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## **Governor Supports Legislation To Expand Treatment of Gambling Addictions**

(Santa Fe) – Gov. Bill Richardson announced today that he plans to seek legislation that will improve treatment of gambling addictions and establish a permanent council charged with developing and implementing prevention and treatment strategies.

Gov. Richardson's plans are based on recommendations made by the Governor's Task Force on Compulsive Gambling, composed of legislators, behavioral-health professionals and representatives from tribes, pueblos, the gaming industry, Department of Health and Governor's office.

Richardson created the 15-member task force in March 2005 to study how compulsive gambling affects New Mexicans and to make specific recommendations on how to improve the State's approach to gambling problems.

"I appreciate the task force's hard work in developing recommendations that will help New Mexico better deal with problems associated with compulsive gambling," said Gov. Richardson. "I encourage the Legislature to work with me to address what can be a serious problem for some New Mexicans."

Richardson will support legislation this year that would appropriate \$600,000 to the Department of Health to create a certified training program in the treatment of gambling addictions and establish a treatment voucher program to serve those affected by compulsive gambling.

"Research has indicated that gambling addictions can devastate entire families, causing divorce, suicide, eviction and bankruptcy," said Health Secretary Michelle Lujan Grisham. "We have to do a better job providing treatment and support to families who are affected by compulsive gambling."

Rep. Kandy Cordova, D-Belen, participated on the Governor's task force and sponsored a gambling bill passed during last legislative session that required a study of compulsive gambling in New Mexico.

"The task force performed a much needed study so we can understand the severity and scope of the gambling problem in New Mexico," Cordova said. "I hope this creates more awareness of the problems associated with gambling so the State can support people who need help."

The Governor also supports the following recommendations:

- Create a Governor's Council on Compulsive Gambling that would report key findings and progress on implementing a strategic approach to dealing with compulsive gambling to the Governor and the Legislature annually.

- Direct the Department of Health and the Gaming Control Board to create an audit team that would monitor compulsive gambling services plan standards for all casinos and race tracks.
- Direct the Department of Health and Aging and Long Term Services Department to provide New Mexico seniors and senior centers with prevention training and educational materials about recognizing and treating gambling problems.

The Governor will also support voluntary self-exclusion legislation that would enable the gaming industry to help those who self-identify as compulsive gamblers and keep them from entering a gaming establishment.

“I’m elated the gaming industry has stepped up to work with the State to provide services to compulsive gamblers in New Mexico,” said Rep. Larry Larranaga, R-Albuquerque, who served on the Governor’s taskforce.

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