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Governor Bill Richardson Pledges \$2 million to Restore Cash Payments for Struggling New Mexicans

SANTA FE – Governor Bill Richardson, following a meeting today with advocates for low-income New Mexicans, pledged \$2 million to restore most of the money that was planned to be cut from the state’s General Assistance Program. Without the Governor’s intervention, monthly cash payments for the state’s most vulnerable citizens would have been slashed by 36 percent.

“This cash infusion will enable the program to survive the entire budget year and provide a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens who are counting on this monthly cash,” Governor Bill Richardson said. “It will be up to the Legislature to act responsibly during the next session and do its share to fund this program at an acceptable level.”

The additional \$2 million will restore the program to a level that is higher than it was in 2007 when the state made changes to the program. The new money will also allow the state to accommodate the increased demand for assistance during difficult economic times.

Cash benefits will be restored to \$245 per month rather than the \$170 that was proposed under new rule changes. Those changes have been abandoned now that the Governor pledged the \$2 million in additional funding. The monthly benefit for the 13 years prior to last year’s changes was \$231 per month.

“The advocates are very grateful to the governor for stepping forward and using these funds to help the most vulnerable people in the state,” said Ruth Hoffman, Director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry. “We will work hard to see that the Legislature can fund this amount on an on-going basis.”

The General Assistance Program was under-funded during the past two budget years. At the same time the program was seeing an increase in participation, creating an even larger budget shortfall.

The Governor will use \$2 million in federal stimulus funds to help plug the budget gap in the program, and ensure that there is funding throughout the budget year, which runs from July 2009 through June 2010.

The General Assistance program serves an average 2,100 disabled individuals each month who cannot work and who are not otherwise eligible for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program because they do not have a child or children in their home, are not eligible or are awaiting approval for the federal Supplemental Security Income, and may not be eligible for Medicaid.

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