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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR: Lopez DATE TYPED: 1/31/03 HB _____

SHORT TITLE: Expand Early Intervention Services SB SJM 16

ANALYST: Wilson

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation Contained		Estimated Additional Impact		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY03	FY04	FY03	FY04		
		Indeterminate	See Narrative		

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Responses Received From
 Department of Health (DOH)
 Health Policy Commission (HPC)
 Board of Nursing (BN)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

SJM16 requests the Department of Health to create a task force to study ways to expand referrals by medical personnel for early intervention services earlier in the life of a child. The task force must include representation from advocate groups, providers and parents of developmentally disabled children, as well as appropriate medical personnel.

The findings of this task force must be reported to the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee by its October 2003 meeting.

Significant Issues

SJM16 recognizes the following information on early childhood intervention:

- Children with developmental disabilities have substantial functional limitations related to a mental or physical impairment, including brain trauma.
- Early intervention services for developmentally disabled children are needed from the moment of birth.

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- The earlier children are identified as developmentally disabled and begin receiving services, the more likely they are to be able to live independent and self-directed lives.
- Families of developmentally disabled children are often overburdened and lack the knowledge and resources to provide optimal care for these children.
- The Department of Health operates a program of early intervention services called CAREarly.
- Medical professionals often do not identify developmental disabilities early enough in the child's life to make a timely referral to this program.
- Earliest referral for these children means maximizing the opportunities for growth and development of the child.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

DOH states that the provisions of SJM 16 would require a substantial investment of time by personnel or contract resources to complete this study. Additional funding is required.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

DOH needs additional staff or a contractor to conduct the study required by SJM 16.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

- The DOH Early Intervention Program currently has over 6,000 children enrolled who are either being evaluated or receiving treatment. The average age of these children was 15.3 months in FY02.
- The program has grown by 22% over the last two years, but program staff are concerned that there are many developmentally disabled and at-risk children who are not yet being reached and that the DOH is not meeting federal standards for children in some categories.
- The program has received an increase in funding, but is still experiencing difficulties with referrals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some health care providers and parents adopt a “wait and see” approach that can cause a critical delay in seeking out appropriate services. The task force proposed by SJM16 would enable all the participants in the infant health arena to collaboratively explore ways to ensure that more children get the services they need at an early enough age to be most effective.
- Early intervention programs provide children from birth to age three with therapeutic services designed to prevent disorders that may stem from genetic conditions or adverse circumstance and to ameliorate developmental delays at as early a point as possible. Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, cleft lip and palate are all conditions identifiable at birth or soon thereafter. Children with any of these conditions--or any combinations of them--are typical of the children referred to early intervention programs.

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- Early intervention specialists and therapists may be able to reduce some of the family stresses related raising developmentally disabled children by providing an opportunity for the developmentally disabled child and family members to learn daily living skills that can assist all involved.
- Early intervention may provide a foundation for the development of life skills that may be more easily learned by a young child.
- Early intervention may present an opportunity for the child and family members to receive specialized counseling that may reduce future problems.
- Early intervention may result in a young person's development that may prevent costly institutionalization during the child's adolescent or adult years.
- Early intervention may provide the child with skills and confidence that allow, as an adult, a semi-independent and productive lifestyle.

DW/lis