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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 235

SHORT TITLE: Sudden Unexpected Young Person Death Reports

SPONSOR: Lord/Dow/Duncan

LAST ORIGINAL
UPDATE: _____ **DATE:** 02/10/2026 **ANALYST:** Chilton

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT*

(dollars in thousands)

Agency/Program	FY26	FY27	FY28	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
		Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal	Recurring	General Fund

Parentheses () indicate expenditure decreases.

*Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

Sources of Information

LFC Files

Agency or Agencies Providing Analysis

University of New Mexico

Agency or Agencies That Were Asked for Analysis but did not Respond

Department of Health

Children, Youth and Families Department

SUMMARY

Synopsis of House Bill 235

House Bill 235 (HB235) would add a section to the Vital Statistics Act (Section 24-14 NMSA 1978), that would mandate certain actions to be taken in the event of certain sudden, unexpected deaths of young persons, defined as those under twenty years of age and reported to either the state or to the federal Sudden Death in the Young or Sudden Unexpected Infant Death registry. The autopsy would be required to include microscopic and toxicological analyses and review of the young person’s medical and immunization records. The specified individuals whose deaths would require autopsy and information gathering would include

- Sudden, unexpected deaths determined to be due to cardiac arrhythmia despite no previously diagnosed structural heart disease
- Sudden, unexpected deaths in persons younger than twenty years due to natural causes (i.e., not due to accident, gunshot wound, etc.)
- Sudden, unexpected death of an infant less than one year of age, from whatever cause.

The autopsy is to include a report on immunizations received by the decedent in the 90 days preceding death.

This bill does not contain an effective date and, as a result, would go into effect 90 days after the Legislature adjourns, which is May 20, 2026.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no appropriation in House Bill 235. However, the University of New Mexico (UNM) comments that

The Office of the Medical Investigator already conducts comprehensive investigations of sudden and/or unexpected child and youth deaths. By imposing mandatory data collection and reporting requirements that are not directly related to the determination of cause or manner of death, the bill would constrain OMI's professional discretion over workflow, documentation, and case closure and could increase administrative burdens without altering medical conclusions. HB 235 could increase workload and costs for the Office of the Medical Investigator. The bill specifies additional investigative elements including review of immunization records and expands reporting obligations. These requirements would increase the time and resources needed per case and add administrative and data-reporting duties. Absent additional resources, the expanded mandates could further strain existing staffing and laboratory capacity and contribute to investigation backlogs.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Sudden unexpected infant and child deaths are the source of enormous grief for families, regardless of the cause. Attempts to explain each non-preventable death might bring relief to affected families, and comprehensive study of many cases and their causes might lead to the prevention of similar deaths. Studies would have to be large enough to be statistically significant; in other words, they would need to make it doubtful that the same effects could have been caused by chance. This is often better done at a federal, rather than a state level, since the United States has approximately 174 times the population of the state of New Mexico.

The federal Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) and Sudden Death in the Young (SDY) Case Registry, according to [its website](#),

Serves as an important resource for families coping with the sudden loss of a child. This registry compiles information about young individuals who pass away unexpectedly. It includes infants, children, and young adults up to the age of 20. Death investigators face challenges in pinpointing the reasons behind sudden deaths in young people. Similarly, public health agencies struggle to accurately tally the occurrences of these tragic events. As a result, doctors, scientists, and grieving families lack a comprehensive understanding of how frequently these deaths occur and what factors contribute to them. The Case Registry aims to address these gaps. By systematically collecting and storing information related to sudden child deaths, it serves several crucial purposes:

- Counting and characterizing deaths
- Investigating causes and risk factors
- Preventing future tragedies

SUID and SDY registries are funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC).

According to UNM,

Mandatory review of immunization records by a medical examiner solely because a child or youth dies suddenly or unexpectedly appears unprecedented. State forensic death-investigation laws typically limit mandatory record review to information relevant to determining cause and manner of death. Immunization histories are maintained by DOH in New Mexico’s immunization information system, not the clinical charts routinely reviewed by OMI in investigating a death. Much of the information that would be abstracted or reported by OMI under HB 235 (medical history, circumstances of death, investigative findings) is already reviewed and synthesized by the New Mexico Child Fatality Review, using OMI reports as a primary source.

According to the New Mexico Case Fatality Review, New Mexico experienced nearly sixty accidental child deaths per year between 2011 and 2021, the majority of which were deemed preventable, including suicides, asphyxiation, poisonings, and weapon-related injuries. Many of the deaths represent the influence of adverse childhood experiences, also called social determinants of health, according to the [2023 report of the NM Child Fatality Review](#) (NMCFR). Social determinants of health include the following factors:



Figure 3. Social Determinants of Health

Regarding immunizations as a possible cause of sudden unexpected death, there are several federal programs watching for that and other adverse effects of immunization. The [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System](#) and the [Vaccine Safety Datalink](#) are very large nationwide systems collecting data regarding adverse effects, including unexpected deaths, occurring in proximity to immunizations. It is likely that, with their much larger populations under surveillance, events with as low an incidence as sudden deaths related to immunizations received would achieve statistical significance much faster than they would in a state-based program, making any connection of importance rather than just a matter of chance.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

Clinicians and families would continue to rely on data from large studies to prove or discard theories as to the origins of sudden, unexpected deaths in the young.

LAC/dw/ct