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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Lopez DATE TYPED 1/31/04 HB _____

SHORT TITLE Corinne Wolfe UNM Children's Law Center SB 318

ANALYST Baca/Dunbar

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation Contained		Estimated Additional Impact		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY04	FY05	FY04	FY05		
	\$200.0			Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

This bill appropriates \$200 thousand from the General Fund to the board of regents of the University of New Mexico for expenditure in fiscal year 2005 to increase funding for the Corinne Wolfe Children's Law Center.

In addition to providing for the operating expenses for salaries and benefits for a director, a staff attorney and administrative support staff, the funds will support the provision of training, technical assistance, research assistance and information dissemination in the areas of child abuse and neglect and juvenile justice.

Significant Issues

The Corinne Wolfe Children's Law Center provides services to volunteers, attorneys, and professionals who work with the child abuse/neglect and juvenile justice system and who are not employed by the judicial branch of government.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$200.0 contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the General Fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY 05 shall revert to the General Fund.

In the 2003 regular session, the legislature passed and Governor Richardson signed an appropriations bill that included \$50.0 for the Corinne Wolfe Children's Law Center.

Operating funds for the center are requested to permit the center to provide the comprehensive, systematic opportunities for training and support that are needed in this state.

The appropriation will be used to provide for:

- ❑ Regional training programs at which volunteer CASAs and CRBs, lawyers, social workers, mental health providers, foster parents and others receive the same training to enhance joint problem-solving and collaborative efforts to improve the lives of children who have suffered abuse and neglect;
- ❑ Distance learning techniques to provide training and information to persons working in rural areas;
- ❑ Development of comprehensive web-based resources;
- ❑ Focused training on specific topics, such as permanency planning, accessing treatment services, tribal-state coordination, the effect of domestic violence, or interviewing of children; and
- ❑ More extensive collaboration with the judicial education center, also at the institute of public law.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Although there is no direct administrative impact on the administrative office of the courts, the children's law center resources will improve the knowledge and skills of attorneys, volunteers, children advocates, law enforcement officials and department social workers handling juvenile and children's court cases.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Funding for the Center in the amount of \$25 thousand was included in the UNM Board of Regents recommendations to the CHE, and the Commission included this request in its FY05 funding recommendations to the Legislature

The Corinne Wolfe Children's Law Center is a specialized center at the institute of public law, UNM school of law, established by the supreme court's court improvement project task force to address the critical need for training and support of the professionals and volunteers who work in the child abuse and neglect and juvenile justice legal systems in New Mexico.

The center is overseen by a committee consisting of judges; attorneys; children, youth and families department (CYFD) officials; volunteer advocates; and the administrative office of the courts (AOC) and court improvement project task force members.

Currently, there are 2,100 children in the custody of the state because of abuse or neglect, or alleged abuse or neglect. These young people are the ultimate beneficiaries of the center. CYFD had 31 children's court attorneys and 615 social workers around the state, while over 105 lawyers served as guardians ad litem for children or as counsel for parents, with half of these scattered throughout rural New Mexico. There were also 600 volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) and over 170 volunteers serving on the 34 local Citizen Review Boards (CRBs) around the state. These are among the people who would be served by the coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach to training that could be provided by a funded Children's Law Center.

AMENDMENTS

The following language is suggested for all new recurring higher education programs and expansion of current programs (assuming that funding will continue beyond FY05):

“The institution receiving the appropriation in this bill shall submit a program evaluation to the Legislative Finance Committee and the Commission on Higher Education by August 2007 detailing the benefits to the State of New Mexico from having implemented this program over a three period.”

LB/lg:dm