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For Immediate Release

Legislation to Insure More New Mexico Children Gets Approval from the House and Senate

Medical or Premium Assistance Bills now Move to the Other Chamber for Approval

Santa Fe, February 7, 2006 – Today, both **House Bill 118** as amended and **Senate Bill 267** as amended, **Medical or Premium Assistance Program**, passed the House and Senate, respectively. This legislation authorizes the Human Services Department to provide medical or premium assistance for children who are not Medicaid eligible. “This is a very important piece of legislation in Governor Bill Richardson’s effort to insure every child ages zero to five during this “Year of the Child,” said Pamela Hyde, Human Services Department Secretary

This legislation, sponsored by Senate President Pro Tem Ben Altamirano, and Representative Ken Martinez, is one of several *Insure New Mexico!* initiatives aimed at decreasing the number of uninsured in the state, currently 399,000 or 21.0% of the population. There are 21,000 children ages zero to five that are uninsured, 16,000 of which are eligible but not enrolled in the Medicaid program, and the remaining 5,000 uninsured children do not qualify for Medicaid. “This program will help start the process of insuring those children,” said Hyde.

While the legislation is making its way through the session, the funding for the program is not currently in the budget. “The Governor’s budget funded this program at \$5.6 million; however, it has yet to make it into the budget making its way through the legislature,” said Hyde. “Without the funding, this program cannot get off the ground.”

Meanwhile, other *Insure New Mexico!* legislation is continuing to make its way through committee hearings.

- Last night **House Bill 481**, as amended, **Health Coverage for All New Mexicans Committee**, unanimously passed the House Appropriations and Finance Committee. This legislation is designed to analyze and determine the cost of various models to achieve Health Coverage for all New Mexicans. Duplicate **Senate Bill 280** is scheduled before the Senate Finance Committee tomorrow.
- **House Bill 24** and duplicate **Senate Bill 381, Expand Health Insurance Alliance Coverage**, give employers more options for covering their employees through the Health Insurance Alliance (HIA). The legislation allows the HIA the opportunity to offer employers affordable health insurance through publicly offered programs, such as the State Coverage Insurance Program. **SB 381** unanimously passed the Senate on Saturday and is awaiting committee assignments in the House. **HB 24** is scheduled before the House Business and Industry Committee this afternoon.

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