

1 SENATE BILL

2 **57TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2026**

3 INTRODUCED BY

4 Michael Padilla

10 AN ACT

11 RELATING TO GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION; CREATING THE CHILD  
12 WELFARE AUTHORITY; CREATING A BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE  
13 AUTHORITY; PROVIDING POWERS AND DUTIES; TRANSFERRING MONEY,  
14 PROPERTY, CONTRACTS AND STATUTORY REFERENCES FROM THE CHILDREN,  
15 YOUTH AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT TO THE CHILD WELFARE AUTHORITY;  
16 AMENDING, REPEALING, ENACTING AND RECOMPILING SECTIONS OF THE  
17 NMSA 1978.

18

19 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

20 SECTION 1. Section 32A-1-4 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1993,  
21 Chapter 77, Section 13, as amended) is amended to read:

22 "32A-1-4. DEFINITIONS.--As used in the Children's Code:

23 A. "active efforts" means efforts that are  
24 affirmative, active, thorough and timely and that represent a  
25 higher standard of conduct than reasonable efforts;

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1                   B. "adult" means a person who is eighteen years of  
2 age or older;

3                   C. "authority" or "department" means the child  
4 welfare authority;

5                   D. "board of regents" means the governing body of  
6 the authority;

7                   [E.] E. "child" means a person who is less than  
8 eighteen years old;

9                   [D.] F. "council" means the substitute care  
10 advisory council established pursuant to Section 32A-8-4 NMSA  
11 1978;

12                   [E.] G. "court", when used without further  
13 qualification, means the children's court division of the  
14 district court and includes the judge, special master or  
15 commissioner appointed pursuant to the provisions of the  
16 Children's Code or supreme court rule;

17                   [F.] H. "court-appointed special advocate" means a  
18 person appointed pursuant to the provisions of the Children's  
19 Court Rules to assist the court in determining the best  
20 interests of the child by investigating the case and submitting  
21 a report to the court;

22                   [G.] I. "custodian" means an adult with whom the  
23 child lives who is not a parent or guardian of the child;

24                   [H.] ~~"department" means the children, youth and~~  
25 ~~families department, unless otherwise specified;~~

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1           [.] J. "disproportionate minority contact" means  
2 the involvement of a racial or ethnic group with the criminal  
3 or juvenile justice system at a proportion either higher or  
4 lower than that group's proportion in the general population;

5           [.] K. "federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978"  
6 means the federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, as that act  
7 may be amended or its sections renumbered;

8           [.] L. "foster parent" means a person, including a  
9 relative of the child, licensed or certified by the  
10 ~~department~~ authority or a child placement agency to provide  
11 care for children in the custody of the ~~department~~ authority  
12 or agency;

13           [.] M. "guardian" means a person appointed as a  
14 guardian by a court or Indian tribal authority;

15           [.] N. "guardian ad litem" means an attorney  
16 appointed by the children's court to represent and protect the  
17 best interests of the child in a case; provided that no party  
18 or employee or representative of a party to the case shall be  
19 appointed to serve as a guardian ad litem;

20           [.] O. "Indian" means, whether an adult or child,  
21 a person who is:

22                           (1) a member of an Indian tribe; or  
23                           (2) eligible for membership in an Indian  
24 tribe;

25           [.] P. "Indian child" means an Indian person, or a

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1        person whom there is reason to know is an Indian person, under  
2        eighteen years of age who is neither:

3                (1) married; or  
4                (2) emancipated;

5                [P.] Q. "Indian child's tribe" means:

6                (1) the Indian tribe in which an Indian child  
7        is a member or eligible for membership; or  
8                (2) in the case of an Indian child who is a  
9        member or eligible for membership in more than one tribe, the  
10      Indian tribe with which the Indian child has more significant  
11      contacts;

12                [Q.] R. "Indian custodian" means an Indian who,  
13        pursuant to tribal law or custom or pursuant to state law:

14                (1) is an adult with legal custody of an  
15      Indian child; or

16                (2) has been transferred temporary physical  
17      care, custody and control by the parent of the Indian child;

18                [R.] S. "Indian tribe" means an Indian nation,  
19      tribe, pueblo or other band, organized group or community of  
20      Indians recognized as eligible for the services provided to  
21      Indians by the secretary of the United States department of the  
22      interior because of their status as Indians, including an  
23      Alaska native village as defined in 43 U.S.C. Section 1602(c)  
24      or a regional corporation as defined in 43 U.S.C. Section 1606.  
25      For the purposes of notification to and communication with a

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1 tribe as required in the Indian Family Protection Act, "Indian  
2 tribe" also includes those tribal officials and staff who are  
3 responsible for child welfare and social services matters;

4 [S.] T. "judge", when used without further  
5 qualification, means the judge of the court;

6 [T.] U. "legal custody" means a legal status  
7 created by order of the court or other court of competent  
8 jurisdiction or by operation of statute that vests in the  
9 authority or a person ~~[department or agency]~~ the right to  
10 determine where and with whom a child shall live; the right and  
11 duty to protect, train and discipline the child and to provide  
12 the child with food, shelter, personal care, education and  
13 ordinary and emergency medical care; the right to consent to  
14 major medical, psychiatric, psychological and surgical  
15 treatment and to the administration of legally prescribed  
16 psychotropic medications pursuant to the Children's Mental  
17 Health and Developmental Disabilities Act; and the right to  
18 consent to the child's enlistment in the armed forces of the  
19 United States;

