

**1. Your name and district number:**

Gerald Ortiz y Pino, Senate district 12

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**2. The overall goals of welfare reform are to move people from welfare to work, reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy and encourage healthy marriages and family formation. TANF allows funds to be spent for marriage and couple relationship education, responsible fatherhood programs, financial education, and parenting programs. What benefits do you see for allocating 1-2% of the TANF budget in New Mexico for services to strengthen families?**

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I supported this previously and think as our economy has improved and state budget picture is stronger, we should do it again.

**3. Research has consistently shown that the social, educational, health and economic outcomes of children in healthy, two-parent families are better than those living in single-parent households. New Mexico has among the highest rates in the nation for teen pregnancies, school drop-outs, juvenile crimes and women and children living in poverty. New Mexico spends \$225 million every year dealing with the outcomes of families in crisis. If you are elected, what would you do to strengthen families?**

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I'd work to expand Medicaid to the full extent permitted under the Affordable Care Act. Lack of health coverage pushes thousands of families into financial and emotional bankruptcy when a loved one becomes ill.

**4. The percentage of children in poverty in New Mexico is 26% higher than the national average. There are many factors contributing to this phenomenon including the fact that 45% of infants in New Mexico are born to teen parents. If you are elected, how would you reduce the number of teen pregnancies in New Mexico?**

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Research has shown that the most effective approach to preventing teen pregnancy is..... surprise! SERVICE LEARNING. Yes, by giving young people a stronger sense of their own community responsibilities and possibilities for helping others and making a difference, they are less likely to seek meaning and closeness through premarital sex; or if they do, to act more responsibly by using contraceptive measures. So I would favor expanding service learning greatly, starting it earlier and making it a graduation

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requirement.

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**5. Studies show that couple relationship education (e.g., conflict resolution, communication skills, understanding of gender differences, etc.) results in happier and healthier marriages. What programs and services are available to couples and families in your district?**

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Many are available through Churches of all denominations (pre-Cana; Retrouville; similar programs in Protestant, Jewish and evangelical Churches). And a few United Way agencies offer such. But we definitely need more--and we need to keep them affordable so there would be no excuse for not utilizing them.

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**6. How can the NM Coalition for Healthy Families help you strengthen families in New Mexico?**

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Many of the worst pressures on families are economic; un or under employment; families with both parents working out of the home; lack of child care; employers who do not support family needs; etc. The Coalition could become a powerful voice for families facing these money-related problems, which often are more damaging to relationships than are sexual issues. If we had a set of state policies which actually supported families instead of squeezing them, we would all benefit from those stronger families.

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**7. Do you have any additional ideas or comments regarding New Mexico's families?**

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One of the indicators of just how stressed our families are is the large number of grandparents who have had to assume primary child-rearing responsibility for their grand kids. Often this is due to drug, alcohol or criminal activity by the parents. These grandparents are doing the best they can; they share love; they try to be consistent and set limits. But they are older; they are tired and they often are not in great health themselves. Part of our state policy (or Coalition work plan) should be to find ways to provide support to these incredibly stressed but very crucial substitute parents and the kids they are rearing. Support groups; respite services; conferences with experts--whatever we can do we should try to find the resources to sustain this group of people.