets critically needed funds to deserving children and families

Santa Fe, New Mexico, August 8, 2005 - Human Services Department Secretary Pamela Hyde today announced that Governor Bill Richardson's "Fresh Start" Program will expand statewide during the coming months. The first phase of the expansion includes Santa Fe, Rio Arriba and Los Alamos Counties. "Our pilot project during the months of April through June proved successful in assisting non-custodial and custodial parents from the northeastern part of the state in obtaining reasonable payment plans, forgiveness of interest or arrears and, in some instances, closing cases all together," said Hyde. "Simply put, it means more New Mexico children will get the child support they need and deserve."

The Fresh Start Program is a first for the state's Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) and it includes amnesty as the first of three phases in an arrears management program. "Amnesty 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 CSED Director Stephanie Gonzales. "Then we can get the non-custodial parent started again on a regular payment plan that he or she can stick with over time."

During the pilot project for Colfax, DeBaca, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, Taos and Union counties, CSED was able to collect \$402,331 in total arrears due including \$22,302 in lump sum payments to 12 custodial parents. The project also waived a total of \$253,167 in accumulated interest and closed 38% of the cases. "The best part of participating is knowing that it's behind me," said Mark Dominguez, a non-custodial parent from Las Vegas who participated in the pilot project. "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."

Letters are being sent to non-custodial parents whose cases are generated from the targeted counties. There are 2,276 cases in arrears with a total of \$51,192,460 arrears due. "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 Gonzales.

Overall, there are 3,994 child support enforcement cases in the three target counties and approximately 70,000 cases across the state.

The Fresh Start program will roll out to other counties in New Mexico through March 2006. The timeline is as follows:

- September 5, 2005 – San Juan County
- September 19, 2005 – Chaves, Eddy and Lincoln Counties
- October 17, 2005 – Catron, Grant, Hidalgo and Luna Counties
- November 14, 2005 – Doña Ana, Otero and Sierra Counties
- January 9, 2006 – Curry, Lea and Roosevelt Counties
- March 6, 2006 – Bernalillo, Cibola, McKinley, Sandoval, Socorro, Torrance and Valencia Counties

Non-custodial parents with cases based out of Santa Fe, Los Alamos or Rio Arriba Counties interested in participating in Governor Bill Richardson's Fresh Start Program should call the Child Support Enforcement Division toll free at 1-866-365-3939.

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