20 [U.] V. "member" or "membership" means a  
21 determination made by an Indian tribe that a person is a member  
22 of or eligible for membership in that Indian tribe;

23 [V.] W. "parent" or "parents" means a biological or  
24 adoptive parent if the biological or adoptive parent has a  
25 constitutionally protected liberty interest in the care and

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1 custody of the child or a person who has lawfully adopted an  
2 Indian child pursuant to state law or tribal law or tribal  
3 custom;

4 [W.] X. "permanency plan" means a determination by  
5 the court that the child's interest will be served best by:

6 (1) reunification;  
7 (2) placement for adoption after the parents'  
8 rights have been relinquished or terminated or after a motion  
9 has been filed to terminate parental rights;

10 (3) placement with a person who will be the  
11 child's permanent guardian;

12 (4) placement in the legal custody of the  
13 [department] authority with the child placed in the home of a  
14 fit and willing relative; or

15 (5) placement in the legal custody of the  
16 [department] authority under a planned permanent living  
17 arrangement;

18 [X. "person" means an individual or any other form  
19 of entity recognized by law;]

20 Y. "plan of safe care" means a written plan created  
21 by a health care professional intended to ensure the immediate  
22 and ongoing safety and well-being of a substance-exposed  
23 newborn or to provide perinatal support to a pregnant person  
24 with a substance use disorder by addressing the treatment needs  
25 of the child and any of the child's parents, relatives,

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1 guardians, custodians or caretakers to the extent those  
2 treatment needs are relevant to the safety of the child;

3 Z. "preadoptive parent" means a person with whom a  
4 child has been placed for adoption;

5 AA. "protective supervision" means the right to  
6 visit the child in the home where the child is residing,  
7 inspect the home, transport the child to court-ordered  
8 diagnostic examinations and evaluations and obtain information  
9 and records concerning the child;

10 BB. "relative" means a person related to another  
11 person:

12 (1) by blood within the fifth degree of  
13 consanguinity or through marriage by the fifth degree of  
14 affinity; or

15 (2) with respect to an Indian child, as  
16 established or defined by the Indian child's tribe's custom or  
17 law;

18 CC. "reservation" means:

19 (1) "Indian country" as defined in 18 U.S.C.  
20 Section 1151;

21 (2) any lands to which the title is held by  
22 the United States in trust for the benefit of an Indian tribe  
23 or individual; or

24 (3) any lands held by an Indian tribe or  
25 individual subject to a restriction by the United States

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1                   against alienation;

2                   DD. "reunification" means either a return of the  
3                   child to the parent or to the home from which the child was  
4                   removed or a return to the noncustodial parent;

5                   [EE. "secretary" means the United States secretary  
6                   of the interior;]

7                   EE. "state superintendent" means the state  
8                   superintendent of child welfare;

9                   FF. "tribal court" means a court with jurisdiction  
10                  over child custody proceedings that is either a court of Indian  
11                  offenses, a court established and operated under the law or  
12                  custom of an Indian tribe or any other administrative body that  
13                  is vested by an Indian tribe with authority over child custody  
14                  proceedings;

15                  GG. "tribal court order" means a document issued by  
16                  a tribal court that is signed by an appropriate authority,  
17                  including a judge, governor or tribal council member, and that  
18                  orders an action that is within the tribal court's  
19                  jurisdiction; and

20                  HH. "tribunal" means any judicial forum other than  
21                  the court."

22                  SECTION 2. A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
23                  32A-1A-1 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

24                  "32A-1A-1. [NEW MATERIAL] SHORT TITLE.--Chapter 32A,  
25                  Article 1A NMSA 1978 may be cited as the "Child Welfare

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1 Authority Act"."

2                   **SECTION 3.** A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
3 32A-1A-2 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

4                   "32A-1A-2. [NEW MATERIAL] PURPOSE OF CHILD WELFARE  
5 AUTHORITY.--The purpose of the authority is to:

6                   A. provide an independent, accredited state agency  
7 governed by a board of regents to administer the state's child  
8 welfare and juvenile justice programs formerly administered by  
9 the children, youth and families department and other child and  
10 family programs assigned to it by law; and

11                  B. cooperate and collaborate with other state  
12 agencies and institutions, judicial agencies and courts, school  
13 districts and local governments to establish a comprehensive,  
14 coordinated and integrated child welfare system."

15                  **SECTION 4.** A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
16 32A-1A-3 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

17                  "32A-1A-3. [NEW MATERIAL] CHILD WELFARE AUTHORITY  
18 CREATED--BOARD OF REGENTS--MEMBERSHIP--DUTIES.--

19                  A. The "child welfare authority" is created as an  
20 adjunct agency of the executive branch of state government.  
21 The authority shall be governed by the board of regents.

