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For Immediate Release

Governor Bill Richardson's "Year of the Child" Health Insurance Initiative Gets Legislative Approval

Medical or Premium Assistance Bill Headed to the Governor for Signature

Santa Fe, February 15, 2006 – Today, **Senate Bill 267** as amended, **Medical or Premium Assistance Program**, passed the Senate and is headed to the Governor for his signature. "This is a key piece of legislation that will help New Mexico move toward insuring every child, newborn through age five," said Governor Bill Richardson.

This legislation, sponsored by Senate President Pro Tem Ben Altamirano, and duplicate **House Bill 118** as amended, sponsored by Representative Ken Martinez, authorizes the Human Services Department to provide medical or premium assistance for uninsured children who are not Medicaid eligible. **HB 118** is awaiting Senate Finance Committee approval before the final approval of the House.

399,000 New Mexicans, which is 21.0% of the state's population, do not have health insurance (Census Current Population Survey, 2004). 21,000 of New Mexico's children ages zero to five have no health care coverage, 16,000 of which are eligible but not enrolled in the Medicaid program, and the remaining 5,000 do not qualify for Medicaid. "This program will help start the process of insuring those children," said Pamela Hyde, Human Services Department Secretary.

While Governor Richardson's budget requested \$5.6 million for this program, only \$1 million is currently in the junior budget bill. "Before the legislature adjourns, we would like to see the program funded properly," said Hyde.

The Medical or Premium Assistance Program is one of three Governor Richardson's *Insure New Mexico!* Council recommendations.

Earlier this week, both **HB 24** and **SB 381, Expand Health Insurance Alliance Coverage**, unanimously passed the Senate and the House and are awaiting the Governor's signature.

The remaining set of initiatives awaiting legislative approval includes **HB 481** as amended and **SB 280** as amended, **Health Coverage for All New Mexicans Committee**. This legislation is designed to analyze and determine the cost of *various* models to achieve Health Coverage for All New Mexicans. **SB 280** is on the House Floor calendar and could be heard this evening.

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