

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Community members from across the state attend HSD rule change hearing in support of changing "income" definition**

**Rio Rancho, NM**- On Friday, members of *Somos Un Pueblo Unido* and *EL CENTRO De Igualdad y Derechos* from Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Farmington, Roswell, Gallup, Hobbs, Artesia and other organizations from the *Economic Relief Working Group* (ERWG) gathered at the New Mexico Human Services Department (NMHSD) in Rio Rancho to deliver public comments in favor of a rule change that would amend the current definition of "income" to exclude money received from cash transfer and guaranteed basic income (GBI) pilot programs.

Currently monthly payments from cash transfer programs, such as GBI programs, are currently considered "income" as defined by New Mexico's Administrative Code (8.102.100 NMAC). This means a SNAP recipient, who is also participating in a GBI program, could see a decrease in her family's food stamp allotment. Some GBI participants have opted out from cash transfer pilots because their SNAP allotment would decrease. The proposed rule change would prevent them from experiencing the "cliff effect" and falling off SNAP/TANF benefits.

"During the pandemic, everything was getting more difficult as work slowed, but thanks to the GBI pilot program *Somos* was offering, I was able to receive financial assistance to help with my household expenses," commented Karla Anchondo, *Somos* member and mother of three children in Roswell. "This rule change is vital to my future, as I receive SNAP benefits and am afraid to sign up for cash transfer programs like this one because it can affect my benefit eligibility and derail my budget."

"Thanks to the support I received from the GBI pilot program, I was able to take care of my four children during the pandemic as I was going through my divorce. I want programs like this to continue helping all working families and for HSD to change the definition of "income" so this doesn't affect programs like SNAP that are vital to the survival of rural families like mine," said Alejandra Almanza, a resident of Hobbs.

"Mixed-status workers and their families were intentionally excluded from financial relief programs at the federal level, and we did not qualify for unemployment and support programs. I lost my job during the pandemic, which caused a huge emotional and financial impact on my family." shared Hilda Gomez, member of *El Centro De Igualdad y Derechos* "It is crucial to ensure that these programs do not jeopardize existing benefits, avoiding the dreaded 'cliff effect'."

"We are glad the Department is opting to utilize flexibility that already exists within federal regulations to prevent a "benefits cliff" for New Mexicans who participate in cash transfer programs, such as GBI. We have been working with the Department for more than a year to encourage the implementation of these rules changes and applaud the Department's openness to working closely with impacted communities." said Gabriela Guzman, Staff Attorney at *Somos Un Pueblo Unido*. "The proposed rule change represents an important first step in the creation of more tools to set low- and middle-income New Mexican families onto a path of financial stability without losing vital benefits, such as SNAP. Our suggestions only aim to strengthen and clarify key elements of the proposed revisions."

*The ERWG is made up of Somos Un Pueblo Unido, EL CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos, NM Voices for Children, NM CAFé, and Partnership for Community Action. Together, with UpTogether, these groups have advocated for and helped design local and state cash transfer programs for New Mexicans financially devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching 25,000 immigrant and very-low income families with about \$25 million in relief.*

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