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Governor, Chief Justice Attend Drug Court Graduation in Honor of New Mexico Drug Court Month

Governor Bill Richardson and Chief Justice Richard Bosson attended a Drug Court graduation today at the Santa Fe district courthouse, and signed a joint proclamation declaring May, 2005, the second annual Drug Court Recognition Month.

“Drug courts have emerged as a powerful component of our criminal justice system, because the program treats more than just addiction,” Chief Justice Bosson said. “The drug court program instills responsibility in participants, and equips them with the tools they need to regain control over their lives.”

Chief Justice Bosson also recognized the contribution of the judges who preside over New Mexico drug courts. “Our drug court judges work for free. They find time in their busy schedules to conference with the parties to the participant’s case, evaluate the participant’s progress, and decide on a future course of action. In doing so, these judges make a real connection with each individual participant, and play an essential role in the participant’s future success.”

Last year, Governor Richardson formed the Substance Abuse Interagency Task Force. The Task Force consists of representatives from different agencies who convened to address specific substance abuse issues in Rio Arriba county. The effort resulted in funding that doubled the capacity of the adult and juvenile drug courts in Española. Governor Richardson also supported funding for the Administrative Office of the Court’s drug court programs, including

replacement of lapsing federal funds, funds to expand and improve services, and new drug courts.

"Drug court programs are terrific examples of how the three branches of state government- executive, judicial, and legislative - can work together to improve the lives of all our citizens," said Governor Richardson. "These programs work. They change lives. They help our families. And they reduce the devastating costs- personal and financial - of the problems associated with substance abuse."

A drug court is a special judicial forum that hears cases of offenders charged with drug-related crimes, offering substance abusers an alternative to incarceration. The program, lasting one year on average, involves judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, probation/surveillance officers, substance-abuse treatment specialists, educational specialists, and community leaders. Through intense supervision, regular drug testing, and treatment, a participant is presented with the opportunity to overcome their addiction, and make life changes to break the cycle of abuse. The participant's progress is monitored, and the drug court is advised of the participant's success. Sanctions, including jail time and termination from the program, are imposed for noncompliance. Incentives are applied for continual compliance.

There are currently 28 active drug courts in New Mexico, up from 25 drug courts one year ago. The drug court system includes Adult, Juvenile, Family Dependency, and DWI Drug Courts. Graduates of drug court programs are far less likely to commit future drug-related felonies than their counterparts who did not participate in drug court programs. Less than 15% of New Mexico drug court graduates re-offended within three years of their graduation; in contrast, drug offenders who did not participate in drug court have a 40 to 60% chance of another arrest for a drug-related crime. In addition, drug court is less expensive than incarceration. The average cost of the drug court program is less than \$30.00 per day per participant. Incarceration, on the other hand, costs an average of nearly \$74.00 per day per inmate.

"We look forward to the continued success of the drug court program, and anticipate the expansion of the program into all counties in New Mexico," said Chief Justice Bosson. Drug court programs are currently available in 15 counties statewide.

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