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Report: Fewer families eligible for services

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By [Wendy Brown](#) | The New Mexican
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Advocates for young children in New Mexico plan to ask the Legislature for an additional \$18.2 million in 2007 to increase the number of children eligible to receive child care assistance.

Bill Jordan, deputy director for policy for New Mexico Voices for Children in Albuquerque, said one of the organizations making the recommendation is the Early Childhood Action Network, a committee established by Lt. Gov. Diane Denish.

The announcement came Tuesday as the National Women's Law Center released a report that says parents in New Mexico who rely on state assistance for child care were better off five years ago.

Ranit Schmelzer, the center's vice president for communications, said that in 2001, a family of three could earn up to \$28,300 a year and qualify for child care assistance, while the same family can now only make \$24,960 and qualify.

"For parents, this can mean the difference between leaving their children each day in an environment of nurturing, developmentally appropriate child care and the minimally interactive care of a much less supportive environment," Schmelzer said. "For the child, it's a difference between healthy brain development and a lifetime of lost potential."

Dan Harris, who heads the state's Child Care Services, said the state cut the eligibility limits for child care assistance in 2001 from 200 percent of the federal poverty level to 100 percent of that level. The administration of then-Gov. Gary Johnson made the cuts, he said, and the current administration has increased the limits incrementally since then.

This year the limit increased to 155 percent of the federal poverty level, and the state Children, Youth & Families Department budget plans for an increase to 175 of the federal poverty level next year, Harris said.

The department would support a further increase if the administration of Gov. Bill Richardson supported it, Harris said.

Jordan said it is difficult to estimate how many more children would qualify for childcare assistance if the increase passed, but based on 1999 numbers, roughly 8,500 more children would qualify.

Chris Cervini, spokesman for Denish, did not immediately return a phone call requesting comment Tuesday.

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