

Duplicates/Conflicts with/Companion to/Relates to:
Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis: SB 495 amends Section 21-1-34 NMSA 1978, the “educational television equipment replacement fund to include equipment costs for Public Radio as well as Public Television.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

No appropriation is contained in the bill. Cost to replace KUNM’s 20-year-old transmitter at Sandia Crest is \$150,000 (FY26). Cost to replace KUNM’s networks of seven rural transmitters is \$250,000 (FY27).

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

No significant additional operating expenses will occur in this equipment replacement request. Radio broadcast transmitters and antennas have a useful life expectancy of 15 years. KUNM’s eight transmitters are all 17+ years old. KUNM’s main transmitter at Sandia Crest is now 20+ years old.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

KUNM’s main transmitter (Sandia Crest) provides an “over-the-air” programming feed to seven remote, rural transmitters (Socorro, Las Vegas, Taos, Eagle Nest, Espanola, Cuba, and Nageezi). If KUNM’s main transmitter fails, it will disrupt all of the rural, remote transmitters.

KUNM is a long-standing “rural serving” Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) radio station. CPB provides KUNM with an annual grant to support programming and community service to KUNM’s network of stations. Through engineering and census data, CPB estimates that our network provides free educational broadcast content to 1,146,048 people in central and northern NM.

KUNM’s actual measured audience (Nielsen Fall 2024) shows that 77,300 people listen to KUNM in any given week.

KUNM’s 24/7/365 content is intentionally diverse to serve the many communities in our broadcast coverage area. Local news, news from NPR, Native America Calling and a wide variety of music and cultural programs, some of which originate from the communities we serve.

KUNM also provides Emergency Alert warning messages – weather, disasters, Amber and Silver alerts that can be critical to the people we serve. These messages will go unheard if our transmitters are off. In some emergency cases (Cerro Grande Fire, Calf Canyon, Ruidoso, 9/11) KUNM opens its phone lines to the public for discussion, local updates, missing persons, etc.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

KUNM Radio is a self-supporting department at UNM – no I&G funding, no line-item funding from UNM or State of NM. Appropriations, if any, will be overseen and managed through the appropriate UNM business channels.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

KUNM is licensed to the Regents of the University of New Mexico, as is NMPBS public television.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

None, KUNM will self-manage the transmitter equipment replacement effort.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

None. There are no implications for FCC licensing of our facilities.

ALTERNATIVES

None.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

Loss of our free broadcast service, including local news and emergency alerts for the half of NM's population we serve, if our equipment is not routinely replaced.

AMENDMENTS

None.