

Remarks as prepared for delivery
Gov. Bill Richardson
Drug Court Graduation
Thursday, May 19, 2005

Thank you for having me here today. It's great to be with all of you. I'd like to recognize Chief Justice Bosson, Judge Michael Vigil, as well as all the members of the judiciary that are here.

In New Mexico, we pride ourselves on being innovative. We have our share of challenges, but we are unafraid to try new strategies, new ideas, and new approaches.

When it comes to crime and public safety, we've spared no effort to improve our states' standing—from a stronger judiciary, to tougher sentences, to more resources, to better rehabilitation programs. And I'm proud of New Mexico's efforts to implement Drug Court programs.

We've gone from one drug court back in 1994 to more than 28 drug courts in operation or planning stages across the state today. These are collaborative, community-based forums to help people take responsibility for their actions, and change their lives for the better.

We've found that locking people up isn't always the best answer. There can be a vicious cycle in which people commit the same crimes, and go in and out of the corrections system through the so-called "revolving door." For some candidates, rehabilitation is the best solution.

Drug courts enable us to stop the revolving door, by offering comprehensive rehabilitation and support services. Re-arrest rates in drug courts are substantially lower than in regular courts—meaning less strain on the prison system, less burden on taxpayers, and less risk of repeat offenders. By some estimates, the annual cost per defendant for treatment services (\$3,500) is less than one-fifth of the average annual cost of incarceration (\$20,000).

By implementing tough accountability measures, increasing sanctions and incentives, mandatory substance abuse treatment, and intensive judicial supervision, New Mexico has created another effective tool in the fight against drug abuse and crime.

To the graduates today: congratulations. You are gathered here with the support of friends and family to celebrate your graduation, and your choice to change your life for the better. You should be proud of what you've accomplished, but also be vigilante. Your new beginning will be difficult at times.

But know that you have the support and the commitment of this program and the people who make it happen. Know that you also can rely on this network of support.

On a final note, I want to thank the people who make this program a reality. The judges, law enforcement officials, treatment providers, counselors, and all the staff deserve our thanks and gratitude. They do a tremendous amount of work—more than most would expect from a judicial program—especially behind the scenes, to help people overcome very personal problems.

The ravages of addiction, substance abuse, and crime can harm families and communities alike. So it is a proud day for us all when the cycle is broken, when families are reunited, and when a person—like you here today—choose a path for a better future.

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