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**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE**  
**BILL ANALYSIS**  
**56th Legislature, 1st Session, 2023**

<b>Bill Number</b>	<u>SB149</u>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<u>Ortiz y Pino</u>
<b>Tracking Number</b>	<u>.223561.2</u>	<b>Committee Referrals</b>	<u>SEC/SFC</u>
<b>Short Title</b>	<u>Study Free Tuition for Certain Programs</u>		
<b>Analyst</b>	<u>Hathaway</u>	<b>Original Date</b>	<u>2/3/23</u>
		<b>Last Updated</b>	<u></u>

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**FOR THE LEGISLATIVE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**BILL SUMMARY**

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 149 (SB149) makes an appropriation to the Higher Education Department (HED) to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of a program that provides free tuition to graduate students in psychology, psychiatric nursing, social work, and counseling programs in exchange for such students making a commitment to practice in New Mexico for at least four years following graduation.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

SB149 appropriates \$100 thousand from the general fund to HED for expenditure in FY24. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY24 shall revert to the general fund.

**SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES**

Behavioral and mental health providers treat a number of conditions including substance abuse, mental health, and emotional disturbances. There is a shortage of such providers in New Mexico, whose careers span the fields of psychology, social work, counseling, and psychiatric nursing. These providers also work in a variety of settings including schools, hospitals, clinics, community-based settings, in private practice, and more.

SB149 would appropriate funds to HED to determine the feasibility of a program that provides free tuition to graduate students in the field of psychology, psychiatric nursing, social work, and counseling programs in exchange for graduates of these programs committing to practice in New Mexico for at least four years.

**Graduate Level Programs in New Mexico.** Several universities in New Mexico offer at least master's level programs in the fields included for study in SB149:

- **Master of Psychology programs:** New Mexico Highlands University, New Mexico State University, and University of New Mexico
- **Master of Social Work programs:** New Mexico Highlands University, New Mexico State University, and Western New Mexico University
- **Master in Counseling programs:** Eastern New Mexico University, New Mexico Highlands University, Western New Mexico University, New Mexico State University, and University of New Mexico
- **Psychiatric Nursing programs:** New Mexico State University and University of New Mexico

**Doctoral Programs.** In its analysis, UNM notes its Department of Psychology is the only program in the state that provides doctoral level training in clinical psychology. UNM also notes that while many graduates of the program stay in the state and continue to practice in New Mexico, it is critical for the state to train additional master’s level psychologists.

It is unclear how many students enroll in each of these programs each year and what the cost of tuition is at various institutions. It is presumed SB149 seeks to study these factors in its proposed feasibility study.

**Costs Beyond Tuition.** UNM notes tuition costs are not the only factor in enrolling in a graduate program. Workload responsibilities, as well as fees, books, and other costs also factor into the decision to enroll in graduate programs.

**Residency Budget Recommendation.** The LESC budget recommendation includes \$4 million for principal, counselor, and social worker residency pilots. This recommendation builds on the legislature’s investments in teacher residency pilots, which have been shown to be an effective tool in building a pipeline of educators and supporting those who want to be educators with wrap-around coursework and immersive year-long clinically rich experiences at partnering school districts. In New Mexico, teacher residencies also offer a \$35 thousand one-year stipend so candidates can afford to engage in the residency model.

**New Mexico School Considerations.** As SB149 relates to schools, New Mexico also faces a shortage of school counselors. New Mexico’s student to school counselor ratio is 443:1, as of the [2020-2021 school year](#), meaning there are 443 students for every school counselor. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250:1. To get to this ratio, New Mexico would need approximately 551 more school counselors. While the student to school counselor ratio for the entire state is 443:1, there are also meaningful differences across the state of New Mexico, with rural communities often underserved, school districts in rural communities sharing these providers, and other workforce challenges that hamper student access to mental and behavioral health supports.

The inclusion of social workers and counselors in SB149 could allow for more insight about the feasibility of also supporting growth in the workforce that serves students in school-based settings.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS**

HED would be the recipient of the appropriation and would be responsible for conducting the study. The \$100 thousand appropriation would help to support HED’s conducting and organization of the proposed study.

New Mexico State University (NMSU), in its analysis of SB149 notes a free tuition plan could benefit NMSU by increasing enrollment in the specified programs (psychology, psychiatric nursing, social work, and counseling), however, increased enrollment would also create a need for more faculty. It is presumed SB149 would seek to study faculty needs as part of its proposed feasibility study.

## **RELATED BILLS**

Relates to House Bill 38, Rural Health Care Practitioner Additions, which would add certain pharmacists, registered nurses, social workers, behavioral health counselors and therapists, and physical therapists to the rural health care practitioner tax credit.

Relates to House Bill 39, Dual-Licensed Instructional Support Providers, which would amend the School Personnel Act to add dual-licensed instructional support providers and administrators to the three-tier licensure system in place for New Mexico’s educators.

Relates to House Bill 47, Rural Health Care Project Revolving Fund, which appropriates funding to create the rural health care project revolving fund within the New Mexico Finance Authority to issue loans to rural health care providers.

Relates to House Bill 104, Behavioral & Mental Health Clinical Supervision, which makes an appropriation to the Human Services Department to provide clinical supervision for behavioral health, mental health, and counseling professionals.

Relates to House Bill 112, Public School Wellness Room Pilot Project, which creates and funds a pilot project to create “wellness rooms” in public schools.

Relates to Senate Bill 151, Graduate Scholarship Act Changes, which amends the Graduate Scholarship Act, including a requirement to being employed in New Mexico for one year for recipients of the scholarship.

Relates to Senate Bill 262, Mental Health Clinician Licensure Supervision, which makes an appropriation to the Human Services Department to fund the supervision of behavioral and mental health clinicians who are seeking independent licensure.

Relates to Senate Bill 325, School Counselor Teacher Loan Repayment, which expands the Teacher Loan Repayment Act to include social workers and school counselors who work in a public school.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

- LESC Files
- University of New Mexico (UNM)
- New Mexico State University (NMSU)

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