

LFC Requester:

**AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS
2026 REGULAR SESSION**

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SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

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

Check all that apply:

Original Amendment _____
Correction Substitute _____

Date Jan. 21, 2026

Bill No: HB 25-280

Sponsor: Kathleen Cates
Short Title: Juvenile Firearm Use & Background Checks

Agency Name and Code Number: LOPD-280
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SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY25	FY26		

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue			Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY25	FY26	FY27		

(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						

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Duplicates/Conflicts with/Companion to/Relates to: HB 49 (Felon in Possession Penalty)
Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis:

HB 25 is identical to 2025's HB 39, as introduced. The bill proposes to amend two sections of the New Mexico Code: NMSA 1978, Section 30-7-16 ("Firearms or Destructive Devices—Receipt, Transportation or Possession by Certain Persons—Penalty") and NMSA 1978, Section 32A-2-26 ("Sealing of Records").

Concerning the proposed amendments to Section 30-7-16:

- HB 25 proposed a new Subsection (A)(4), which would create an additional category of persons who may not lawfully possess firearms—any adult who committed a “delinquent act involving the use of a firearm” when that adult was a child, if such an act would be subject to felony prosecution if committed by an adult.”
- HB 25 proposes to amend Subsection (B) to make possession by such an adult a 3rd degree felony.
- HB 25 proposes to a new Subsection (E)(1) to define “adult subject to a juvenile disposition of a delinquent act involving the use of a firearm” and to exclude from that definition individuals for whom 10 years have passed since the “juvenile disposition” and persons who have been “pardoned” by the “proper authority.” This proposed amendment would also renumber the currently existing subsections as necessary.

Concerning the proposed amendments to Section 32A-2-26, HB 25 proposes a new subsection L, which would appear to unseal—by operation of law—the records of such dispositions for two, specific purposes: (1) conducting federal instant background checks *and* (2) determining whether a person is or may be violating Section 30-7-16.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Because juvenile records are sealed, it is impossible to assess how many potential adults would become ineligible for firearm ownership based on their delinquency record, much less how many of those are currently lawful gun owners who would suddenly be in violation of a

third-degree felony statute upon enactment of this bill, however, it has the potential to impact a great number of currently law-abiding adults. It also captures a great number of people prospectively, and the ten-year collateral consequence could impact plea bargaining in hundreds of juvenile cases each year, potentially resulting in more trials to resolve juvenile offenses, not to mention an influx of prosecutions for felon in possession targeting this newly minted “felon” demographic.

With increased cases and increased public defender resource needs. The LOPD cost for experienced defense attorneys, including salary, benefits, operational costs, and support staff is \$292,080.16 annually in the Albuquerque/Santa Fe areas, and \$300,569.45 in outlying geographic areas. A 2022 workload study by an independent organization and the American Bar Association concluded that New Mexico faces a critical shortage of public defense attorneys. The study concluded, “A very conservative analysis shows that based on average annual caseload, the state needs an additional 602 full-time attorneys – more than twice its current level - to meet the standard of reasonably effective assistance of counsel guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment.”

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_aid_indigent_defendants/ls-sclaid-moss-adams-nm-proj.pdf. Barring some other way to reduce indigent defense workload, any increase in the number of serious, complex felony prosecutions would bring a concomitant need for an increase in indigent defense funding in order to keep the LOPD’s workload crisis from spreading.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

NMSA 1978, Section 32A-2-18(A) states that “A judgement ... resulting in a juvenile disposition **shall not be deemed a conviction of crime nor shall it impose any civil disabilities** ordinarily resulting from conviction of a crime.”

HB 25 would appear to conflict with this existing law by effectively equating a juvenile adjudication with an adult conviction for certain purposes. HB 25 would impose a civil disability on certain adults, based on their behavior as a child, which would prohibit such adults from exercising constitutional rights under the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article II, Section 6 of the New Mexico Constitution, both of which protect the right to keep and bear arms. Such disability would ordinarily result from the conviction of a felony crime, contrary to Section 32A-2-18(A). This tension, if not resolved, could result in litigation that would require the judiciary to construe and reconcile or declare unconstitutional the statutory provisions if enacted. Either way, the proposed change would significantly alter the Children’s Code and reduce the protections that it now affords juveniles.

Because enactment of this law would declare to be criminal certain ordinary activities that have previously been legal since the founding days of New Mexico, any such enactment should come with profound fanfare, advertising and education to prevent innocents from inadvertently becoming criminals by simply continuing behavior they have legally done all their lives.

There is also significant concern about relying on juvenile delinquency history at all. Typically, juvenile records are sealed to protect the privacy of minors who have been involved in the judicial system, because minors are more likely to make choices without fully contemplating or understanding the implications or consequences of such choices. Sealing the records allows those individuals to move forward into their lives as adults without the stigma of past offences that would otherwise hinder their opportunities for employment, education, house, and other

opportunities to enjoy a full, productive adult life after they have fully developed. Giving minors the opportunity to have a chance at a fresh start encourages positive behavior and reintegration into society, which could be undercut by HB 25. Although HB 25 does not impose a lifetime impediment, it does impose what some may consider to be a significant impediment that is in tension with the purposes of sealing juvenile records generally. It is also unclear how the information could be made available for background check purposes without undermining the privacy interests in sealing. *See Administrative Implications.*

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

It is difficult to predict the impact on the LOPD due to the creation of a new crime insofar as no statistics exist to suggest how much the previously legal behavior presently occurs (after all, it's completely legal now) and would continue and would be prosecuted. It is important to remember that indigent criminal defense is a constitutionally mandated right, and that LOPD does not control the decision to charge or the number of resultant cases assigned to the agency. All that can be said at this time is that if more charges, case assignments and trials result, LOPD may need to hire more attorneys and staff. Accurate prediction of the fiscal impact is impossible to speculate; assessment of the required resources would be necessary after the implementation of the proposed higher-penalty scheme.

Barring some other way to reduce indigent defense workload, any increase in the number of felony prosecutions would bring a concomitant need for an increase in indigent defense funding in order to keep this problem from spreading. Of course accurate prediction of the fiscal impact would be impossible to speculate; assessment of the required resources would be necessary after the implementation of the proposed statutory scheme.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Concerning the proposed amendment to Section 32A-2-26, which appears to unseal the records by function of law for certain purposes, it is unclear how it would work in practice. The language is broad enough to be interpreted in a manner that would effectively unseal such records of juvenile adjudication for all law enforcement agencies at any time, not just for the purposes of background checks. It is unclear whether DPS (or whatever agency would facilitate these file inquiries) has the ability or capacity to process these requests in a manner ensuring the narrow scope of the bill without exposing sealed juvenile records to undue exposure.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

TECHNICAL ISSUES

Analyst is unaware whether this legislation is germane under Art. IV, Section 5. It is not a budget bill and analyst is unaware that it has been drawn pursuant to a special message of the Governor.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

ALTERNATIVES

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

AMENDMENTS

