



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Ranit Schmelzer or Jenice Robinson

National Women's Law Center, 202-588-5180

OR: Bill Jordan, Deputy Director for Policy, New Mexico Voices for Children

505-244-9505 ext. 11 (p), 505-350-3097 (c)

New Report: Child Care less accessible for New Mexico families

ALBUQUERQUE—Working parents in New Mexico who rely on child-care assistance to make ends meet were better off five years ago than they are now. That's because in 2001 New Mexico significantly reduced the income level at which families are eligible, according to a new report by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC). The report, *State Child Care Assistance Policies 2006 Update: Gaps in Child Care Assistance Remain, With New Challenges Ahead*, was released today.

The report shows that five years ago, a New Mexico family of three could earn up to \$28,300 a year and still qualify for child-care assistance. In 2006 that same family can only earn up to \$24,960 and still qualify for child-care assistance. 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. For the child it's a difference between healthy brain development and a lifetime of lost potential.

"Eighty-five percent of brain development happens in the first three years of life," said Bill Jordan, Deputy Director for Policy at NM Voices for Children. "In New Mexico, less than 1 percent of our educational budget is spent on those years. We've got it upside down."

New Mexico is one of 17 states in which working families cannot qualify for assistance if they earn more than 160% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Prior to August of 2001, child-care assistance was available to New Mexico families earning up to 200% of the FPL. Today it's only available for families earning up to 155% FPL.

The Early Childhood Alliance, a coalition of advocates, providers and parents, is asking the state Legislature for an additional \$18.2 million in 2007 in order to restore eligibility to 200% FPL and expand several initiatives to improve quality.

Across the nation, state policies have failed to provide needed support for working families. Besides income eligibility, the report looked at parent co-pays, waiting lists, and the rates at which states reimburse child-care providers. Forty-one states, New Mexico included, fail to

meet the federal benchmark for reimbursement rates. The lower the reimbursement rates, the fewer choices families have in child-care providers.

“Failing to sufficiently compensate providers has negative consequences for children, parents and providers,” said Helen Blank, Director of Leadership and Public Policy at National Women’s Law Center and co-author of the report. “Low-income children are denied critical early learning experiences. Parents find it difficult to access the child care they need to work. And providers, who are often low-income women themselves, face earning less or going out of business.”

The good news for New Mexico is that our parent co-pays are relatively low (6% of family income) and that the state has no waiting list.

To view the report, visit: www.nwlc.org/pdf/StateChildCareAssistancePoliciesReport2006

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico’s children, families and communities.
2340 Alamo SE, Suite 120, Albuquerque, NM 97106; 505-244-9505 (p); www.nmvoices.org