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**AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS
2026 REGULAR SESSION**

WITHIN 24 HOURS OF BILL POSTING, EMAIL ANALYSIS TO:

LFC@NMLEGIS.GOV

and

DFA@STATE.NM.US

{Include the bill no. in the email subject line, e.g., HB2, and only attach one bill analysis and related documentation per email message}

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

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

Click all that apply:

Original **Amendment**
Correction **Substitute**

Date Prepared: 2026-02-12
Bill No: SM29

Sponsor: Pinto, Shannon D. / Lopez, Linda M.
HEALTH CARE
Short Title: BARRIERS & GAPS

Agency Name and Code NMHED
Number: _____
Person Writing: Weber, Jody
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Phone: 5053940030 **Email:** gov

SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY26	FY27		
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue	Recurring	Fund Affected

FY26	FY27	FY28	or Nonrecurring	
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY26	FY27	FY28	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Total	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Duplicates/Conflicts with/Companion to/Relates to:

Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act:

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Senate Memorial 29 (SM29) requests that the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center (UNM HSC) coordinate with health care facilities statewide to identify communication barriers and gaps that hinder effective patient care. It also encourages UNM HSC to gather and share related data to support the development or expansion of medical interpreter training programs. As a memorial, it expresses the Senate’s request and encouragement rather than creating binding legal requirements.

It further requests that UNM HSC develop strategies to address identified communication barriers and gaps. The memorial encourages UNM HSC to collect data regarding barriers that affect patients’ ability to communicate within the health care system and to share that data to assist individuals or entities developing or expanding medical interpreter training programs. The memorial directs that a copy be transmitted to UNM HSC.

The New Mexico Higher Education Department’s (NMHED) analysis of this bill focuses on the higher education implications of the proposed legislation. Additional insight may be obtained from analyses by other agencies.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The memorial does not include an appropriation, and a comprehensive statewide study would take significant resources.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Medical interpreters play a critical role in ensuring clear, accurate communication between patients, families, and providers when a patient does not speak the same language as their care team. This includes helping patients describe their symptoms, assisting doctors in explaining prescription medication usage, and supporting families in discussing complex or end-of-life decisions with hospital staff. Beyond literal translation, interpreters must also convey cultural meaning, recognizing culturally specific ways of describing illness or beliefs about health to build trust and mutual understanding. Like all healthcare professionals, medical interpreters are required to maintain strict confidentiality and comply with privacy laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Nine point fifty-five percent (9.55%) of New Mexico's population has limited English proficiency. When patients with limited English proficiency lack meaningful language access, they are more likely to rely on the emergency department rather than establish care with a primary care provider. This pattern often signals barriers to preventive services, routine checkups, and early treatment, resulting in more advanced illness and higher-cost care that could have been avoided with timely intervention.

Improving patient-provider communication through qualified medical interpreters helps patients better understand diagnoses, treatment plans, and how to navigate the health system. Clear and culturally responsive communication reduces medical errors, strengthens adherence to care plans, and increases patient satisfaction and trust. Over time, culturally sensitive interpretation can foster stronger engagement with primary and preventive care, leading to more consistent and effective use of health services.

- SM29 does not identify which medical facilities would be included in the study, leaving unclear whether the focus would be on hospitals, community health centers, rural clinics, tribal health facilities, or other provider types.
- The memorial does not include requirements for data collection, reporting, or interagency data sharing, which may limit the study's ability to produce actionable findings.
- If the study confirms a workforce shortage, New Mexico's higher education institutions may need to develop or expand medical interpreter training programs to meet projected demand, raising potential capacity and funding considerations.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

UNM HSC would be required to develop and execute this study and produce a report with actionable strategies without fiscal support.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

UNM HSC would need to administer the project.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

N/A

TECHNICAL ISSUES

N/A

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

The scope and methodology of the requested study is not outlined in the memorial. UNM HSC would need to select health care facilities and garner state-wide participation for the study to be successful.

ALTERNATIVES

N/A

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

If this memorial is not enacted, UNM HSC will not conduct a study of communication issues in healthcare facilities.

AMENDMENTS

N/A