

Viewpoint Viewpoint



Kids and Families Win at Roundhouse

2007 Legislative Session Brings Long-Awaited Victories

One of the challenges of advocating for public policy change is that victories take time. Lots of time. Years, even. And they require lots of work and collaboration. We worked especially closely this year with our partners in the faith community and with organized labor, human rights groups and many other advocacy organizations. Along with our partners, we gave expert testimony before many committees, created detailed fact sheets for our legislators, and appealed to our friends and

supporters to get involved. And it paid off. The 2007 legislative session was a great one for the children and families of New Mexico

While we can't help but feel proud, we also want to thank our legislators and Governor Bill Richardson for their support. Here's a rundown of the many big victories and the few disappointments from the nearly 200 bills that were on the legislative agenda for NM Voices for Children:

Various Victories

- ✓ **Statewide Increase in the Minimum Wage**
Beginning in January of next year, minimum wage earners across the state will make \$6.75 an hour – a big bump from \$5.15 an hour, to be sure, though still not a living wage. Minimum wages go up again to \$7.50 an hour in January 2009. It's not quite everything we asked for, as the bill also precludes cities and counties from raising their minimum wages above that amount until 2010, and does not allow the wage to rise automatically with inflation. Still, the preemption does not affect those municipalities (Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County) that have already raised their wages. Our thanks to the leaders of both chambers – House Speaker Ben Lujan and Senate President Pro Tem Ben Altamirano, as well as Gov. Richardson for his public support.
- ✓ **Creation of a Working Families Tax Credit**
Starting next tax year, low-income working families that qualify for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) will also qualify for a state-level credit, which will be worth 8 percent of the federal credit. The EITC has had broad bipartisan support, as have the many state-level versions that have popped up around the country. Our thanks again to House Speaker Lujan as well as Sen. Jerry Ortiz y Pino, Sen. Clint Harden and Gov. Richardson.
- ✓ **Increase in Low-Income Tax Exemptions**
Exemptions from personal income taxes were increased to give low- and middle-income



workers a break on their taxes. For a family with an adjusted gross income of \$18,000, it would mean additional exemptions of \$2,500 for each federal exemption. Our thanks to Rep. Ed Sandoval, the new chair of the House Tax and Revenue Committee, for championing this bill.

- ✓ **Regulation of Payday Lending** Payday lenders are notorious for preying on the poor, and payday loans are notorious for trapping people in endless debt. This compromise bill represents a tremendous win for consumers. The bill caps fees at \$15.50 per \$100 borrowed and allows for no rollovers – which is where the industry made most of its money ... and the poor lost most of theirs. Loans that are not repaid during the initial loan period automatically revert to a 130-day payment plan. And no more borrowing money from one payday lender to pay off another payday loan. Our thanks to Lt. Governor Diane Denish, and to Sen. Bernadette Sanchez and Rep. Patty Lundstrom for their hard work, dedication and willingness to compromise.
- ✓ **Tax Expenditure Reporting Required** This bill requires that the state Tax and Revenue Department create a report of all the tax exemptions, deductions and credits the Legislature has allowed in previous years (such as exempting health care providers from the gross receipts tax, for example). The report would also include an analysis of the benefits those expenditures had on the state's economy. Several states and the federal government already do this, and it allows lawmakers to make better decisions about the state budget. Tax exemptions amount to state spending, after all, they're just not listed on the budget. Rep. Brian Moore is our hero for taking on this important issue.
- ✓ **Increased Unemployment Insurance Benefits** Unemployment insurance (UI) is crucial in tiding families over when a breadwinner is between jobs. Under this bill, weekly benefits increase, the dependent benefit climbs from \$15 a week per child to \$25 a week, and employers

get a break on their UI taxes. We have Rep. Mimi Stewart to thank for this win-win-win legislation.

- ✓ **Enactment of a Special Needs Adopted Child Tax Credit** People who adopt special-needs children face numerous challenges, but paying for that child's care should not be one of them. This bill allows a \$1000 tax credit for such families, hopefully making it more economically feasible for more families to open their hearts and homes to these special children. Our thanks to Rep. Rhonda King.
- ✓ **Passage of the Child Helmet Safety Act** Adults can no longer knowingly allow their children to go bike riding, roller-skating and the like without a helmet. This bill will cut down on traumatic brain injuries, keeping kids safe and saving the health care system money. You could call it a 'no-brainer.' With thanks to Sen. Linda Lopez who worked for years to pass this legislation.
- ✓ **Passage of the Dee Johnson Clean Indoor Air Act** Beginning in June it will be illegal to smoke in most work places – including most bars and restaurants. This bill was undoubtedly fueled in part by the Surgeon General's recent report that no level of exposure to secondhand smoke is safe, but we can't discount the hard work put in by the youth of the various anti-tobacco coalitions who lobbied for it. And a big thanks to Rep. Al Park as well. →



New Mexico youth lobby against "Big Tobacco" during the 2007 legislative session. Their blue faces represent holding their breath until indoor air is rid of second-hand tobacco smoke.

