

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**AG Balderas Secures Guilty Plea Against Counselor Accused of
Defrauding State's Medicaid Program**

Las Cruces, NM—Yesterday, Attorney General Hector Balderas announced that Cathy Chidester, who operated Drop In Counseling in Las Cruces, pled guilty to Medicaid Fraud, Obstruction of Investigation, and Identity Theft. Ms. Chidester was accused of fraudulently billing New Mexico's Medicaid program for children's counseling, when in fact, public school records showed that the children were in class attending school during the alleged counseling sessions. Sentencing for Ms. Chidester will be in 60 days and she faces up to five years imprisonment in addition to payment of restitution of more than \$177,000.

"Medicaid ensures that almost half of all New Mexicans have access to healthcare. We will vigorously apply the rule of law against individuals who steal from the vital Medicaid safety net for families," said Attorney General Balderas.

This case was investigated and prosecuted by the Office of the Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit (MFCU). MFCU receives 75 percent of its funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under a grant award totaling \$3,774,509 for Federal fiscal year (FY) 2021-22, of which \$2,830,884 is federally funded. The remaining 25 percent of the approved grant, totaling \$943,625 for FY 2021-22, is funded by the State of New Mexico.

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