



NEW MEXICO HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT
P.O. Box 2348
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-2348

Bill Richardson
Governor

Pamela S. Hyde, J.D.
Secretary

Contact Betina Gonzales McCracken 505 827-6245 or 505 699-4675

For Immediate Release

Governor Bill Richardson's "Fresh Start" Program for Parents Behind in Child Support Payments Begins in Las Cruces Area

Santa Fe, New Mexico, April 18, 2006— Human Services Department Secretary Pamela Hyde announced today that Governor Bill Richardson's child support enforcement *Fresh Start Program* has begun in Doña Ana, Lincoln, Otero and Sierra counties. "With Governor Richardson dedicating 2006 as the *Year of the Child*, this is a great 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 contacting our child support enforcement office in Las Cruces today," said Hyde.

The Fresh Start Program is a first for the state's Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) and 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," said Cathi Valdes, CSED acting Director. "From there we can restore suspended drivers or professional licenses, decrease the interest rate being paid on balances and even begin to negotiate the forgiveness of some of the child support owed. After that we work to get the non-custodial parent started on a regular payment plan that he or she can really stick with over time, or in some instances are able to close the case altogether."

This four-county area is the sixth phase of the statewide rollout of the program. In April 2005, the Las Vegas, New Mexico child support enforcement office began Fresh Start as a pilot program in the northeastern part of the state. Since then, 461 non-custodial parents (NCPs) have participated in the program that has closed 307 cases, made \$491,924 in lump sum payments to custodial parents and negotiated new judgments totaling \$1,963,470. In exchange, child support enforcement staff has waived \$3,783,201 in principal and \$2,609,863 in interest owed by NCPs.

The Las Cruces CSED office, responsible for administering four-county area, has mailed letters to 250 NCPs owing \$20,000 or more in child support. The letter urges them to find out more about the Fresh Start Program and how it can benefit them to get on a payment plan that both parents can live with. "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 with their child support responsibilities and, hopefully, re-involve themselves in their children's lives," said Valdes.

Overall, there are 3,811 non-custodial parents, with arrears balances totaling \$89 million dollars, in the four-county area who are not current in their child support payments. These parents can find out more about the Fresh Start Program starting in their area by calling 1-888-293-0825 (toll free).

Below is the implementation schedule for the Fresh Start Program for the rest of the state:

- **June 5, 2006 – Curry, Lea and Roosevelt counties**
- **July 10, 2006 – Bernalillo, Cibola, Sandoval, Socorro, Torrance and Valencia counties**

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