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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR: JP Taylor DATE TYPED: 2/9/03 HB 537

SHORT TITLE: Statewide Information & Referral Task Force SB _____

ANALYST: Dunbar

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation Contained		Estimated Additional Impact		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY03	FY04	FY03	FY04		
\$150.0				Recurring	GF

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Duplicates Senate Bill 422.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Responses Received From

Department of Health (DOH)
 Health Policy Commission (HPC)
 State Agency on Aging (SAA)
 NM Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons
 Department of Labor (DOL)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 537 appropriates \$150.0 to the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council for the purpose of establishing a statewide task force to develop a statewide information and referral program, using a 211-telephone number. The bill proposes to pilot test the program in Dona Ana County. The bill identifies an appropriation of \$60.0 to establish the task force and \$90.0 to implement the pilot 211 program.

The bill contains an emergency clause.

Significant Issues

The task force includes representative from Department of Health (DOH), Human Services Department (HSD) Agency on Aging, the long-term care link program, Children Youth and Families Department (CYFD) Department of Labor (DOL) and the Governor's Committee on Con-

cerns for the Handicapped, Commission for the Blind, the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, a statewide organization that raises money for health and human services purposes and other interested parties.

DOH reports that there is a need for a comprehensive health and human services referral and information resource system. According to the Dona Ana County Advocates for Children, Youth and Families, this system has been implemented in 20% of the states in the U.S. The system works well when there are such events as the one that occurred on September 11, 2001. Additionally, the system is beneficial when regional catastrophes occur, such as hurricanes, tornadoes or earthquakes. The system is in place to receive calls that relate to questions such as where individuals can find housing, clothing, food and other essential items during an emergency.

DOH indicates that there is an existing effort underway to develop a broader web-based Public Health Division (PHD) resource directory for information and referral. It is suggested that the Information and Referral Task Force examine the development of the PHD directory and utilization of other existing resource directories before appropriating additional funding for resource and referral.

State Agency on Aging reports that several cities, including Albuquerque, Las Cruces and Santa Fe, are developing "211" information systems. To date, the cities have not developed a plan to coordinate the systems.

Considerations must be made to accommodate callers who do not speak English. This is particularly likely in Dona Ana County, which has a large Spanish speaking population.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$150.0 contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY 04 shall revert to the general fund.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Agencies note that participation in the task force and in the pilot test would require significant staff time. In particular, the development and implementation of the pilot test would require considerable staff time and some administrative efforts.

DUPLICATION

Duplicates Senate Bill 422

TECHNICAL ISSUES

HB 537 makes no provision for accountability and monitoring of the recipient of the appropriated funds (the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.)

DOH questions why the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council has been chosen to receive the appropriation and carry out the provisions of HB 537. It is unclear, for example, whether the Council has the appropriate experience and personnel for such a task. HB 537 does not establish any system for oversight of this work, or any means of holding the Council accountable

The following suggestions would strengthen the provisions in HB 537:

- State the types of services to be covered by the proposed system, and whether it is intended for situations of emergency or catastrophic events.
- Require attention to issues of telephone infrastructure.
- Require exploration of alternatives for people without telephones.
- Require that the task force consider ways for a system to determine what kind of referral is appropriate for each caller.
- Require that the proposed task force make provisions for updating the planned system.
- Add provisions for oversight and monitoring of the project and for holding the recipients of funds accountable.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

A 211 system could be a single point of entry into a statewide information and referral system. This approach could be a partial solution to the fragmented nature of health and human services systems, which at present can make access extremely difficult. Such a system has been implemented in 20% of the states in the U.S. The system could be used routinely as well as in emergency situations.

Nationally, 211 information and referral systems have been found to decrease non-emergency calls on 911 emergency lines. Such a system might also reduce the burden of non-emergency visits to emergency rooms. This could reduce the burden on the emergency medical system, as well as the associated costs.

According to DOH there may be significant benefits from a 211 general information and referral system, however, the following list note potential problems that are not dealt with in HB 537.

A 211 phone line would have serious limitations in the event of an emergency, since phone lines might be overloaded or down. In addition, in New Mexico many people do not have ready access to a telephone. A telephone-based system would require considerable attention to the infrastructure. It would be advisable for HB 537 to require that the task force address these problems, especially if emergency planning is seen as part of its mission.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Should the funds be appropriated to DOH instead of the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council?

Does the Council have the experience and personnel to carry out the task?

BD/yr