

# Viewpoint



On the brighter side, funding was appropriated to create 50 new caseworker positions at the chronically understaffed Human Services Department to assist with Medicaid enrollment and re-certification. Two memorials to track the Medicaid re-certification process were also passed, which will hopefully help more kids get uninterrupted care. Our thanks to Gov. Bill Richardson (for championing the Medicaid expansion), Sen. Jerry Ortiz y Pino, Rep. Danice Picraux, and Rep. Lucky Varela (for their re-certification legislation).

## The Legislative Low-Down Highlights from the 2008 Legislative Session

After the many victories of the 60-day 2007 session, a 30-day session just seems way too short to get everything done. The just-concluded 30-day session was more of a disappointment than usual. Here's a rundown of both victories and defeats:

### Medicaid and Health Care

With employer-sponsored health insurance on the decline, and more and more children unable to see a doctor for even routine and preventative care, Medicaid takes on an increasingly important role in keeping kids healthy. It will also be a cornerstone to any successful plan that extends coverage to all New Mexicans. But too many state legislators didn't see it that way. Medicaid was under funded by at least \$11 million. Since this critical program is matched with federal dollars, under funding it by \$11 million means we will not receive nearly \$30 million in federal dollars. Another \$9 million, which the governor requested to enroll another 9,000 children in the health care program, was also denied.

Other health legislation we supported that didn't pass included the Health Care Authority bill, which would have set up an independent body to develop evidence-based answers to the many unknowns that stand in the way of universal coverage and come up with legislation for the 2009 session. Funding that was appropriated for urban Indian health care was vetoed. Our thanks to Sen. Dede Feldman and Rep. Picraux (Health Care Authority), and Sen. Linda Lopez and Rep. Mimi Stewart (urban Indian health care).

### Education and Childcare

One of the most important bills in the education arena was to revisit the public school funding formula. Among other things, it would have increased funding for schools in high poverty areas, but was defeated at the governor's request. The governor also vetoed \$3 million for the highly successful Kindergarten Plus program, \$1.4 million for the college affordability fund, and \$700,000 for a rate increase for childcare providers, which is vital to improve childcare quality. Our thanks to sponsors Rep. Stewart (school funding formula and Kindergarten Plus), and Rep. Rhonda King and Sen. Lopez (childcare legislation).

*(Continued on page 2)*

# New Mexico Voices for Children

*(Legislative Low-Down continued from page 1)*

New Mexico's growing Pre-K program was funded at \$5.4 million – although, that's a far cry from the \$20 million requested by the governor. Two school-related programs to help youth – mentoring and bullying prevention – were funded, and Adult Basic Education programs received \$150,000. On the childcare side, \$1 million was appropriated for voluntary newborn home visitation, a program that offers support and guidance to new parents, and \$150,000 went to TEACH, which provides scholarships for childcare professionals. Our thanks go to Gov. Richardson and Lt. Governor Diane Denish (for Pre-K), First Lady Barbara Richardson and Sen. Ortiz y Pino (youth mentoring), Rep. Rick Miera (bullying prevention) Rep. Picraux (home visiting), Rep. Nick Salazar and Sen. Clint Harden (ABE), and Sen. Lopez (TEACH).

## **Tax Policy**

While tax policy is a big part of our work, no significant tax legislation – good or bad – passed this session. This year we focused a lot of energy on tax increment development districts, or TIDDs. Our concern with TIDDs is that diverting so much state gross receipts tax revenue to private developers could seriously jeopardize the stability of the state General Fund. The two reforms that we backed failed, but so did a bill to allow the developer SunCal to issue general obligation bonds for a new development on Albuquerque's west side. The fact that we were able to rally so many legislators against it is a considerable victory – particularly since the pro-TIDD side was represented by nearly a dozen lobbyists. Along with our partners – legislators and other community and advocacy groups – we educated and activated a lot of people on an issue that would otherwise have passed largely unnoticed. A very big thanks to Sen. Cisco McSorley, Rep. Elias Barela and Rep. Keith Gardner, among many others.

Legislation to require combined reporting – which would keep multi-state corporations from sheltering the profits they make on their businesses in New Mexico, hence lowering the corporate income tax they owe here – failed again this year. Even though this legislation would level the playing field for New Mexico-owned corporations, which cannot take advantage of this tax loophole, the large business organizations fought it as usual, despite support for the legislature from small business leaders. Our thanks to Rep. Peter Wirth for sponsoring this bill again.

