GOVERNOR SUSANA MARTINEZ ANNOUNCES RESIDENCY CERTIFICATION EFFORT FOR FOREIGN NATIONAL DRIVER’S LICENSES

Effort Intended to Enhance the Security of New Mexico’s Driver’s License

SANTA FE – Today, Governor Susana Martinez announced that the State will begin efforts to increase the security of New Mexico’s driver’s license by initiating a residency certification program for those who have obtained a foreign national driver’s license. The program is the result of a recommendation from the Taxation and Revenue Department (TRD) and the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD), in response to the Governor’s directive on June 22nd to identify and implement administrative changes that can enhance the security of New Mexico’s driver’s license.

“New Mexico’s driver’s license is not secure. We are one of only two states that offer driver’s licenses to illegal immigrants, and our state has become a destination spot for people from other states and around the world who wish to receive an official government-issued ID card,” said Governor Martinez. “There is a real and legitimate concern, given the interest that is coming from out of state and the numerous license rings that have recently been uncovered, that New Mexico driver’s licenses are going to people who do not remain or even intend to remain residents of our state.”

Beginning today, MVD will be sending letters to a random sample of 10,000 foreign nationals who have obtained New Mexico driver’s licenses. Each individual who receives the letter will have 30 days in which to contact MVD to schedule an in-person appointment to verify their residency in New Mexico. They can call 855-784-8407 or go online to www.mvd.newmexico.gov to make appointments. The letter includes a description of the process for verifying residency, and an MVD center at the Bank of the West building in Albuquerque has been established to handle the required in-person appointments. The address of the office is 5301 Central Avenue in Albuquerque, on the building’s first floor.

“We have strong evidence to indicate that illegal immigrants from other states and countries are coming to New Mexico just to obtain our driver’s licenses and then leave,” TRD Secretary Demesia Padilla said. “This review process will allow us to determine
how deep this problem runs and also make necessary regulatory changes to prevent fraud and misrepresentation.”

Over 85,000 foreign nationals without a Social Security Number have obtained New Mexico driver’s licenses since a law was passed allowing illegal immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses in 2003. The residency certification program should provide valuable data regarding the percentage of foreign national driver’s licenses that have been issued to people who are not, in fact, residents of New Mexico. If the results of the effort point to a serious problem of issuing licenses to non-residents, TRD and MVD will then proceed with verifying the residency of the additional foreign nationals who were not part of the random sample.

“Let me be very clear - the fraud and abuse related to New Mexico’s driver’s license will not go away until the irresponsible law that grants driver’s licenses to illegal immigrants is repealed,” Governor Martinez concluded. “But in the meantime, we owe it to New Mexicans to identify driver’s licenses that are being used improperly and cancel them.”

The residency requirements for foreign nationals are the same as for anyone else who wants to obtain a New Mexico driver’s license. Some of the documents that can be shown to verify full-time residency in New Mexico include: bank statements with activity in New Mexico; utility bills; lease agreements; and pay stubs. A complete list can be found on the MVD website at www.mvd.newmexico.gov.

MVD regulations require anyone who has moved since the date of obtaining a driver’s license to notify the agency of the change of address. “We understand that some of these individuals might have moved since obtaining their driver’s licenses and have failed to properly notify MVD. To accommodate these individuals, we will resend the letters if any of the returned letters have a new forwarding address within New Mexico. If the forwarding address is from out-of-state, we will cancel those individuals’ driver’s licenses,” said Secretary Padilla. For other licenses that are determined to be held by non-residents or by those who fail to comply with the certification process, steps will be taken to begin the process of cancelling their driver’s license.

In the past year, law enforcement officials have busted numerous criminal rings that have used false residency documents to obtain New Mexico driver’s licenses for illegal immigrants living outside the State. These criminal schemes involved Chinese, Brazilian, Costa Rican, Polish, East Indian and Mexican nationals. MVD also cancelled dozens of licenses already issued to individuals involved with these schemes.

In 2003, when New Mexico law was implemented to issue driver’s licenses to illegal immigrants, 17 other states in the country also issued them. All but two states – New Mexico and Washington – have stopped issuing driver’s license to illegal immigrants. Since 2010, more and more illegal immigrants from across the country are coming to New Mexico for the sole purpose of obtaining our driver’s license and then leaving the State.
New Mexico has become a magnet for driver’s licenses for illegal immigrants from all over the country. Investigators have found that people are willing to pay anywhere between $500 and $6,000 per person to obtain a New Mexico driver’s license. Since July 2010, MVD has required all illegal immigrants who want to obtain a driver’s license to make an appointment. A staggering 35 percent of those calling to make these appointments have used out-of-state phone numbers – yet another indicator of the outside interest from those in other states and countries for a New Mexico license.