22                  B. The "board of regents" of the authority is  
23 created and consists of seven members appointed by the governor  
24 with the advice and consent of the senate. No more than four  
25 members shall be appointed from the same political party. The

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1 initial appointees shall draw lots for staggered terms and  
2 thereafter shall serve for terms of four years.

3                   C. Regents shall be appointed as follows:

4                   (1) a current or retired children's court or  
5 family court judge;

6                   (2) a licensed foster parent;

7                   (3) a licensed youth behavioral health  
8 specialist;

9                   (4) a juvenile justice professional who has a  
10 graduate degree in juvenile justice or a similar field or who  
11 has at least seven years of juvenile justice experience;

12                   (5) a licensed social worker; and

13                   (6) two public members who have a demonstrated  
14 interest in and knowledge of child welfare or juvenile justice  
15 matters.

16                   D. Regents who are not otherwise reimbursable from  
17 state or local government funds for travel expenses are  
18 entitled to receive per diem and mileage as provided in the Per  
19 Diem and Mileage Act and shall receive no other compensation,  
20 perquisite or allowance.

21                   E. The board of regents shall meet at least  
22 quarterly and may meet at the call of the chair or at the  
23 request of a majority of the regents. A majority of the  
24 regents constitutes a quorum, and a majority of the regents  
25 present at a meeting is needed to take action unless a specific

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1       statute requires an extraordinary vote. The chair may ask the  
2       governor to replace a regent who has three or more unexcused  
3       absences. Vacancies on the board of regents shall be filled by  
4       appointment by the governor for the remainder of the unexpired  
5       term. Members appointed to fill a vacancy are also subject to  
6       senate confirmation.

7                   F. A regent shall recuse on any vote in which the  
8       regent or a member of the regent's family to the fourth degree  
9       of consanguinity or affinity has a financial interest or would  
10       otherwise benefit from the regent's vote.

11                  G. The board of regents shall:

12                           (1) approve the mission, goals and objectives,  
13       policies and procedures of the authority;

14                           (2) appoint the state superintendent with the  
15       advice and consent of the senate who shall lead the authority  
16       as generally directed by the board of regents;

17                           (3) approve the proposed and operating budget  
18       of the authority;

19                           (4) approve proposed authority rules;

20                           (5) select the accrediting agency to accredit  
21       the authority; and

22                           (6) appoint advisory committees."

23                          SECTION 5. A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
24       32A-1A-4 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

25                          "32A-1A-4. [NEW MATERIAL] STATE SUPERINTENDENT--

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1 APPOINTMENT--QUALIFICATIONS--DEPUTIES.--

2                   A. The "state superintendent of child welfare"  
3 shall be appointed with the advice and consent of the senate  
4 solely on merit and without regard to political affiliation.  
5 The state superintendent shall serve at the pleasure of the  
6 board of regents and shall be compensated at the same exempt  
7 salary range as a cabinet secretary, depending on education and  
8 experience.

9                   B. The state superintendent shall:

10                   (1) hold a master's or doctoral degree in  
11 social work, psychology, human services, criminal justice or a  
12 similar field with a concentration in child welfare or juvenile  
13 justice or similar concentration; and

14                   (2) have at least five years' experience  
15 administering a large organization that required a working  
16 knowledge of and experience in the child welfare or juvenile  
17 justice systems.

18                   C. The state superintendent may employ  
19 professional, clerical and technical assistants to carry out  
20 the authority's powers and duties and shall employ a "deputy  
21 superintendent for child welfare", who has experience with  
22 child abuse and neglect, family supports, foster care and other  
23 areas of child welfare policy; and a "deputy superintendent for  
24 juvenile justice", who has experience with juvenile justice  
25 policy, programs and facilities."

1                   SECTION 6. A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
2 32A-1A-5 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

3                   "32A-1A-5. [NEW MATERIAL] AUTHORITY--ORGANIZATIONAL  
4 UNITS.--

5                   A. The authority consists of the:

6                   (1) office of the state superintendent, which  
7 includes the:

8                   (a) chief counsel and other attorneys;  
9                   (b) quality assurance bureau; and  
10                   (c) tribal affairs bureau;

11                   (2) administrative services division, which  
12 includes the:

13                   (a) budget bureau;  
14                   (b) human resources bureau;  
15                   (c) employee support unit; and  
16                   (d) information technology support

17 bureau;

18                   (3) child and family welfare division, which  
19 includes the:

20                   (a) protective services bureau; and  
21                   (b) foster care bureau; and  
22                   (4) juvenile justice division, which includes  
23 the:  
24                   (a) juvenile probation office; and  
25                   (b) corrections and rehabilitation

bureau.

B. With the approval of the board of regents, the state superintendent shall appoint "directors" of divisions. Directors shall be exempt from the Personnel Act.

C. The state superintendent shall appoint "chiefs" to be administrative heads of bureaus. The chief and all subsidiary employees shall be covered by the provisions of the Personnel Act.

D. The state superintendent may reorganize the organizational units of the authority and may transfer and merge functions between divisions in the interest of efficiency and economy. The state superintendent shall notify the legislature of any reorganization that changes the statutory divisions or bureaus or their functions.

