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**For Immediate Release**

## **State Senate Unanimously Passes Legislation to Increase Access to Substance Abuse Service Providers in Rural and Tribal Areas of the State**

### **Bill to Allow More Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors to Become Providers for Medicaid Services Now Heads to House of Representatives**

*Santa Fe, March 1, 2007* – Today the State Senate unanimously (37 to 0) passed legislation that increases access to behavioral health services through Medicaid in rural and tribal areas of the state. “We are pleased and encouraged by the Senate vote and look forward to the House of Representatives following suit,” said Pamela Hyde, Secretary of the Human Services Department and co-chair of the NM Interagency Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative (Collaborative).

**Senate Bill (SB) 494 – Counseling and Therapy Licensure Requirements**, sponsored by Senator Phil Griego, allows experienced and qualified Certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors (CADACs) to be grandfathered into the system as Licensed Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors (LADACs).

This change will increase access across the state for Medicaid reimbursable behavioral health services for recipients under age 21. Indian Health Service and Tribal 638 providers would also benefit, as the legislation allows them to be reimbursed at the Office of Management and Budget all-inclusive rates.

“This legislation will help those already certified and working as alcohol and drug abuse counselors become licensed and increase funding for behavioral health services,” said Secretary Hyde, “which will help rural and frontier communities of the state, including Native American communities faced with shortages of behavioral health practitioners.”

SB 494 would provide a three-year window for the NM Counseling and Therapy Practice Board to grant licensure to providers who have been certified as CADACs from July 1, 1996 through July 1, 2010. The three-year window begins July 1, 2007 and ends on July 1, 2010.

This legislation is a recommendation of the Governor’s Executive Order Working Group on the Behavioral Health Workforce. The Collaborative, the Behavioral Health Planning Council (BHPC), the Native American Subcommittee of the BHPC and the New Mexico Counseling and Therapy Practice Board all support this legislation.

SB 494 now moves to the House of Representatives. Duplicate House Bill 713, sponsored by Representative Ray Begaye, passed the House Business and Industry Committee and awaits a hearing before the House Health and Government Affairs Committee.

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