- ✓ **Cockfighting is Banned** Perhaps one of the most contentious perennial issues, the banning of cockfighting has never had the traction it had this year. It's long-anticipated passage is due in large part to Gov. Richardson's public support. This barbaric blood ritual has been touted by its supporters as a family activity – but research tells us that children who witness violence are victimized by that violence. Our thanks to the governor and Sen. Mary Jane Garcia.



- ✓ **Memorial to Support SCHIP** While reauthorizing and funding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is under the purview of Congress, we can certainly encourage them to act responsibly on the matter. Our Legislature did just that with a pair of memorials, courtesy of Rep. Park and Sen. Kent Cravens. SCHIP funding allows states to insure children whose parents make too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but who don't make enough to purchase coverage on their own.
- ✓ **Breast Pump Usage in the Workplace Safeguarded** Nursing mothers no longer need to worry about employment repercussions for pumping breast milk, which has to be done on a regular basis. Thanks to Rep. Danice Picraux for sponsoring legislation that requires employers to provide space and flexible break time for this most basic of childcare needs.

Parsing the State Budget

While the state budget is a big and complicated creature, we followed a few of our priorities and

are happy to report that they received the sort of funding we'd supported. Here are just a few:

- ✓ **Medicaid Expansion** The vast majority of Medicaid recipients are children and the elderly. But with more and more working adults losing their employer-sponsored health insurance, expanding that coverage to parents has become imperative. This appropriation will cover adults living at the federal poverty level. Funded at \$10.9 million, thanks to Sen. Dede Feldman and Rep. Picraux.
- ✓ **Native American Youth Suicide Prevention** Poverty, the legacy of discrimination and cultural destruction, and rampant alcoholism and drug abuse are just a few of the issues that drive Native youth to take their own lives in higher percentages than their white and Hispanic counterparts. Program funded at \$50,000, thanks to Rep. Ray Begaye.
- ✓ **Autism Programs** The rise in autism across the country is worrisome to say the least. Study and treatment funded at \$3.4 million.
- ✓ **Childcare Expansion** Childcare costs are so high that many low-income workers can't afford to work if it means leaving their child in daycare. Assistance increased by \$5.7 million with \$2.5 million going toward expanding the program to include families living at 165% of the FPL and another \$2 million for increasing payments to childcare centers, thanks to Sen. Lopez and Rep. King.
- ✓ **Pre-K Program** Studies have overwhelmingly shown that children from low-income families do better in school when they first attend a pre-K program. Funding increased by \$6 million, thanks to the Lt. Gov. Denish.
- ✓ **Adult Basic Education** Critical for parents who need to improve their skills in order to find better-paying work. Program funded at \$300,000, thanks to Sen. Harden.

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- ✓ **College Affordability Fund** – like health insurance, the cost of a college education has greatly outpaced inflation over the past decade. To make matters worse, the stagnation in wages has meant far too many graduates can't pay back their student loans. Funded at \$48 million.
- ✓ **Housing Trust Fund** – \$2 million in new money appropriated, thanks to Sen. Nancy Rodriguez.
- ✓ **LIHEAP Assistance** – low-income families too often must choose between putting food on the table and paying utility bills. During winter, such a choice may have fatal repercussions, which is why state and federal governments make assistance available so low-income families can pay their heating bills. Assistance funded at \$6 million, thanks to Sen. Altamirano and Rep. Sandoval.
- ✓ **Racial Impact Assessments** – it's important to understand what forces lead to an overrepresentation of racial minorities in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Study funded at \$100,000, thanks to Rep. Jim Trujillo.

