

LFC Requester:**Davidson****AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS - 2026 REGULAR SESSION****WITHIN 24 HOURS OF BILL POSTING, UPLOAD ANALYSIS TO****AgencyAnalysis.nmlegis.gov and email to billanalysis@dfa.nm.gov*****(Analysis must be uploaded as a PDF)*****SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION***{Indicate if analysis is on an original bill, amendment, substitute or a correction of a previous bill}***Date Prepared:** 1/26/2026*Check all that apply:***Bill Number:** SB84Original Correction Amendment Substitute **Sponsor:** Michael Padilla**Short** High School Water
Management Pilot Project**Agency Name
and Code**New Mexico Environment
Department 667**Number:****Person Writing**Jonas ArmstrongJonas.Armstrong2@en**Phone:** 505-670-9050 **Email:** v.nm.gov**SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT****APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)**

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY26	FY27		
	\$5,000.0	Nonrecurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () indicate expenditure decreases)

Relates to: 2025 SB60

SECTION III: NARRATIVE**BILL SUMMARY**

Senate Bill 84 (SB84) adds a new section to the Public-School Code to create the High School Water Management and Conservation Program, a pilot project that offers a one-credit elective high school course to provide practical environmental education and career preparation for students. The Public Education Department (PED) would administer the program in collaboration with other state agencies and Indian nations, tribes and pueblos.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

SB84 appropriates \$5 million (GF) to PED for FYs 2027 and 2028 for the program. NMED is not included in the list of collaborating agencies, so it would not incur additional expenses for this program.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

NMED's work spans the full water workforce ecosystem, including water system management, regulatory compliance, laboratory science, engineering review, planning, financing, inspections, and enforcement, not just operator certification. NMED would be a direct beneficiary of an increase in the water workforce through additional education and career pathways for system managers, board members, engineers, planners, scientists, and long-term operations professionals.

New Mexico's ability to protect surface and ground water and to keep public water and wastewater systems operating safely to protect public health and the environment requires water and wastewater professionals who are well trained and certified. These careers and the people who fill them are responsible for day-to-day system operation and compliance. NMED's Utility Operator Certification Program does not just certify operators; it also publicizes operator job opportunities and maintains a list of certified operators, samplers, and approved assessors as a tool for water and wastewater systems that often struggle to staff these roles and may need contract support to keep facilities running and compliant.

New Mexico has nearly 2,500 certified water and wastewater operators serving more than 1,000 water systems, leaving little staffing redundancy statewide and creating persistent recruitment challenges. Operator demand is most acute in rural and small systems, which experience higher turnover, competition from larger utilities, and an aging workforce that signals near-term attrition risk.

SB84 offers a direct way to strengthen that workforce pipeline by creating a pilot High School Water Management and Conservation Program. By introducing water careers before students leave the K-12 system, SB 84 can help widen the pool of New Mexicans who are aware of, interested in, and prepared to pursue the kinds of water-sector jobs our state and communities rely on to protect public health, including the Department's internal needs and the operator and sampling roles supported by NMED's certification and contract-operator infrastructure.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

None.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

None.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

None.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

None

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Executive Order 2024-152, “Building New Mexico’s Workforce to Foster Infrastructure Investments and Resilient Communities,” directs state agencies to coordinate on building a skilled workforce for infrastructure sectors, including water management. The EO emphasizes cross-cabinet collaboration and early career pathways, aligning with SB 84’s focus on introducing water careers in K-12 education through partnerships among PED, NMED, OSE, HED, DOH, and others. SB84 complements that ongoing effort.

ALTERNATIVES

None.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

If SB84 is not enacted, the High School Water Management and Conservation Project will not be established, and the Public Education Department (PED) will not develop the proposed curriculum or pilot program. High school students will miss the opportunity to engage in practical, multidisciplinary education on water management and conservation, and will not be exposed to the potential career paths in the water resources management field.

AMENDMENTS