

Las Cruces Sun-News, 9-26-06  
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## **D.C. Delegation Asked to Oppose Medicare Reimbursement Reduction**

By Walter Rubel Santa Fe bureau chief

SANTA FE — The Legislative Health and Human Services Committee voted unanimously Monday to send a letter to New Mexico's congressional delegation urging them to oppose a proposed 5.1 percent reduction in Medicare reimbursement rates and a nine-day suspension of payment to providers.

"It seems to me that we almost have an obligation to protest this so our delegation knows we think this is not the right way to go," said Sen. Mary Kay Papen, D-Las Cruces, in making the motion for the letter.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced last month that the reimbursement rates would be reduced.

"The Medicare law includes a statutory formula that will require CMS to implement an expected minus-5.1 percent update in payment rates for physician-related services," the Centers said in a press release. The reduction would go into effect in 2007, without Congressional intervention.

Sen. Dede Feldman, D-Albuquerque, said Medicaid rates in New Mexico are tied to Medicare rates, so the reductions would impact medical providers in both programs.

The committee also heard Monday about the impact of a new federal law that went into effect in July requiring more stringent identification for those on Medicaid. They must now prove both citizenship and identification. The only document that will cover both requirements is a passport, said Bill Jordan, deputy director for policy at New Mexico Voices for Children.

A birth certificate can be used to prove citizenship, Jordan said, and a photo ID to prove identification. There are also other ways to prove

identification, he said, but enrollees must work through several layers before documents such as a school record would be accepted.

"It's been a real hassle in the field, trying to get children enrolled," Jordan said. "When we did the back-to-school enrollment, which is always the big couple of weeks when Medicaid enrollment is boosted, what we found is that parents weren't prepared with proof of citizenship and proof of identity. And so, enrollment wasn't what it could have been."

Jordan said his concern is that parents will get frustrated with the process and just give up.

Betina Gonzales McCracken, a spokeswoman for the state Human Services

Department, said they have not seen a big impact yet from the new law, but that could be because of the recent decision to extend the enrollment period from six months to a year. She said they have also worked with the Department of Health to access records for children born in New Mexico who may not have a birth certificate.

Preliminary figures for July and August show a small increase in enrollment, Gonzales McCracken said.

Walter Rubel can be reached at [wrubel@lcsun-news.com](mailto:wrubel@lcsun-news.com)