E. Those organizational units of the authority and the officers of those units specified by law have all of the powers and duties enumerated in the specific laws involved; however, the carrying out of those powers and duties shall be subject to the direction and supervision of the state superintendent, who shall retain the authority and responsibility for the administration of any such laws.

F. The authority shall have access to all records, data and information of other state agencies that are not specifically held confidential by law."

**SECTION 7. A new section of the Children's Code, Section**

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1 32A-1A-6 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

2 "32A-1A-6. [NEW MATERIAL] STATE SUPERINTENDENT--GENERAL  
3 POWERS AND DUTIES.--

4 A. The state superintendent is responsible to the  
5 board of regents for the operation of the authority. It is the  
6 state superintendent's duty to manage all operations of the  
7 authority under the general direction of the board of regents  
8 and to administer and enforce the laws with which the state  
9 superintendent or the authority is charged.

10 B. To perform the state superintendent's duties,  
11 the state superintendent has every power expressly enumerated  
12 in the law, whether granted to the state superintendent, the  
13 authority or a division of the authority, except when a  
14 division is explicitly exempted from the state superintendent's  
15 power by statute. In accordance with these provisions, the  
16 state superintendent shall:

17 (1) except as otherwise provided in the Child  
18 Welfare Authority Act, exercise general supervisory and  
19 appointing power over authority employees, subject to  
20 applicable personnel laws and rules;

21 (2) delegate power to subordinates as the  
22 state superintendent deems necessary and appropriate, clearly  
23 delineating such delegated power and the limitations to that  
24 power;

25 (3) within the limitations of available

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appropriations and applicable laws, employ and fix the compensation of those persons necessary to discharge the state superintendent's powers and duties;

(4) take administrative action by issuing rules, orders and instructions, not inconsistent with law and approved by the board of regents, to assure implementation of and compliance with the provisions of law for which administration or execution the state superintendent is responsible and to enforce those rules, orders and instructions by appropriate administrative action in the courts;

(5) conduct research and studies that will improve the operation of the authority and the provision of services to the children and families of the state;

(6) provide courses of instruction and practical training for employees of the authority and other persons involved in the administration of programs with the objectives of improving the operations and efficiency of administration and of promoting comprehensive, coordinated, culturally sensitive services that address the whole child;

(7) prepare an annual budget for the authority for approval of the board of regents before submission to the state budget division of the department of finance and administration for final approval;

(8) provide cooperation at the request of other state agencies to:

(a) minimize or eliminate duplication of services and jurisdictional conflicts;

(b) coordinate activities and resolve problems of mutual concern; and

(c) unless otherwise provided by law, resolve by agreement the manner and extent to which the authority provides budgeting, recordkeeping and related clerical assistance to administratively attached agencies;

(9) develop and implement a language access plan to provide meaningful access to authority programs for persons of limited English proficiency; and

(10) conduct state and federal criminal history records checks on employees and other persons who will have unsupervised contact with minors who are clients or in the custody of the authority, including applicants for employment, internships or volunteering; prospective contractors; prospective foster or adoptive parents and other adults residing in the prospective foster or adoptive parent's household; and fictive kin with whom the authority is considering placing a child. Criminal history records checks shall be conducted as provided in the New Mexico Children's and Juvenile Facility and Program Criminal Records Screening Act.

C. The state superintendent may:

(1) apply for and receive, with board of regents approval, in the name of the authority, public or

private grants, gifts or donations available to the authority to carry out its programs, duties or services; and

(2) create advisory committees and appoint their members, which committees shall not remain in existence for longer than two years or beyond the period required to receive federal or private funds, whichever occurs later, without board of regents approval. Advisory members who are not eligible to be reimbursed for per diem and mileage from any state or local governmental source are entitled to reimbursement for those expenses pursuant to the Per Diem and Mileage Act but shall receive no other compensation, perquisite or allowance.

D. The authority may adopt, amend and repeal rules to carry out the provisions of the Child Welfare Authority Act and other laws for which the authority has responsibility; provided that the board of regents shall approve rules prior to promulgation. Rules shall be adopted and promulgated as provided in the State Rules Act."

**SECTION 8.** A new section of the Children's Code, Section 32A-1A-7 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

"32A-1A-7. [NEW MATERIAL] AUTHORITY--ADDITIONAL DUTIES--

In addition to other duties provided by law or assigned to the authority by statute or the board of regents, the authority shall:

A. develop priorities for authority services and

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resources based on state policy, national best-practice standards and local considerations and priorities;

B. strengthen collaboration and coordination in state and local services for children and families by integrating critical functions as appropriate, including service delivery, and contracting for services across divisions and related agencies;

C. develop and maintain a statewide database, including client tracking of services for children and families;

D. develop standards of service within the authority that focus on prevention, monitoring and outcomes;

E. analyze policies of other state agencies that affect children and families to encourage common contracting procedures, common service definitions and a uniform system of access;

F. adopt rules to control disposition and placement of children as provided in the Children's Code or other state or federal law, including rules to limit or prohibit the out-of-state placement of children, including those who have developmental disabilities or emotional, neurobiological or behavioral disorders, when in-state alternatives are available;

G. assume and implement responsibility for children's mental health and substance abuse services in the state, coordinating with the health care authority and the

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1 department of health;

2 H. assume and implement the lead responsibility  
3 among all state agencies for domestic violence services;

4 I. implement prevention and early intervention as  
5 an authority focus;

6 J. conduct biennial assessments of service gaps and  
7 needs and establish outcome measurements to address those  
8 service gaps and needs, including recommendations from the  
9 governor's children's cabinet and authority advisory  
10 committees;

11 K. ensure that behavioral health services provided,  
12 including mental health and substance abuse services for  
13 children and their families, shall be in compliance with  
14 requirements of the Behavioral Health Reform and Investment  
15 Act; and

16 L. develop and implement the families first  
17 strategic plan for the delivery of services and access to  
18 programs as required by the Families First Act."

