

# Infant Hearing Diagnostic Project

Brief prepared by the New Mexico School for the Deaf  
Respectfully Submitted to the Legislative Finance Committee



## Background Information:

- Hearing loss is the most common condition present at birth.
- Timely diagnosis of infants, meaning prior to the age of 3 months, is a “developmental emergency\*.” (\*Congressional Joint Committee on Infant Hearing)
- Children identified and into early intervention by the age of 3-6 months can maintain a typical developmental and educational trajectory.
- Lifetime financial earnings for those children with late-identified hearing loss average 50 to 70% less than their typical-hearing peers in the United States.
- In New Mexico, there are only six places in New Mexico for an infant to be diagnosed. Three of these are in Albuquerque. The other three are located in Alamogordo, Ruidoso, and Gallup. (The Gallup facility is part of NMSD's Tele-audiology Project.)
- Services to rural New Mexico are clearly underrepresented and transporting a newborn to Albuquerque for diagnosis is highly prohibitive for numerous reasons.

## Barriers to Increasing Capacity:

- Unlike adults, infants can take up to 3 hours for diagnosis. The insurance reimbursement rate does not make this service financially feasible for most audiology practices.
- Equipment costs for infant diagnosis are around \$70,000 for start-up. This does not include the ongoing costs of disposables and calibrations.

## Advances Made:

Since the advent of NMSD's Tele-audiology Project Center in Gallup, the average age of diagnosis **dropped from 19 months to 7-8 weeks**. Gallup previously led the state in late diagnosis. It now leads the state in early diagnosis.

Three other rural NMSD Tele-audiology sites are already planned and are scheduled to begin diagnostic services in late 2025 and early 2026.

## Proposal and Request:

NMSD is committed to ensuring the educational trajectory of children. We are, therefore, requesting \$140,000 to provide salary and benefits for a dedicated pediatric audiologist to help offset the costs of this much needed service.