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For Immediate Release

Governor Bill Richardson's "Fresh Start" Program Collects a Half-Million Dollars for Children

Santa Fe, New Mexico, May 9, 2006 – Human Services Department Secretary Pamela Hyde announced today that Governor Bill Richardson's *Fresh Start* Program has netted \$545,194 in lump sum payments over the past year for children of non-custodial parents (NCPs). "We were hoping the program would be this successful," said Hyde. "And it can only get better, since we have yet to roll it out statewide."

The program, which began in April 2005 in the northeastern part of the state, has been effective in several ways: collecting lump sum payments of more than a half-million dollars; waiving principal and/or interest for a total of \$6.9 million; issuing new judgments for a total of \$2 million, which get NCPs on a child support payment plan they can afford; and closing 325 of the 496 *Fresh Start* cases.

The *Fresh Start* Program includes the forgiveness of past debt and interest owed either to the custodial parent or the state. This part of the program has been effective in getting non-custodial parents who are behind in paying their child support in the doors of child support offices. Once inside, child support enforcement staff can restore suspended drivers or professional licenses and work to get the NCP started on a regular payment plan, or close the case altogether.

The Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED), especially those working on the *Fresh Start* Program, are preparing for a tidal wave of calls since the program just began in Doña Ana County, the state's second largest county, population-wise. "We are looking forward to working with more custodial and non-custodial parents and helping them deal with what has probably been a very stressful time in their life," said Cathi Valdes, CSED Acting Director. "Once we accomplish as much as we can through the *Fresh Start* Program, we can then concentrate on getting NCPs on payment plans earlier, rather than later, which is important for avoiding arrears situations altogether."

By mid-July, the 12 remaining counties in the state: Bernalillo, Cibola, Sandoval, Socorro, Torrance, Valencia, Curry, De Baca, Harding, Quay, Roosevelt and Lea, are scheduled to begin *Fresh Start*.

For more information on how to participate in the Governor Bill Richardson *Fresh Start* program, call 1-888-293-0825.

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