19 SECTION 9. A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
20 32A-1A-8 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

21 "32A-1A-8. [NEW MATERIAL] QUALITY ASSURANCE BUREAU.--

22 A. To measure the quality of services provided by  
23 the authority or its agents, to facilitate satisfactory  
24 outcomes for children and families that receive services and to  
25 provide a continuing opportunity to improve service delivery,

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the quality assurance bureau shall:

(1) monitor the system for receiving and

resolving complaints and grievances;

(2) perform periodic investigations and

evaluations to assure compliance with the Children's Code and

other applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations;

(3) facilitate monitoring of indicators of the authority's performance to determine whether the authority is:

(a) providing children and families with individualized, needs-based service plans;

(b) providing services in a timely manner; and

(c) in compliance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations;

(4) identify any deficiencies and recommend corrective action to the state superintendent;

(5) have access to any records maintained by the authority, including confidential information; and

(6) promote continuous improvement of all authority processes serving children and families.

B. The quality assurance bureau shall contribute to and facilitate the publication of public reports assessing the performance of the authority. The reports shall not disclose the identity of natural persons mentioned in the report, including children or families that receive or are eligible for

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1 services or any authority employee."

2 SECTION 10. A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
3 32A-1A-9 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

4 "32A-1A-9. [NEW MATERIAL] CHILD WELFARE ADVISORY  
5 COMMITTEE CREATED--MEMBERS--PURPOSE.--

6 A. The "child welfare advisory committee" is  
7 created. The committee is composed of eleven members appointed  
8 by the board of regents. The board of regents shall appoint  
9 persons with demonstrated interest and involvement in child  
10 welfare, particularly those services and programs administered  
11 or funded by the authority. Members shall be appointed so as  
12 to provide adequate representation of ethnic groups and  
13 geographic areas of the state. At least two members shall be  
14 parents who are recipients of services provided by the  
15 authority; at least two members shall be youths between the  
16 ages of sixteen and twenty-one; and at least one member shall  
17 be a member of the youth alliance.

18 B. The members of the committee who are not  
19 eligible to be reimbursed for per diem and mileage from any  
20 state, local or federal governmental source are entitled to  
21 reimbursement for those expenses as provided in the Per Diem  
22 and Mileage Act and shall receive no other compensation,  
23 perquisite or allowance.

24 C. The committee shall assist in the development of  
25 policies and procedures for the authority."

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1                   SECTION 11. A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
2 32A-1A-10 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

3                   "32A-1A-10. [NEW MATERIAL] CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS--  
4 QUALIFICATIONS--ACTING AS PEACE OFFICERS.--

5                   A. Correctional officers of the authority shall:

6                   (1) be citizens of the United States;  
7                   (2) be eighteen years of age or older;  
8                   (3) possess a high school education or its  
9 equivalent;  
10                   (4) not have been convicted of a felony  
11 offense by a court of this state, any other state, the District  
12 of Columbia or a territory of the United States or the United  
13 States; and  
14                   (5) successfully pass a physical examination  
15 and an aptitude examination administered by the authority.

16                   B. Correctional officers of the authority who have  
17 completed an appropriate American correction association  
18 training course and who have at the particular time the  
19 principal duty to hold in custody or supervise any child  
20 accused or convicted of a delinquent act or criminal offense  
21 shall have the power of a peace officer with respect to arrests  
22 and enforcement of laws when:

23                   (1) on the premises of a facility of the  
24 authority or while transporting a child committed to or under  
25 the supervision of the authority;

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- (2) supervising a child committed to or under the supervision of the authority anywhere within the state; or
- (3) engaged in any effort to pursue or apprehend a child pursuant to Paragraph (1) or (2) of this subsection.

C. A correctional officer of the authority shall not be convicted or held liable for any act performed pursuant to this section if a peace officer could lawfully have performed the same act in the same circumstances.

D. Crimes against a correctional officer of the authority while in the lawful discharge of duties that confer peace officer status pursuant to this section shall be deemed the same crimes and shall bear the same penalties as crimes against a peace officer."

**SECTION 12.** A new section of the Children's Code, Section 32A-1A-11 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

"32A-1A-11. [NEW MATERIAL] PROHIBITION ON EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH SUBSTANTIATED ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT--PROHIBITION ON CERTAIN CONVICTED FELONS--DISCIPLINARY ACTION--CONFIDENTIALITY OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT RECORDS.--

A. An applicant, an officer, an employee, an intern or a volunteer of the authority having direct unsupervised contact with authority clients shall not have been the subject of a substantiated allegation of child abuse or neglect.