Delightful Defeats

While supporting certain legislation may seem like the most appropriate work for an advocacy group, it's equally important to oppose legislation that we believe would harm the well being of New Mexico's kids. Here are a few we opposed that we were happy to see defeated:

- ✓ **Definition of Marriage** – families come in all shapes and sizes, and defining a loving domestic relationship as only occurring between certain types of adults is to violate the rights of many.
- ✓ **All Gun Bills Except One** – several bills were floated that would have relaxed gun use regulations. Fortunately, those were all defeated – except one, which makes it legal to carry a concealed handgun into an establishment that sells alcohol. Too bad, booze and guns are never a good mix
- ✓ **TABOR** – a so-called Taxpayer Bill of Rights,

TABOR is really just a way to hamstring state spending – whether it needs to be limited or not. In reality, under TABOR restrictions, state governments end up playing a budgetary shell game – and funding is invariably moved out of social services to make up for shortfalls elsewhere.

Downright Disappointments

We suffered few disappointments this session, but we'll take up the battle that we did lose next time around.

- ✓ **Abolishing the Death Penalty** — beyond the fact that we're the last 'civilized' nation to continue this practice, the death penalty has long been known for its disproportionate use on men of color. This bill, carried by Rep. Gail Chasey, passed the House but failed in the Senate.
- ✓ **Prohibit Children from Serving as Medical Interpreters** – when non-English speakers end up in the emergency room, it's often their children who end up as impromptu translators. Aside from this being completely inappropriate, it's also entirely inadequate. Medical translation is a specific skill and hospitals need to have professionally trained personnel on staff. Though Sen. Ortiz y Pino's bill died in committee, a pilot program to train interpreters at University Hospital was funded, thanks to Sen. Altamirano and Rep. Rick Miera.
- ✓ **Corporate Tax Reform** – although the state Tax and Revenue Department backed this bill, it died in committee. Referred to as 'combined reporting,' it would have required multi-state corporations – like Wal-Mart – to pay corporate income tax on the profits they make in New Mexico. Thanks to a loophole in our tax law, they've found clever ways around paying their fair share. Our thanks to Rep. Peter Wirth.
- ✓ **Funding for Mental Health Care for Native American Students** – like the suicide prevention program, mental health care is a critical need in our Native communities. But the \$500,000 to fund it, sponsored by Rep. Begaye, was cut. ■

Meet the New E.D.

Catherine Direen joined New Mexico Voices for Children this past February as executive director, taking the reins from Kay Monaco. Catherine brings extensive experience in social justice advocacy, policy change, community activism, and nonprofit management. Her previous work has included health care reform, economic reform, social justice, living wage issues, and eliminating racial disparities.

Having worked with Kaiser Permanente's nationwide Labor Management Partnership, the California Academy of Family Physicians, and the nationwide Asian American Journalists Association, among others, Catherine has developed a resume that spans several states. She served as interim executive director for several organizations in Northern California before moving to New Mexico to work as a consultant. She holds a master's degree in analytic philosophy from Ohio State University.

"I welcome the opportunity to work on behalf of the children of New Mexico," said Catherine, who



Catherine Direen, Executive Director

made New Mexico her home almost two years ago. "Living in one of the world's most prosperous nations, we ultimately have the resources to provide the education, jobs, living wages, and family supports necessary to end poverty here. I look forward to working with people throughout the state to continue finding the best ways forward."

A Look at Kay's Legacy

Long-time Executive Director Kay Monaco left NM Voices for Children this February for new opportunities. Under Kay's direction, NM Voices began working on public policy issues such as taxes and budgets. While tax collection and government spending may seem entirely unrelated to child well-being, they are, in fact, critical if we are to make any permanent headway in ending child poverty. How our government collects taxes – from whom and how much – and how our government spends that money, are enormous determinants in how its citizens – and their children – fare economically.

Our public policy work has earned NM Voices a high profile within the community and an excellent reputation to go with it. One of the ways we measure this success is by the caliber of the other organizations that solicit our advice or want to partner with us. For example, we were recently quoted in a story in the *New York Times*. We're also proud to say that we can now add the Harvard Graduate School of Education to the list.

The Harvard Family Research Project, housed in the School of Education, publishes a professional journal each quarter called *The Evaluation Exchange*. The current issue, geared toward evaluators, looks at evaluation techniques in the advocacy arena. Since the fruits of advocacy work often don't appear for years, evaluating that work is particularly challenging.

Among the organizations contributing expertise in this issue is the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which funds our Kids Count work. It was our partners at Casey who recommended that the journal speak with Voices about our self-evaluation process.

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We're All Grown Up!

Founded in 1987 by a group of pediatricians, New Mexico Voices for Children this year marks its twentieth anniversary of advocacy work on behalf of New Mexico's children. In that time we've gone through a few name changes, and we've even shifted the focus of our work a bit, but our mission has never changed: to speak for New Mexico's children in order to improve their well being and that of their families and communities.

