

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SB 56

51st Legislature, 1st Session, 2013

Tracking Number: .190691.1

Short Title: UNM Health Center Project ECHO

Sponsor(s): Senator Sue Wilson Beffort

Analyst: James Ball

Date: February 3, 2013

Bill Summary:

SB 56 makes an appropriation to hire personnel to continue Project Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) at the University of New Mexico (UNM).

Fiscal Impact:

\$1.6 million is appropriated from the General Fund to the Board of Regents of UNM for expenditure in FY 14. Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund.

Fiscal Issues:

The UNM bill analysis states that:

- Project ECHO received \$1.53 million funding in FY 09 through the Department of Health (DOH) to support improved access to specialty care for patients in rural and underserved regions of New Mexico; however, the project funding was reduced to \$250,000 for FY 10 and further reduced to \$100,000 for FY 11;
- the \$1,430,000 shortfall was temporarily and partially absorbed by other grants at DOH, but creates an ongoing obstacle to long-term planning and operations;
- state funding support will allow ECHO to continue to provide specialty care to New Mexicans in rural and underserved areas statewide; and
- legislative funding, as opposed to funding from grants received by Project ECHO, can be dedicated to basic operating budget and salaries that must be maintained in order to provide quality services statewide.

UNM also notes that Project ECHO is uniquely situated to provide access to specialty care where none exists and to serve as an important resource that is necessary for New Mexico to address requirements set out in the Medicaid expansion and in the federal *Affordable Care Act*.

Substantive Issues:

According to UNM:

- 32 of 33 counties in New Mexico are designated as medically underserved areas;
- specialty care for common, chronic, and complex diseases is available in many of these counties only by traveling to the state's only academic medical center, UNM-Health Sciences Center (HSC);

- a high proportion of New Mexico residents are poor and uninsured;
- approximately two-thirds of the state's population lives in rural areas, while two-thirds of physicians are located in urban areas; and
- as a result, many citizens experience lengthy delays and extraordinary costs associated with specialty consultation, and many underserved citizens simply cannot access specialty care at all.

UNM further states that Project ECHO extends specialty consultation to rural and frontier areas by partnering experts at UNM-HSC with primary care providers in those areas, so that care can be delivered to patients by their own providers in their own communities.

Background:

According to DOH:

- Project ECHO does not involve direct patient care; and
- Telehealth ECHO clinics connect primary care partners to specialists who help co-manage rural and underserved patients with common chronic conditions, such as:
 - chronic pain and headache management;
 - complex care;
 - dementia care;
 - diabetes and cardiovascular care;
 - Hepatitis C;
 - women's health and genomics;
 - HIV/AIDS clinic;
 - integrated addiction and psychiatry;
 - palliative care; and
 - rheumatology.

Committee Referrals:

SEC/SFC

Related Bills:

- SB 87 *UNM Health Workforce Analysis*
- SB 137 *Rural Primary Health Care Funding*
- SB 300 *UNM Health Center Hepatitis C Program*
- HB 170 *Volunteer Healthcare for the Underserved Act*
- HB 171 *Insurance Coverage for Telemedicine Services*