B. An officer, an employee, an intern or a

1       volunteer of the authority who has direct unsupervised contact  
2       with authority clients shall not have been convicted of a  
3       felony offense that is directly related to the job duties of  
4       the officer, employee, intern or volunteer by a court of this  
5       state; any other state, the District of Columbia or a territory  
6       of the United States; or the United States.

7                   C. An employee subject to the Personnel Act who has  
8       been the subject of a substantiated allegation of abuse or  
9       neglect, as investigated and determined by the authority, may  
10      be subject to increased supervision or disciplinary action  
11     under the Personnel Act. Upon appeal of a disciplinary action  
12     to the personnel board pursuant to this section, the personnel  
13     board shall defer to the record of the administrative hearing  
14     affirming a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect, if  
15     one exists, in determining whether the action taken by the  
16     authority was with just cause.

17                   D. An employee of the authority subject to  
18       dismissal pursuant to this section shall have no right to  
19       progressive discipline as a condition precedent to discipline  
20     under this section.

21                   E. In an appeal by an employee to the personnel  
22       board as provided by the Personnel Act, records that are  
23       otherwise confidential pursuant to the Abuse and Neglect Act  
24     shall be discoverable by the parties and admissible as to any  
25     relevant fact; provided that any identifying information

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1 related to the reporting party, any other party providing  
2 information and information the authority finds would be likely  
3 to endanger the life or safety of any person providing  
4 information to the authority may be redacted."

5 **SECTION 13.** A new section of the Children's Code, Section  
6 32A-1A-12 NMSA 1978, is enacted to read:

7 "32A-1A-12. [NEW MATERIAL] JUVENILE JUSTICE ADVISORY  
8 COMMITTEE--DUTIES--FEDERAL ACT REQUIREMENTS.--

9 A. Pursuant to the federal Juvenile Justice and  
10 Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, the "juvenile justice  
11 advisory committee" is created to advise the authority and to  
12 serve as the "supervisory board" pursuant to that act and any  
13 applicable federal regulations. The committee has explicit  
14 power to continue to fulfill its duties in administering the  
15 federal funds made available to the state, if such funding is  
16 to continue.

17 B. The committee has policymaking, planning and  
18 review powers over only the following functions pursuant to the  
19 federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of  
20 1974:

21 (1) in conjunction with the authority,  
22 approval of a comprehensive state plan and modifications  
23 reflecting statewide goals, objectives and priorities for the  
24 expenditure of federal funds received under that act;  
25 (2) approval or disapproval of applications or

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amendments submitted by eligible entities pursuant to that act;

(3) in conjunction with the authority,

assurance that fund accounting, auditing and evaluation of programs and projects funded pursuant to that act comply with federal requirements and state law;

(4) in conjunction with the authority, receive and review annual reports from adult jails and lockups regarding compliance with federal requirements that apply when a juvenile is temporarily held in an adult jail or lockup. The committee and the authority shall determine the format of the annual reports;

(5) assistance to the governor, the legislature and entities created or funded pursuant to that act in developing new or improved approaches, policies or legislation designed to improve juvenile justice in New Mexico; and

(6) provision of technical assistance by the authority to eligible entities pursuant to that act.

C. All budgetary, evaluation, monitoring and grants administration functions required pursuant to the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 shall be carried out by the authority."

**SECTION 14.** Section 30-22-11.1 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1993, Chapter 121, Section 1, as amended) is amended to read:

"30-22-11.1. ESCAPE FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE [CHILDREN,

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1 ~~YOUTH AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT~~] CHILD WELFARE AUTHORITY--ESCAPE  
2 FROM JUVENILE DETENTION.--Escape from the custody of the  
3 ~~[children, youth and families department]~~ child welfare  
4 authority consists of any person who has been adjudicated as a  
5 delinquent child and has been committed lawfully to the custody  
6 of ~~[a department]~~ an authority juvenile justice facility or who  
7 is alleged to be a delinquent child and has been lawfully  
8 detained in a juvenile detention facility:

9           A. escaping or attempting to escape from custody  
10 within the confines of ~~[a children, youth and families~~  
11 ~~department]~~ an authority juvenile justice facility; or

12           B. escaping or attempting to escape from another  
13 lawful place of custody or confinement that is not within the  
14 confines of ~~[a children, youth and families department]~~ an  
15 authority juvenile justice facility.

16           Any person who commits escape from the custody of a  
17 ~~[children, youth and families department]~~ child welfare  
18 authority juvenile justice facility is guilty of a  
19 misdemeanor."