With the advent of our double-decade anniversary, we thought it would be fun to provide you with some lists of 20 things we think are important and that guide our work. We'll bring you a new list with every newsletter for 2007. Enjoy.

Twenty Reasons We Do This Work

1. New Mexico is home to nearly half a million children – and each one deserves the best shot at life we can give them.*
2. Children have no real voice in the government decisions that affect them unless someone speaks on their behalf.
3. We believe everyone has the right to equal economic opportunity, affordable health care, quality education and safe neighborhoods.
4. Children are our future – and our responsibility, whether they're our own children or not.
5. Children suffer when their families lack economic stability, face discrimination or feel disenfranchised.
6. More than half (56%) of our state's children live in low-income families (below 200% of the federal poverty level).*
7. Among our Native-American population, 40% of children live under the federal poverty level.**
8. Despite this poverty, only 4% of the children living in low-income families live in homes where no adult works.*
9. More than 20% of New Mexico's children have no health insurance.*
10. While black children only make up 2% of the total child population, they represent 6% of the children in foster care.**
11. Some 15% of new mothers report not having enough food in the house.**
12. Almost half (48%) of New Mexico's school kids qualify for free lunches.**
13. Only two states have higher teen birth rates than New Mexico.*
14. Almost one-quarter of all child abuse allegations are substantiated.**
15. New Mexico's child death rate is higher than the national average.*
16. In 2000, New Mexico's rate of firearm-related deaths was more than twice the national average.**
17. While the vast majority of brain development occurs in the first four years, the vast majority of New Mexico's educational investment doesn't begin reach them until they are six.**
18. Nearly half of our fourth-grade students scored below the basic reading level in 2005.*
19. New Mexico has a lower median household income than any of its bordering neighbors.**
20. New Mexico ranks 48th in the nation – second lowest – in general child health and well-being.*

Sources:

*Annie E. Casey 2006 Kids Count Data Book

**NM Voices for Children publications

Celebrating Spirited Youth

Our Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Award is all about recognizing the inspirational community service work that's selflessly done by youth all across the state, and this year we had a crop of 44 excellent nominees. We'll be honoring each and every one – and awarding scholarships to two winners and two honorees – at our **Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Award** ceremony. One winner and honoree will be named in each of the two age groups – 13 to 18 and 19 to 26.

The Youth Spirit Award was inspired by the work of Amy Biehl, a graduate of Santa Fe High School who was killed at the age of 26 while in South Africa on a Fulbright Scholarship. She was conducting voter registration for the country's first all-race election that ended the policy of apartheid when she was killed in a riot.

This year's keynote speaker is local author Carol Cassell, Ph.D. Carol, a nationally recognized leader in the field of sex education, will speak at the ceremony about the importance of experiencing success in young adulthood and how that can be fostered through community service.

Carol is a popular keynote speaker and her presentations are highly rated as “thought provoking,” “practical” and “entertaining.” Known for her down-to-earth advice and sense of humor, Carol has appeared on many radio and television programs and is a frequently quoted expert on a range of topics in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and numerous women's magazines. Carol's three critically acclaimed books, *Swept Away*, *Tender Bargaining* and *Straight from the Heart*, are published in four languages.



The 2006 Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Award Nominees

Monica Armenta, the executive director of the Albuquerque Public Schools Education Foundation and a former TV news anchor, will emcee the awards ceremony, which includes lunch and entertainment. We hope you'll join us for this heart-warming tribute to New Mexico's future as embodied in some of its brightest and best young people.

Save the Date

The Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Awards ceremony is Friday, April 20, 11:30am to 1:30pm, at the Embassy Suites Hotel (1000 Woodward Pl. NE) in Albuquerque. Tickets are \$38 and are available online at www.nmvoices.org/abysa.htm. Reservations may also be made by calling 505-244-9505, ext. 10. RSVP by April 17.

(Kay's legacy continued from page 6)

The result is a two-page spread, featuring Kay, explaining how we evaluate our work here at NM Voices.

