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October 1, 2015

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**All Pueblo Council of Governors Honors
NM Center on Law and Poverty**

In a moving ceremony at its meeting this past Tuesday, September 29th, the All Pueblo Council of Governors thanked the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty for generating changes in policy and laws for economic and social justice and for having “given voice to the poorest in our society”.

Over the past decade, the Center on Law and Poverty has collaborated with Native Americans in a unique relationship on issues important to New Mexico’s tribes. These include: increasing access to health care for Native American’s at the University of New Mexico Hospital; protecting Native American’s rights to fee-for-service Medicaid; to spread best administrative practices for tribal healthcare systems; improving our state government’s consultation with tribes concerning matters that affect them; ensuring that safety net programs work well for low-income Native Americans; and many others.

The work of the Center with Native American leaders and advocates has yielded significant outcomes. The joint efforts at UNM Hospital alone, for example, with local community groups, resulted in several important outcomes. The Hospital developed comprehensive language services to better serve patients who are not proficient in English. It abandoned its practice of charging uninsured patients more than insured patients and of requiring that uninsured patients pay 50% of expected charges in advance of receiving care. It also curtailed aggressive collections policies that harmed low-income patients.

On behalf of the Council, Governor Val Panteah Sr. of Zuni Pueblo read an homage to the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty’s director, Kim Posich, for his dedication and leadership, and to his staff, for their advocacy and litigation in partnership with Native Americans and in Native American interests. He also called for exploring a formal relationship with the Center and Mr. Posich agreed to join the Governors in considering a more explicit partnership.

Mr. Posich stated that strengthening the relationship between the Center on Law and Poverty and the Pueblos could lead to the formation of a Native American public interest law center, an idea that has been generating excitement in advocacy circles. Most visions of the new law center would have it be similar to the Center on Law and Poverty with the purpose of creating systemic change for low income Native American New Mexicans, perhaps even starting within the Center. However, it would be staffed largely by Native Americans and focus exclusively on issues that cut across Native American interests.