20           SECTION 15. Section 30-22-11.2 NMSA 1978 (being Laws  
21 1994, Chapter 18, Section 1, as amended) is amended to read:

22           "30-22-11.2. AGGRAVATED ESCAPE FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE  
23 ~~[CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT]~~ CHILD WELFARE  
24 AUTHORITY--Aggravated escape from the custody of the  
25 ~~[children, youth and families department]~~ child welfare

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1       authority consists of any person who has been adjudicated as a  
2        delinquent child and has been committed lawfully to the custody  
3        of [a ~~department~~] an authority juvenile justice facility or who  
4        is alleged to be a delinquent child and has been lawfully  
5        detained in a juvenile detention facility:

6               A. escaping or attempting to escape from custody  
7        within the confines of [a ~~children, youth and families~~  
8        department] an authority juvenile justice facility and  
9        committing assault or battery on another person in the course  
10       of escaping or attempting to escape; or

11               B. escaping or attempting to escape from a lawful  
12        place of custody or confinement that is not within the confines  
13        of [a ~~children, youth and families department~~] an authority  
14        juvenile justice facility and committing assault or battery on  
15        another person in the course of escaping or attempting to  
16        escape.

17        Any person who commits aggravated escape from the custody  
18        of the [~~children, youth and families department~~] child welfare  
19       authority is guilty of a fourth degree felony."

20        SECTION 16. Section 32A-22-2 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 2005,  
21        Chapter 64, Section 2, as amended) is amended to read:

22               "32A-22-2. CHILDREN'S CABINET CREATED.--

23               A. The "children's cabinet" is created and is  
24        administratively attached to the office of the governor. The  
25        children's cabinet shall meet at least six times each year.

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B. The children's cabinet consists of:

- (1) the governor;
- (2) the lieutenant governor;
- (3) the [secretary of children, youth and families] state superintendent of child welfare;
- (4) the secretary of early childhood education and care;
- (5) the secretary of corrections;
- (6) the secretary of [human services] health care authority;
- (7) the secretary of workforce solutions;
- (8) the secretary of health;
- (9) the secretary of finance and administration;
- (10) the secretary of economic development;
- (11) the secretary of public safety;
- (12) the secretary of aging and long-term services;
- (13) the secretary of Indian affairs; and
- (14) the secretary of public education.

C. Each year, the governor shall select a person to serve as chair of the cabinet."

SECTION 17. Section 32A-26-11 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 2020, Chapter 52, Section 13) is amended to read:

"32A-26-11. ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS.--A young adult may

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1 appeal an adverse eligibility determination in accordance with  
2 rules promulgated by the [department] authority. The  
3 [department] authority shall provide the young adult, in the  
4 young adult's primary language, with clear and developmentally  
5 appropriate verbal and written information concerning the  
6 administrative appeal process."

7 **SECTION 18.** Section 40-7A-3 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1981,  
8 Chapter 171, Section 3, as amended) is amended to read:

9 "40-7A-3. DEFINITIONS.--As used in the Child Placement  
10 Agency Licensing Act:

11 A. "child" means [an individual] a person under the  
12 age of eighteen years;

13 B. "child placement agency" means [any individual,  
14 partnership, unincorporated association or corporation] a  
15 person undertaking to place a child in a home in this or any  
16 other state for the purpose of foster care or adoption of the  
17 child;

18 C. "department" or "authority" means the [children,  
19 youth and families department] child welfare authority;

20 D. "division" means the [protective services] child  
21 and family welfare division of the department;

22 E. "foster home" means a home maintained by an  
23 individual having the care and control, for periods exceeding  
24 twenty-four hours, of a child who is not placed for adoption;

25 F. "person" means [any] an individual or a

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1 partnership, an unincorporated association or a corporation;  
2 and

3 G. "state superintendent" or "secretary" means the  
4 [secretary of children, youth and families] state  
5 superintendent of child welfare."

6 SECTION 19. Section 40-10B-3 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 2001,  
7 Chapter 167, Section 3, as amended) is amended to read:

8 "40-10B-3. DEFINITIONS.--As used in the Kinship  
9 Guardianship Act:

10 A. "authority" or "department" means the child  
11 welfare authority;

12 [A.] B. "caregiver" means an adult, who is not a parent of a child, with whom a child resides and who provides that child with the care, maintenance and supervision consistent with the duties and responsibilities of a parent of the child;

13 [B.] C. "child" means an individual who is a minor;

14 [C. "department" means the children, youth and families department;]

15 D. "guardian" means a person appointed as a guardian by a court or Indian tribal authority;

16 [E. "Indian" means, whether an adult or child, a person who is:

17 (1) a member of an Indian tribe; or

18 (2) eligible for membership in an Indian

1       tribe;

2           F. "Indian child" means an Indian person, or a  
3       person whom there is reason to know is an Indian person, under  
4       eighteen years of age, who is neither:

5               (1) married; or

6               (2) emancipated;

7           G. "Indian child's tribe" means:

8               (1) the Indian tribe in which an Indian child  
9       is a member or eligible for membership; or

10               (2) in the case of an Indian child who is a  
11       member or eligible for membership in more than one tribe, the  
12       Indian tribe with which the Indian child has more significant  
13       contacts;

14           H. "Indian custodian" means an Indian who, pursuant  
15       to tribal law or custom or pursuant to state law:

16               (1) is an adult with legal custody of an  
17       Indian child; or

18               (2) has been transferred temporary physical  
19       care, custody and control by the parent of the Indian child;

20           I. "Indian tribe" means an Indian nation, tribe,  
21       pueblo or other band, organized group or community of Indians  
22       recognized as eligible for the services provided to Indians by  
23       the secretary of the interior because of their status as  
24       Indians, including an Alaska native village as defined in 43  
25       U.S.C. Section 1602(c) or a regional corporation as defined in