The perennial TABOR legislation (the so-called 'tax payer's bill of rights') was again defeated. We oppose such legislation for a variety of reasons. We don't believe that the state budget should be artificially limited, and that doing so hampers a state's ability to fund programs so they keep pace with inflation and population growth. Such spending limits almost always result in cuts to important services like education, health care and the upkeep of public infrastructure. They also make it nearly impossible for the state to address new and emerging concerns. Similar legislation in other states has proven to be devastating.

## **Other**

In the miscellaneous category: \$2 million was appropriated for the Housing Trust Fund, a housing task force memorial was passed, and \$500,000 was appropriated for individual development accounts (IDAs), which help low-income people set aside some savings. Both appropriations are far short of what is really needed, though. Thanks to Sen. Nancy Rodriguez (Housing Trust Fund), Sen. Ortiz y Pino (Housing First Task Force), and Sen. Bernadette Sanchez (IDAs).

We were pleased to see two bills defeated that would have increased penalties for gang-related crimes. We oppose such legislation because we believe it demonizes kids – who should be judged on their behavior not the friends they keep. The No Child Left Inside Act, which uses a tax on TVs and video games to fund outdoor activities, was funded at \$150,000. Legislation to criminalize human trafficking also passed. We supported both of these initiatives. Thanks to Rep. Gail Chasey (No Child Left Inside) and Sen. Mary Jane Garcia (human trafficking).

While the Marriage Equality legislation, which would have provided domestic partnership status for couples who cannot or do not wish to marry, had heavy support early in the session, it was ultimately defeated. On the upside, two attempts to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman were also defeated. No ethics legislation was passed, but \$176,000 was approved to create a searchable online database of campaign contributions. Our thanks go out to Rep. Stewart (Marriage Equality) and Rep. Ken Martinez (online searchable database).

And a big thanks to all of you who answered our calls to action and contacted your legislators to urge them to support or oppose legislation.

## The Next Twenty Years: Nurturing a New Generation

### *The New Mexico Children's Charter*

We marked quite a milestone for New Mexico Voices for Children during 2007. We celebrated our 20th anniversary in November. And while we had our share of fun (you can see photos from our anniversary gala inside), we also took the opportunity to look ahead; to formulate a vision for what we'd like to see in the next 20 years. We'd like for New Mexico's next generation to live in a very different place than we live in today. We'd like them to enjoy more economic opportunity, universal access to health care, an excellent educational system, and an end to the disparities caused by our country's racial divide. And that's just for starters.



Brian Jennings signs the wall-sized version of the New Mexico Children's Charter.

In order to better realize this vision, we set our deepest hopes down on paper in what we call **the New Mexico Children's Charter**. The charter is a road map, of sorts, as well as a promise and a call to action. It is also a living document; in which course corrections can be made as needs change. We see the following outcomes as the destination of that course:

- No child lives in poverty
- Every child and adult has access to quality health care, including mental health care
- Every family has access to affordable, safe and high quality early childcare and education
- Every child has access to a public education system that is fully funded and in which resources are equitably distributed
- Every New Mexican can afford to go to college
- Our youth have access to positive development opportunities and alternatives to incarceration
- Our youth have enough positive options available to them that they put off parenthood until they are older and economically independent
- Every family has safe, affordable housing and sufficient, nutritious food
- Our economic development strategy provides for jobs that pay living wages, guarantee family leave, protect workers' rights, and provide access to education to improve skills and success in the workplace
- Our tax system is transparent, everyone pays their fair share, and it generates enough revenue to maintain necessary programs
- Children and families are a high priority in federal, state and local budgets
- Every family has access to appropriate credit, and predatory lending practices are abolished
- Our state has and enforces strong environmental laws that protect public health and the future of the planet
- All communities, regardless of diversity, size or place, have a voice in state government
- Our voter rights are protected and civic participation is encouraged
- Our elected officials are held accountable through campaign finance reform and ethics laws
- All New Mexicans are assured protection of their human rights and civil liberties
- No one experiences disparities in education, health, economic opportunity, housing, civil rights, self determination or personal power because of their race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation
- All immigrants to New Mexico are protected by just and humane immigration policies
- Every community is a safe, welcoming place for families and children

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# New Mexico Voices for Children

*(Children's Charter continued from page 3)*

Together with policymakers, partners, and other organizations, we will craft workable strategies and set realistic benchmarks for achieving our goals. Success will depend upon more than just advocating for specific legislation or equitable public policies. As some of our allies have suggested, it will also mean changing public attitudes; moving people away from what economist Jared Bernstein calls "You're On Your Own" (YOYO) mentality and building a "We're In This Together" (WITT) mindset.

