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Governor Richardson's Fresh Start Program Reaches 1,000th Mark

More Than \$1.4 Million Collected From Non-Custodial Parents through Arrears Management Program

Santa Fe, New Mexico –The Human Services Department's (HSD), Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) has reached several milestones through the Governor Bill Richardson's Fresh Start Arrears Management Program, as it handled the 1,000th case last month, collected more than \$1.4 million in back child support owed and marked the third year of the program.

"The Fresh Start Program has been instrumental in collecting child support from some of the most difficult cases in the state," said Pamela Hyde HSD Secretary. "It has brought in non-custodial parents to a CSED office who might otherwise not have come in to settle their child support case because their balance was so high."

The program began as a pilot in northeastern New Mexico in March 2005 and expanded statewide within the first year. It allows the CSED to negotiate forgiveness of some of the child support owed and decreasing or forgiving interest on the amount owed, which for some cases was set at 15 percent. The compounded amount deterred some parents from paying anything.

"The non-custodial parent has to bring something to the table in order for this program to work, and they have with more than \$1.4 million in lump sum payments collected for back child support owed in the 1,000 cases handled so far," said Charissa Saavedra, CSED Director. "The program has also allowed for more regular payments for families with \$3.7 million in new child support orders filed through the court system."

The program also restored suspended licenses of some non-custodial parents, which allowed them to return to work and pay their obligations.

The Fresh Start Program has helped the New Mexico CSED work some of the most difficult and challenging cases. Many of which had been open for years with no real progress," said Saavedra. "This program has benefited both the non-custodial parent and the custodial parent, and more importantly the children."

The New Mexico CSED currently has 59,057 cases and has collected \$92.8 million in child support so far this budget year, a 7.2 percent increase over last year

Non-custodial parents interested in learning more about the Governor Richardson's Fresh Start Program are encouraged to call the Child Support Enforcement Division at 1-888-293-0825.

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