

New Mexico Advocates for Children & Families

2000 Legislative Priorities

Re-structure of the Low Income Comprehensive Tax Rebate (LICTR) schedule.

- This legislation would equalize the tax burden, and help offset the effect of the gross receipts tax on poor people. It is also aimed at reducing child poverty by giving low income families with children six years old and younger additional credits, which translate into a larger rebate.

A revision of the state pay scale for government employees.

- Currently, some state government jobs pay as little as \$5.15 an hour, or \$10,700 per year. This wage is less than the federal poverty guidelines for a family of one. NMACF joins the Human Needs Coordinating Council (HNCC) in urging the legislature to increase wages to government employees to \$8 per hour, or \$16,640 per year.

Support of a local option for an excise tax on alcohol.

- This legislation would allow counties to add an additional excise tax - up to 10% - on alcohol sales in order to support alcohol related prevention and treatment programs. For the average six pack of beer, an additional 10% tax would translate to about 40 cents. Beyond DWI, alcohol use and abuse plays a role in domestic violence, child abuse, youth suicide and homicide, and fetal alcohol syndrome, and impacts the lives of many families and children in New Mexico.

Legislation in support of the tobacco settlement committee report to the legislature.

- The New Mexico Legislature set up a committee to make a recommendation for the distribution of the tobacco settlement funds. That committee, The Tobacco Settlement Committee, co-chaired by Senator Mary Jane Garcia (D, Dona Ana), and Representative Gail Beam, (D, Bernalillo) has a preliminary recommendation. New Mexico is estimated to receive \$49.4 million the first year. Of that, 60 percent, or \$29.6 million would be placed into a permanent savings fund. The other 40%, or approximately \$19.8 million would be distributed as follows: 1) \$5.75 million (29.1%) for a public health initiative. The initiative would be comprised of comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation programs based on the Center for Disease Control best practices and diabetes prevention outreach. 2) \$5.95 million (30.1%) would be placed into the next Generation Fund, an endowment fund to support youth development programs statewide. 3) \$275,000 (1.4%) would be given to the New Mexico Literacy Project, which helps youth and adults to see the "truth in advertising." 4) \$3.8 million (19.2 %) for early childhood development; home visits for at-risk children statewide with some future expansion of the number of children served. 5) \$3 Million to the University of New Mexico to endow a chair that would focus on tobacco related illness. This would be a one-time endowment. The proposal does include \$1 million to UNM for research on lung tissue regeneration.

Legislation to support mental health parity.

- This legislation would require insurers to provide coverage for mental health problems to the same extent that physical health problems are covered. Treatment of mental health problems can result in fewer physical health problems, and can help many New Mexicans lead productive and healthy lives. While the Governor vetoed this legislation last session, he now says that he would support mental health parity.

Memorial to examine privatization.

- Many aspects of governmental activity are being privatized, from prison operations, to nursing homes, to water treatment facilities. Sometimes, privatization may result in lower costs to taxpayers. But, privatization also removes the operations in question from the political process, and from public scrutiny. This memorial would call for a study and recommendations regarding privatization. The study would include considerations like a cost benefit analysis, the effect of privatization on existing infrastructure, the effect on employment in the area, and the delegation of authority and responsibility from the state to the private entity.

Memorial requesting LFC to conduct a fiscal and performance audit of CYFD and HSD.

- This memorial would request a fiscal and performance audit of the Children, Youth and Families Department, and the Human Services Department. It stems from concerns about abused and neglected children, and children in the juvenile justice system, and the operations of Medicaid managed care in responding to the needs of children.

Memorial to create an interim committee on managed care OR legislation increasing the paid staff support of the Health and Human Services Interim Committee, enabling that committee to focus on managed care issues.

- Most insured New Mexicans are enrolled in managed care plans. Concerns over problems with managed care have drawn national attention, but many of the concerns remain unaddressed by the managed care companies. The memorial would allow the legislature to more closely examine managed care, provide oversight and make important policy changes for consumers.

DONA ANA CHAPTER PRIORITIES

Regionalized Human Services

- The delivery of human services is especially problematic in southern New Mexico because of complicated cross border health and economic concerns. Because these problems are very localized, creation of a Human Services authority in the southern part of the state would allow for problem solving that could more efficiently and effectively deal with those local issues. This memorial would direct the appropriate state agencies to review their statutory directives, and report to the legislature which functions might be regionalized.

Creation of an Information and Referral (I & R) system in southern New Mexico.

- There is currently not a system in southern New Mexico that allows callers to find resources to meet their human services needs. Both Farmington and Albuquerque operate I & R centers through the local United Way, but efforts to generate money through United Way in southern New Mexico have been unsuccessful. This legislation would make money available for the development of I & R services.

Creation of an employer/ employee supported child care center in Dona Ana County.

- Only two of the licensed child care centers in Dona Ana county are open on weekends, and only three are open after 6 p.m. Many TANF recipients work non-traditional hours, and they are in need of child care services. This initiative would provide \$100,000 to establish a child care center responsive to the needs of working parents, which involves employers in a partnership to help offset some of the costs of child care.

YOUTHLINK MEMORIALS

Memorial to study alternatives to school suspension and expulsion

- Current school policies do not provide opportunities during suspension or expulsion periods for students to continue their studies without first losing ground, or if expelled, to return to school to complete their high school education. This memorial would study alternative educational opportunities for suspended and expelled students.

Memorial to examine the relationship between teen pregnancy and age appropriate sex education

- New Mexico has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the nation. This memorial would examine the relationship between age appropriate sex education and its impact on teen pregnancy rates, an important first step in understanding the effectiveness of prevention education.

Memorial to approve Juvenile Drug Courts

- Currently two Judicial Districts have grant-based Juvenile Drug Courts. During the year 2000, 9-10 more districts will be funded to create Juvenile Drug Courts. The memorial would require those judicial districts that have Juvenile Drug Courts under grant programs approved by the state, to submit periodic reports that include levels of community involvement in the district programs; reports of DWI citations versus “minors in possession”; the numbers of graduates from the program; and the costs of administering the programs. The Memorial should also express the intent of the Legislature that youths be involved in the adjudication process of the Juvenile Drug Courts.