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**AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS
2025 REGULAR SESSION**

WITHIN 24 HOURS OF BILL POSTING, EMAIL ANALYSIS TO:

LFC@NMLEGIS.GOV

and

DFA@STATE.NM.US

{Include the bill no. in the email subject line, e.g., HB2, and only attach one bill analysis and related documentation per email message}

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

{Indicate if analysis is on an original bill, amendment, substitute or a correction of a previous bill}

Click all that apply:

Original Amendment
Correction Substitute

Date 2025-02-17
Bill No: SB394

Sponsor: Gonzales, Roberto "Bobby" J **Agency Name and Code** NMHED
Short UNM-TAOS **Number:** _____
Title: OBSERVATORY **Person Writing** Leakakos, Joseph
Phone: 5054128059 **Email** joseph.leakakos@hed.

SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY25	FY26		
N/A	\$1,500	Nonrecurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue			Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY25	FY26	FY27		

N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Total	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Duplicates/Conflicts with/Companion to/Relates to:

Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act:

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Senate Bill 394 (SB394) provides an appropriation of one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) from the General Fund to the Board of Regents of the University of New Mexico (UNM) for expenditure in FY26 through FY29 for the site preparation, construction, equipping, furnishing, and landscaping of the new Cielo Centro observatory, located at the University of New Mexico-Taos branch (UNMT). Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY29 shall revert to the General Fund.

The New Mexico Higher Education Department's (NMHED) analysis of this bill focuses on the higher education implications of the proposed legislation. Additional insight may be obtained from other agencies' analyses.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

SB394 provides an appropriation of one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) from the General Fund to the Board of Regents of UNM for expenditure in FY26 through FY29. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY29 shall revert to the General Fund.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

UNMT is looking to build Cielo Centro that will include "an observatory, observation deck, classroom, amphitheater, a trail featuring a to-scale solar system and artwalk, and weather station" (<http://taos.unm.edu/community/assets/unmt-observatory-fact-sheet-1.pdf>). "Less than one percent (1%) of the population in the US and Europe can witness [the dark sky's] unspoiled beauty due to light pollution," and "the Cielo Centro observatory is committed to preserving this natural wonder" (<https://taos.unm.edu/community/observatory.html>).

Further UNMT was gifted a 36-inch diameter, 12-foot, 6-inch tall Dobsonian telescope, the "largest public-use telescope in New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado[,] and one of the largest in the country," and one of UNMT's goal related to the telescope is to "build an observatory to house it, protect it, and allow for UNMT students, local K-12 students, and the public to use it" (<https://news.unm.edu/news/unm-taos-gifted-new-mexicos-largest-public-telescope>).

SB394 provides funding for the site preparation, construction, equipping, furnishing, and landscaping of Cielo Centro. Once operational, Cielo Centro will "serve as an educational hub, offering hands-on learning experiences for K-12 students, college students, and the general public." New Mexico higher education institutions (HEIs) provide educational offerings for the public through classes such as continuing education classes, and Cielo Centro looks like it will extend these offerings. Cielo Centro will also "expand the astronomy and physical science classes taught at UNMT and provide work-study opportunities for students." (<https://taos.unm.edu/community/observatory.html>).

Beyond increasing public and student offerings, Cielo Centro could provide greater visibility and recognition on UNMT in the larger astronomy community, including through increased tourism and visitors to Taos. One effect of this may be that students considering studying astronomy may consider UNMT due to Cielo Centro, or students who were not considering studying astronomy may switch their focus to astronomy.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

N/A

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

UNMT may need additional administrative staff to facilitate the construction and operations of Cielo Centro, and it may need additional faculty once Cielo Centro is operational.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

N/A

TECHNICAL ISSUES

N/A

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

N/A

ALTERNATIVES

UNMT could look for funding through alternative sources, including putting in a request for research and public service project (RPSP) funding through NMHED.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

The Board of Regents of UNM will not receive an appropriation for the site preparation, construction, equipping, furnishing, and landscaping of Cielo Centro at UNMT.

AMENDMENTS

N/A