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## FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

<b>SPONSOR</b> <u>Steinborn/Pinto</u>	<b>LAST UPDATED</b> _____
	<b>ORIGINAL DATE</b> <u>2/12/25</u>
<b>SHORT TITLE</b> <u>Search &amp; Rescue Emergency Responses</u>	<b>BILL NUMBER</b> <u>Senate Bill 353</u>
	<b>ANALYST</b> <u>Sanchez</u>

### ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT\* (dollars in thousands)

Agency/Program	FY25	FY26	FY27	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Any and All Agencies Solicited for Analysis	See Fiscal Implications	See Fiscal Implications	See Fiscal Implications	See Fiscal Implications	Recurring	General Fund

Parentheses ( ) indicate expenditure decreases.  
 \*Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

### Sources of Information

LFC Files

Because of the short timeframe between the introduction of this bill and its first hearing, LFC has yet to receive analysis from state, education, or judicial agencies. This analysis could be updated if that analysis is received.

#### Agency Analysis was Solicited but Not Received From

Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM)  
 Department of Public Safety (DPS)  
 Office of the Attorney General (NMAG)  
 Municipal League (ML)  
 Council of Governments (COGS)

## SUMMARY

### Synopsis of Senate Bill 353

Senate Bill 353 (SB353) proposes amendments to the Search and Rescue Act (Section 24-15A-3 NMSA 1978) to establish standardized response protocols for federal, state, and local agencies when New Mexico Search and Rescue (SAR) is required in emergencies. The bill defines key SAR-related terms, including the roles of the state SAR control agency, mission initiators, and resource officers. It mandates the Department of Public Safety (DPS) coordinate SAR resources and establish standardized criteria for activating state SAR personnel. Additionally, SB353 requires emergency personnel to promptly notify the state SAR control agency when an SAR emergency arises and aims to ensure coordination among relevant jurisdictions, including federal land management agencies, when applicable. The bill also introduces a training requirement for

emergency response personnel on SAR reporting protocols.

The effective date of this bill is January 1, 2026.

## **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS**

SB353 would require DPS to coordinate SAR resources, establish standardized activation criteria, and ensure interagency coordination. These new requirements could increase DPS's administrative costs, including the need for additional staffing, system upgrades, and expanded oversight responsibilities. While the bill does not include an appropriation, implementing these mandates may require additional funding in future budget cycles.

The bill also establishes new training requirements for emergency response personnel on SAR reporting protocols. If state and local agencies must develop or expand training programs, the associated costs could vary depending on whether existing resources are sufficient or if new funding will be required. Local law enforcement and emergency management offices may face compliance costs related to the implementation of standardized SAR protocols, raising concerns about potential unfunded mandates. Without dedicated funding, local agencies may need to absorb costs through existing budgets, potentially impacting other emergency response priorities.

Another fiscal consideration is the bill's potential impact on New Mexico's volunteer SAR network. The state relies heavily on trained volunteers for search and rescue operations, and new activation criteria or reporting requirements could affect recruitment and retention. If volunteer participation declines due to increased requirements, DPS and local agencies may need to rely more on paid personnel, increasing operational costs. The extent of this impact is unclear without further input from SAR organizations and local emergency response agencies.

Additionally, the bill requires coordination with federal land management agencies in cases where SAR operations extend into federal jurisdictions. Establishing and maintaining agreements with these agencies could create administrative burdens and funding uncertainties. If additional memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or reimbursement mechanisms are necessary, the financial and operational impact on DPS and local agencies could be significant.

Although the provisions of SB353 are set to take effect on January 1, 2026, agencies may require funding as early as FY25 to prepare infrastructure, training, and coordination mechanisms. Given the potential fiscal and operational impacts, further analysis is needed to determine the full scope of funding requirements.

## **SIGNIFICANT ISSUES**

SB353 may significantly impact interagency coordination and emergency response protocols. By mandating standardized activation criteria and reporting requirements, the legislation aims to create a more consistent approach to SAR operations. However, agencies accustomed to existing procedures may face an adjustment period, and differences in operational structures between state, local, and federal entities could complicate implementation. The requirement for coordination with federal agencies may introduce additional procedural hurdles, particularly if new agreements or memorandums of understanding must be negotiated.

The bill may also affect New Mexico's reliance on volunteer SAR personnel. If new activation or reporting requirements create administrative burdens, volunteer participation could decline, potentially straining SAR operations. Without input from SAR organizations, it is unclear whether the bill's provisions align with existing volunteer capabilities or whether further support measures will be needed to ensure continued engagement.

Without agency feedback, it is uncertain how DPS and local emergency management officials will interpret and implement the new requirements. If provisions are vague or require additional regulatory guidance, rulemaking or future amendments may be necessary to avoid inconsistencies in application.

SS/hg/sgs