



State of New Mexico Office of the Governor

Governor Bill Richardson's Signs *Insure New Mexico!* Legislation

**Package of four bills and two initiatives will provide nearly
35,000 New Mexicans access to health insurance**

For Immediate Release
March 18, 2005

Contact: Pahl Shipley
505.476.2202

Santa Fe -Today Governor Bill Richardson signed into law legislation that will help decrease the number of New Mexicans without medical insurance, which stands at 414,000. The bills are part of Governor Bill Richardson's *Insure New Mexico!* initiatives.

"Today I am fulfilling a pledge that I made to the people of New Mexico - I promised to expand access to quality, affordable health insurance, reduce the number of citizens without insurance, and increase the number of employers who offer insurance to their employees," said Richardson at today's bill signing ceremony.

The bills signed by the Governor include:

- **HB 394, Health Insurance Rates and Alliance Membership,**
- **HB 335, Health Coverage for Unmarried Dependents,**
- **HB 289, Part-time Employee Insurance Coverage,**

The Governor indicated he will also sign **HB 523, Small Employer Health Care Coverage Access**, which has passed both houses but was not delivered to the Governor's office in time for today's signing event.

New Mexico has the second highest rate of uninsured in the Nation, at 22.1 percent. These pieces of legislation along with implementation of the State Coverage Initiative and expanding outreach

to Native American and Hispanic children who are eligible but are not enrolled in Medicaid will help approximately 35,000 uninsured New Mexicans get health insurance.

The following initiatives were recommended to the Governor by the *Insure New Mexico!* Council:

House Bill (HB) 523 and Senate Bill (SB) 271, which the legislature passed last night, **Small Employer Health Care Coverage Access**, sponsored by Speaker of the House Ben Lujan and Sen. Dede Feldman, implements the Small Employer Insurance Program that will provide options for small employers (50 or fewer employees) to *voluntarily* buy into the state's health insurance program.

HB 394, Health Insurance Rates and Alliance Membership, sponsored by House Majority Floor Leader Ken Martinez, removes provisions of the Health Insurance Alliance (HIA) statutes to make health insurance more affordable for small businesses and individuals. The expansion includes: changing the premium rate structure to lower costs; changing the composition of the HIA board of directors to include a non-profit representative; and increasing HIA's responsibility for outreach, public awareness and assistance to employers in obtaining and maintaining health insurance for employees. One study found that 62 percent of employers who do not currently offer health care insurance were unaware of the various options available to them (HPC Employer Survey, 2005). It is estimated that this legislation will help insure some 10,000 New Mexicans. Senate President Pro Tem Ben Altamirano sponsored the duplicate Senate Bill 504.

HB 335 and its duplicate **SB**, which the legislature passed last night, **Health Coverage for Unmarried Dependents**, sponsored by Rep. Danice Picraux and Sen. Dede Feldman, allows unmarried dependents to stay on their parents' coverage until they turn 25 years old. About 32 percent of New Mexicans between the ages of 18 to 24 years are uninsured, (HRSA Household Survey, 2004). This legislation is expected to insure approximately 4,000 unmarried dependents.

HB 289, Part-time Employee Insurance Coverage, sponsored by Rep. Peter Wirth, requires insurers to offer a health insurance plan to part-time employees (those working over 20 hours per week) working for employers who *choose* to insure such employees. Of the uninsured adults in New Mexico, 25 percent work one part-time job and 41 percent of those who hold multiple part-time jobs are uninsured (HRSA Household Survey, 2004). This legislation may help some 4,000 part-time employees get health insurance. Sen. John Grubestic sponsored the duplicate Senate Bill 335.

Other initiatives that do not require legislation are being implemented by the Human Services Department are:

- **Implementing the State Coverage Initiative**, which is estimated to insure 10,000 New Mexicans and;
- **Outreach to Enroll Native American and Hispanic Children on Medicaid**, which is estimated to insure 3,800 children.

The *Insure New Mexico!* Council will continue to meet after the session to find more solutions to decrease the number of uninsured.

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