

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SB 15

51st Legislature, 2nd Session, 2014

Tracking Number: .195171.2

Short Title: Dental Students in WICHE Program

Sponsor(s): Senator Michael Padilla

Analyst: James Ball

Date: January 28, 2014

Bill Summary:

SB 15 makes an appropriation to increase the number of students who may participate in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) dental school program.

Fiscal Impact:

\$400,000 is appropriated to the Higher Education Department (HED) from the General Fund for expenditure in FY 15. Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund.

Fiscal Issues:

The Fiscal Impact Report (FIR) from the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) states that, for FY 14, the WICHE program received \$2.1 million in general fund appropriations. This amount included \$1.0 million for 48 dental school scholarships with six designated for new students and 42 for continuing students.

The FIR further states that, for FY 15, both the Executive and LFC recommended increasing funding for the WICHE dental school scholarship program is sufficient to increase the student cohort for the academic year 2014-2015 by an estimated six scholarships for a total of 12 new students. If either recommendation were adopted and if SB 15 also were enacted, the WICHE dental school program would total \$1.4 million.

LFC also notes that dental students may receive the WICHE scholarship for four years. Should the SB 15 appropriation be considered nonrecurring funding, the state might not be able to support six students in the FY 15 cohort for future years without specific appropriation bills. However, should the appropriation be included in the *General Appropriation Act*, language therein would make these funds non-reverting and would likely be funded in future fiscal years.

Substantive Issues:

The Department of Health (DOH) states in its analysis of SB 15 that New Mexico is experiencing a dental healthcare professional shortage. All New Mexico counties except one are federally designated as Health Professions Shortage Areas and Medically Underserved Areas or Populations. New Mexico ranks 49th of the 50 states in per-capita for dentists. Access to dental healthcare and preventive services is challenging in many communities throughout the state. The

appropriation in SB 15 would permit the WICHE tuition scholarship program to expand for dental school students, at least for one year.

Background:

According to the DOH, New Mexico has been a member of the WICHE Loan-for-Service Program since 1952. The program provides support for New Mexico students who want to pursue a degree in dentistry. State participation in this program allows New Mexico students to enroll at out-of-state graduate or professional dental education programs not offered in New Mexico public universities and receive reduced tuition fees. Upon acceptance into the WICHE program, New Mexico students agree to practice in New Mexico as a health professional in their field of study. Acceptance into the program is competitive and selection of participants is made by the WICHE Loan-for-Service Program Commissioners. The number of available slots is determined by funding levels and the number of applicants.

Committee Referrals:

SCC/SEC/SFC

Related Bills:

SB 76 *Dental Therapist Hygienist Act*
HB 7 *General Appropriation Act of 2014*