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## **News Release**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **County Health Department Loses State Grant Funding For Healthy Families Program**

*Flagstaff, Az.* – Due to the recent drastic cuts in the State funded Healthy Families Program, Coconino County Health Department officials have issued layoff notices to all twenty employees in the affected program. With a 67% program cut, approximately 200 families in the County will no longer receive vital services provided by the program.

The Healthy Families Program provides the support, training and tools necessary to produce a strong family bond and reduce the possibility of abuse and neglect to the families of newborn babies who are experiencing challenging circumstances. As part of the program, staff visits families to improve parenting skills, checks on the development of children, and helps families access needed resources. The program helps relieve some of the stress that accompanies the birth of a new baby.

Over the course of a year, the program provides services to approximately 320 families in Flagstaff, Williams and Page. Currently, 200 families in the greater Flagstaff area participate in the program, as well as 30 families in the greater Page area. Potentially affected families have been notified of the funding loss and the possibility that they will be dropped from the program. Discussions have begun with families to begin this transition. Staff members are working with clients to identify other local service providers and to transfer them to these community agencies, as needed and available.

The Health Department has known for several months that funding levels could be reduced. In February of this year, the Department of Economic Security notified the County Health Department of a 75% reduction in funding for the remaining four months of the fiscal year. In an effort to sustain the program and service levels, the Health Department was able to avoid layoffs and service interruption by reducing program operating and travel expenses, as well as utilizing available County resources, through June 30.

The Health Department hopes to retain some Healthy Families staff members and continue the program in a very limited capacity. Officials are awaiting the final budget information from the State, which will be used to determine the direction of the scaled-back program.

“Our Healthy Families Program staff are professional and caring individuals who have provided an extremely valuable service to our communities. I have worked with each of them and can attest to their dedication and commitment. Over the past 15 years, the Health Families Program has proven to be highly successful in improving family interactions and in reducing childhood neglect,” said Barbara Worgess, Coconino County Health Department Director. “We are doing everything possible to assist our staff during this difficult time.”

Recently, the State Legislature swept the Healthy Families funding in an effort to alleviate State budget shortfalls. Since the program is entirely grant funded, the County does not have the resources to supplement the funding, due to ongoing budget challenges throughout the organization.

“Throughout this difficult budget period, it has been the goal of the Board of Supervisors and County Manager’s office to keep our County and our employees whole. It saddens me that the State has chosen to cut this program’s funding so drastically and leave us with no other alternatives,” said County Manager Steve Peru. “The affected employees’ first concerns are for the families they serve, which is a testimony to their dedication to the County and our citizens. This is a tremendous loss for the County.”

Steps have already been implemented to assist the affected employees in finding employment as soon as possible. The Human Resources Department and Career Center are working with them on an individual basis to determine what their needs are in the areas of training, job skills enhancement, resume building, occupational change, etc. Per County policy, they will be given preference for any job openings that become available within the County for a period of time.

The Career Center manages the countywide Rapid Response Team, which is a group of local professionals that works with employers and employees during layoff periods. The team will begin working with the laid off employees immediately and help them update their résumés, apply for new jobs, or return to school to update their skills.

For more information, call Coconino County Health Department Director Barbara Worgess at (928) 679-7272; toll-free (877) 679-7272.

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