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**Contact: Ona Porter**  
Prosperity Works  
505-228-7506

**Technical Contact: Gabe Pacyniak**  
Associate Prof., UNM School of Law  
202-460-3820

## **Utility Affordability and Relief Act Passes House of Representatives**

**Santa Fe, NM** – HB206, the Utility Affordability and Relief Act passed the New Mexico House of Representatives tonight. The legislation now heads to the Senate. Representatives Kristina Ortiz (D-42), Andrea Romero (D-46), Joanne Ferrary (D-37), and Anjelica Rubio (D-35) are sponsoring this vital legislation aimed at helping thousands of New Mexico families who have fallen behind on paying their utility bills during the COVID–19 pandemic.

“I’m so pleased that my first piece of legislation as a State Representative has now passed the House of Representatives. We are a big step closer to seeing these benefits provided to the people of New Mexico. I hope the Senate will move quickly to pass this bill as well.” said Representative Kristina Ortiz (D-42).

House Bill 206 gives much-needed relief to New Mexicans impacted by COVID who have been unable to stay current on their electric, natural gas and water bills. The bill combines federal funding, philanthropic donations, reallocation of utility company fees and other sources to provide this arrears forgiveness to qualified customers who enter into up to 24-month payment plans with the utility. For each dollar paid by the customer, an additional dollar will be provided as a permanent credit on their account. There is also a hardship clause allowing additional assistance for New Mexicans who cannot afford to enter into a payment plan.

The legislation also aims to help customers reduce energy bills in the future by directing utilities to enroll qualified customers in low-income energy efficiency programs as well as establishing an Energy Efficiency Development Block Grant program. The Block Grant Program, to be managed at the state level, would serve as a venue for future federal stimulus investments and other funds and allow local governments and tribes to apply for resources that support energy efficiency projects for low-income residents in their communities.

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*Prosperity Works is a non-profit in Albuquerque that equips limited-income (LI) New Mexico households statewide with the social, financial, and personal assets that are essential to catalyze sustainable and equitable solutions for building strong, thriving communities.*