Needless to say, we're extremely pleased to be featured in a journal from such a prestigious university and to be in such good company. This issue also features “ask the expert” sections with professional evaluation groups Innovation Network and Continuous Progress, as well as foundations such as the California Endowment, Atlantic Philanthropies, W.K. Kellogg Foundation and, of course, the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

You can find the publication online here: www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval.html. You'll find the article on pages 16 and 17, and our “blowfish” theory of change is reproduced on page 18. ■

With Fame Comes Shame (and Bad Publicity)

On April 14 we roll out the red carpet and eagerly await the arrival of celebrities and the glitterati at the **Third Annual Fame & Shame Awards** event. Actually, these “celebrities” are local teens dressed as the movies stars who have worked the hardest at glamorizing smoking in recent Hollywood movies. Besides shaming Hollywood’s involvement in tobacco pushing, the event will highlight the “Youth Kicking Tobacco’s Butt Youth Advocate of the Year Award” recipients. The award recognizes teens who have distinguished themselves by working to protect their peers and communities from tobacco addiction and the related illnesses. Participants are members of the statewide coalition Youth Empowerment Advocacy Heroes (YEAH!). NM Voices is involved with YEAH! through our Youth Link program, which empowers teens to educate their peers and advocate for issues that affect their well-being.

The Fame and Shame Awards are an important part of the national Kick Butts Day observance, since non-smoking teens are 16 times more likely to develop positive feelings toward smoking if they see their favorite stars smoking on screen. Please join us for all the fun and glamour!



Left: Is that Joe Camel at the 2006 Fame & Shame Awards?



Right: The Youth Link gang (Brian Urban, Lisa Mullings, Kesi Perea, Kristen Woodruff and Marica Martinic) at the 2006 Fame & Shame Awards - dressed to impress!

Save the Date

The 3rd Annual Fame & Shame Awards event is Saturday, April 14, at the KiMo Theater in downtown Albuquerque (423 Central Ave. NW). The red-carpet arrivals begin at 4:30pm. Attendance is free and open to all.

More Race Matters

The date is set for our next **Race Matters Conference**, where we look at youth policy through a racial lens. Last year’s conference was a great success and many of the attendees expressed interest in continued work in this field. We’re still hammering out the details regarding topics and speakers, but it’s not too early to register.

Save the Date

The Race Matters conference is Wednesday, May 30, 8am to 4:30pm, at the UNM Continuing Education Center (1634 University NE) in Albuquerque. Early registration is \$75, day-of registration is \$85, and students under 21 pay \$25. You can register online at www.nmvoices.org/racematters.



In Memorium

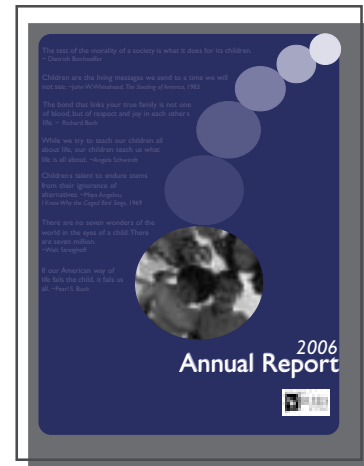
State Senator Jerry Ortiz y Pino, who served as NM Voices' executive director from 1995 to '98, has suffered two family losses over the past few months. In early March, his father Pedro ("Pete") passed away. Pete was active in state government, the Catholic Church, and the community. He was preceded in death by his wife Evangeline, and is survived by their six children and numerous grand- and great-grandchildren and step-grandchildren.

Last fall, the family matriarch, Concha Ortiz y Pino de Kleven, who was Pete's first cousin, passed away. She contributed energetically to her many causes and served three terms in the Legislature. She was the first woman in the nation to serve as majority whip in a state legislature.

As a former NM Voices leader, Jerry holds a special place in our hearts. Our thoughts and well wishes are with him and his family.

The Annual Accounting

Our Annual Report for fiscal years 2005-06 has arrived. If you made a contribution to NM Voices in the last fiscal year, you should have received one in the mail. It's also available on our website at www.nmvoices.org.



Oh, Give Me a Home...

You don't need to have roaming buffalo to make Bright Eyes feel at home on your plains. Just lots of room in your heart (and a lot of hay). We're still looking for someone to adopt our dun-colored Appaloosa colt, who will celebrate his first birthday this summer. If you're interested in purchasing this precious colt, contact Felicia Griffin, Director of Operations and Development, at 505-244-9505, ext. 21, or fgriffin@nmvoices.org.



Bright Eyes - still looking for a good home.

Staff Member List

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Support Us!

Without the crucial research and advocacy work we do, one-third of New Mexico's children -- those who live in poverty -- would have no voice in the public policy that affects them.

Please add your VOICE to ours by making a financial contribution to support our vital work. Make a donation today by completing the form below and returning to us along with your check or visit our website at www.nmvoices.org to make a contribution online.

Thank you for your support.

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