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1        ~~43 U.S.C. Section 1606. For the purposes of notification to~~  
2        ~~and communication with a tribe as required in the Indian Family~~  
3        ~~Protection Act, "Indian tribe" also includes those tribal~~  
4        ~~officials and staff who are responsible for child welfare and~~  
5        ~~social services matters;~~

6                ~~J.] E.~~ "kinship" means the relationship that exists  
7        between a child and a relative of the child, a godparent, a  
8        member of the child's tribe or clan or an adult with whom the  
9        child has a significant bond;

10               ~~[K.] F.~~ "parent" means a biological or adoptive  
11       parent of a child whose parental rights have not been  
12       terminated and includes an individual identified as a parent  
13       under the New Mexico Uniform Parentage Act; and

14               ~~[L.] G.~~ "relative" means ~~[an individual]~~ a person  
15       related to a child as a spouse, parent, stepparent, brother,  
16       sister, stepbrother, stepsister, half-brother, half-sister,  
17       uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, first cousin or any person denoted  
18       by the prefix "grand" or "great", or the spouse or former  
19       spouse of the persons specified."

20               **SECTION 20. TEMPORARY PROVISION--TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS,**  
21       **STATE TREASURY FUNDS, MONEY, PROPERTY, CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS**  
22       **AND STATUTORY REFERENCES--RULES OF DEPARTMENT ARE RULES OF THE**  
23       **AUTHORITY UNTIL AMENDED OR REPEALED.--**

24               A. On January 1, 2027, all functions,  
25       appropriations, money, records, furniture, equipment, supplies

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and other property of the children, youth and families department shall be transferred to the child welfare authority.

B. On January 1, 2027, all agreements and contractual obligations of the children, youth and families department, including tribal-state agreements, shall be obligations of the child welfare authority.

C. On January 1, 2027, all statutory references to the children, youth and families department, including tribal-state agreements, shall be deemed to be references to the child welfare authority.

D. The rules of the children, youth and families department shall be deemed to be rules of the child welfare authority until the authority amends or repeals the rules.

E. The governor's office, the department of finance and administration, the state personnel office and the children, youth and families department shall assist in a smooth transition from the children, youth and families department to the child welfare authority.

**SECTION 21. TEMPORARY PROVISION--APPOINTMENT OF BOARD OF REGENTS--APPOINTMENT OF STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF CHILD WELFARE.--**The governor shall appoint the board of regents of the child welfare authority by August 15, 2026, and the board shall familiarize itself with applicable statutory provisions, rules promulgated by the children, youth and families department, court cases, consent decrees, contracts and other

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1       matters pertaining to the department and assist in the  
2       transition from the children, youth and families department to  
3       the child welfare authority. The children, youth and families  
4       department shall assist the board and shall provide any  
5       information held by the department, including confidential  
6       information. The board shall maintain confidentiality. The  
7       board of regents may advertise for and interview candidates for  
8       the state superintendent of child welfare position for  
9       employment beginning January 1, 2027.

10       **SECTION 22. TEMPORARY PROVISION--RECOMPILATION--**  
11       **COMPILE INSTRUCTION.--**

12           A. Sections 9-2A-21 and 9-2A-22 NMSA 1978 (being  
13       Laws 2003, Chapter 324, Sections 3 and 4, as amended) are  
14       recompiled as Sections 32A-1A-15 and 32A-1A-16 NMSA 1978.

15           B. Sections 9-2A-24 and 9-2A-25 NMSA 1978 (being  
16       Laws 2010, Chapter 86, Section 1 and Laws 2025, Chapter 156,  
17       Section 2) are recompiled as Sections 32A-1A-17 and 32A-1A-18  
18       NMSA 1978.

19           C. The compilation shall reflect that Chapter 32A,  
20       Article 27 NMSA 1978 is an article of the Children's Code.

21       **SECTION 23. REPEAL.--**

22           A. Sections 9-2A-1 through 9-2A-20 and 9-2A-23 NMSA  
23       1978 (being Laws 1992, Chapter 57, Sections 1 through 4 and 6  
24       through 8, Laws 2005, Chapter 271, Section 2, Laws 2011,  
25       Chapter 163, Section 1, Laws 1992, Chapter 57, Sections 9

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1 through 12 and 14, Laws 2007, Chapter 351, Section 1, Laws  
2 1992, Chapter 57, Sections 15 and 16, Laws 1993, Chapter 120,  
3 Section 1, Laws 1997, Chapter 110, Section 1, Laws 2003,  
4 Chapter 324, Sections 1 and 2 and Laws 2007, Chapter 65,  
5 Section 2, as amended) are repealed.

6 B. Section 32A-19-1 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1993,  
7 Chapter 77, Section 228, as amended) is repealed.

8 **SECTION 24. EFFECTIVE DATE.--**

9 A. The effective date of the provisions of Section  
10 21 of this act is July 1, 2026.

11 B. The effective date of the provisions of Sections  
12 1 through 20, 22 and 23 of this act is January 1, 2027.

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