We hope you share our vision for New Mexico's children and families. And we hope that if you do, you will raise your voice with ours and speak for the children.

## **Thanks to all of our 20th Anniversary Gala Sponsors**

### **Champion for Children**

Dean William. Rudoy, Ph.D.

### **Guardian for Children**

Clear Channel Outdoor, Pachamama

### **Advocate for Children**

Albuquerque the Magazine, Qwest, Tony DellaFlora, Jim "Grub" Graebner & the CNM Film Program

### **Friend of Children**

AFSME

### **Voice for Children**

- Albuquerque Academy • John & Polly Arango • Atkinson & Kelsey, P.A. • Susanne Brown, M.D.
- Caroline Buerkle • Central New Mexico Community College Foundation • Denish, Kline & Associates
  - Desert Hills of New Mexico • Don Chalmers Ford • The Dudley Family & Friends • Julian Garza
    - Javier Gonzales • Joseph Anthony Wasson, Jr./Jams Unlimited • Guerrilla Graphix
  - The Gulf Stream Group Worldwide • Hogares, Inc. • Robert P. McNeill, Attorney at Law • Mesa del Sol
  - NM Commission for Community Volunteerism • NM Investment Advisors • NM Pediatric Society
    - Frank & Frances Padilla • Janice & Stuart Paster • Richard Romero • Ron Romero
  - Sawmill Community Land Trust • The Setter Group • SouthWest Organizing Project
    - Sutin, Thayer & Browne • TFV, Inc. • University of New Mexico
  - Youth Development, Inc. • Youth Development, Inc. - Wise Men/Wise Women

# New Mexico Voices for Children

## A Glimpse at the Gala

We hosted quite a crowd at our **20th Anniversary Gala and Awards Ceremony** in November – some 600 people from the far reaches of the state. Among the evening highlights were the awards ceremony to honor citizens and lawmakers for their work to improve the health and well being of New Mexico’s children, several youth performances, and the keynote speaker’s compelling tale of surviving child abuse and becoming an advocate for domestic violence awareness and legislation. You can view all of the event photos from a link on our website home page. All photos by Ray A. Mares.



Guests peruse some of the many silent auction items.



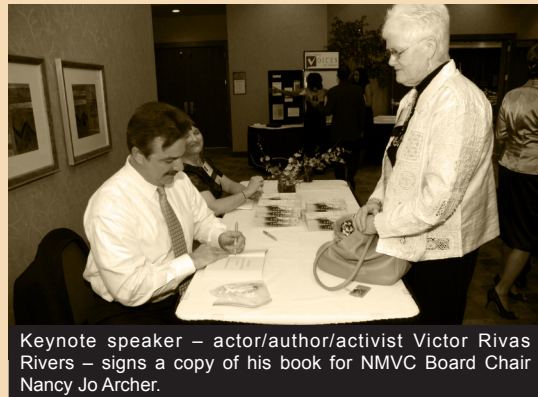
A pre-dinner crowd packs the Embassy Suites to enjoy live music by the Route 66 Jazz Quartet.



Dancers from the National Institute of Flamenco's Niñas Flamencas group perform a colorful number.



NMVC Executive Director Eric Griego congratulates Lt. Governor Diane Denish on winning the Early Care Voice for Children award for her work on behalf of early education and quality child care.



Keynote speaker – actor/author/activist Victor Rivas Rivers – signs a copy of his book for NMVC Board Chair Nancy Jo Archer.

## Recent Events



▲ Youth performers from Albuquerque Public Schools and Working Classroom's theater program lend their comic and vocal talents to the Roundhouse Comedy Revue (l. to r.): Esperanza Cervantes, Elora Daniels, Mikey Pruitt (in back), Mike Montoya (as the Fonz), James Camacho, Logan Mitchell, and Mia Daniels. photo courtesy of the Daniels family

The roast – whether of celebrities or politicians – is a time-honored tradition, and we tried our hand at it during the just-ended legislative session. We poked fun at New Mexico's own unique brand of politics in our Roundhouse Comedy Revue. The evening of songs, satire and silliness featured a stellar cast of local kids (pictured), several state legislators who know how to have fun, and emcee Steven Michael Quezada, who treated the audience to some of his choice comic material. The show was extremely well-received and we hope to make it an annual fundraising event. Our thanks go out to the brilliant cast, spectacular writers, and terrific technical assistants: Alliance Audio Visual, Nan Elsasser/Working Classroom, Jenny Gamble and Thane Kenny/Starving Artists.

**Thanks to all of our Roundhouse Comedy Revue Sponsors Committee - AFSCME**

**Filiboosters** - ATF Teacher Leadership Foundation, Richard Romero John and Polly Arango, Natasha Ning, Bill O'Neill, James Rivera, Robert Rivera, The Setter Group, Linda Siegel, Don and Marsha Simonson

We released our 2007 New Mexico Kids Count report at our KIDS COUNT Day at the Legislature. This year's report focuses on the value of early care and education and how an investment in a child's first years pays off for the child and society as a whole. Lt. Governor Diane Denish joined us to speak about the importance of early care and education, as well as the importance of health coverage for kids in their success at school. As always, our KIDS COUNT report is available on our website.

## Upcoming Events

It's like our own little Oscar Awards except that you don't want to win one of these little statuettes. It's the 4th Annual Fame & Shame Awards, a production of the kids in the statewide YEAH! coalition. The directors, actors and movies in which smoking is glamorized earn the dubious distinction of the "Shamie" awards, while our anti-tobacco crusaders are honored with fame and the Youth Kicking Tobacco's butt of the Year Awards. The Fame & Shame Awards event is Friday, June 6, 2008, and attendance is always free. We'll keep you posted on the time and place if you keep your sequins and tuxedos at the ready!

The 2007 Fame & Shame Awards held at Albuquerque's KiMo Theater literally stopped traffic as fans, friends and family members waited for the red-carpet arrivals photo by Ray A. Mares. ►

We're now taking nominations for our annual Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Awards, but you've still got plenty of time. The deadline is 3pm on August 22, 2008. You can download nomination packets from our website ([www.nmvoices.org/abysa.htm](http://www.nmvoices.org/abysa.htm)). The awards ceremony is Friday, October 17, 2008, 11:30am to 1:30pm at the Embassy Suites in Albuquerque. The award honors youth aged 13 to 26 who have made outstanding contributions to their communities through service or volunteer work.



## New Publications

We have a number of new publications that you're welcome to download from our website ([www.nmvoices.org](http://www.nmvoices.org)). We're particularly proud of our two user guides that explain New Mexico's tax and budgeting systems. Expect more of these in the months ahead.

### From our Fiscal Policy Project:

#### *Citizen's Guide to the New Mexico State Budget*

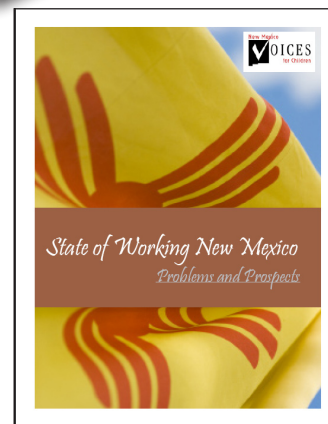
The state budgeting process, as you might well imagine, is as complex as it is convoluted. We try to take out some of the kinks so you get a sense of how it all unfolds. We'll release a companion Citizen's Guide to Advocating for the State Budget, along with a general advocacy guide, later this year.

#### *Citizen's Guide to New Mexico's Tax System*

A state's tax system says a lot about that state's priorities. Who should pay the most taxes and who should get the most breaks? This easy-to-follow guide explains how much money the state collects in taxes and from whom.

#### *The State of Working New Mexico 2007*

A good economy is built in part on good jobs. How does New Mexico rate in terms of job quality, wages, work hours and the like? Find out in this annual report put out in conjunction with the Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN).



### From our Kids Count Program:

#### *Immigrant Kids Count*

A large percentage of the children in New Mexico are either immigrants or have parents who are. This report looks at how they fare relative to the native-born or naturalized population, what unique obstacles they face and what strengths they possess.

#### *New Mexico Kids Count 2007*

Our annual report looks at a variety of indicators of child well-being on a county-by-county basis. This year the report focuses on the value of early care and education, and the economic consequences of dropping out of high school – not just for the individual and their family, but for the community as a whole.



## Newsletter

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# Viewpoint

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