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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

BILL NUMBER: Senate Memorial 27

SHORT TITLE: Impact of Radiation Exposure

SPONSOR: Steinborn/Charley/Shendo/Pinto/Pope

LAST ORIGINAL
UPDATE: _____ **DATE:** 02/12/2026 **ANALYST:** Chilton

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT* (dollars in thousands)

Agency/Program	FY26	FY27	FY28	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
	No fiscal impact	No fiscal impact	No fiscal impact	No fiscal impact		

Parentheses () indicate expenditure decreases.
*Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

Sources of Information

LFC Files

Agency or Agencies Providing Analysis
Aging and Long-Term Services Department
Veterans Services Department

Agency or Agencies That Were Asked for Analysis but did not Respond
Indian Affairs Department
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

Agency or Agencies That Declined to Respond
Department of Health

Because of the short timeframe between the introduction of this bill and its first hearing, LFC has yet to receive analysis from state, education, or judicial agencies. This analysis could be updated if that analysis is received.

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Senate Memorial 27

Senate Memorial 27 (SM27) acknowledges the effect radiation exposure has had on New Mexico’s citizens as a result of their exposure to the Trinity Site nuclear test in 1946 or their exposure to radiation from uranium mining, largely in the northwest part of the state. The result has been increased cancer rates and other health problems now known to be a result of radiation exposure.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), as part of the July 2025 federal Big Beautiful Bill, allowed those with health problems caused by or exacerbated by radiation exposure and their surviving relatives to apply for federal payments of \$100 thousand in compensation. Applications for these payments must be filed no later than December 31, 2027.

The memorial notes that many of those who might be eligible for these payments are unaware of it, but that they could be assisted by such state resources as the New Mexico Tumor Residency and local and tribal organizations in knowing about and applying for RECA payments. The Senate, recognizing the contributions made by exposed individuals to the state's and the country's wellbeing, asks state agencies including the Department of Health, the Indian Affairs Department and the Aging and Long-Term Services Department to work with local and state-wide organizations and tribal governments to give outreach and education to possibly eligible persons, in culturally-appropriate forms, of their rights to compensation under the federal Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no appropriation in Senate Memorial 27. Both the Aging and Long-Term Services Department (ALTSD) and the Veterans Services Department (VSD) state that informing their clientele of the approaching deadline falls within their mission, and that they provide information about such matters at their already-existing local resource centers. Neither anticipates a fiscal impact on their departments.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

On July 16, 1945, the world's first atomic bomb was exploded at the Trinity Site northwest of Alamogordo, Otero County, New Mexico. At the time, little was known of the health effects of such a large release of radioactivity upwind from human settlements. That one-time exposure led to many adverse health effects, as did longer-term exposure to radiation for uranium miners and those working in uranium mills, largely in Cibola and McKinley Counties within New Mexico.

Subsequently, atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan as a means of ending the Second World War in the Pacific. Columbia University's K=1 Project looked at the health effects in those two cities, concluding that

Though exposure to radiation can cause acute, near-immediate effect by killing cells and directly damaging tissue, radiation can also have effects that happen on longer scale, such as cancer, by causing mutations in the DNA of living cells. Mutations can occur spontaneously, but mutagen-like radiation increases the likelihood of a mutation taking place. In theory, ionizing radiation can deposit molecular-bond-breaking energy, which can damage DNA, thus altering genes. In response, a cell will either repair the gene, die, or retain the mutation. In order for a mutation to cause cancer, it is believed that a series of mutations must accumulate in a given cell and its progeny. For this reason, it may be many years after exposure before an increase in the incident rate of cancer due to radiation becomes evident.

Among the long-term effects suffered by atomic bomb survivors, the deadliest was leukemia. An increase in leukemia appeared about two years after the attacks and peaked

around four to six years later. Children represent the population that was affected most severely. Attributable risk—the percent difference in the incidence rate of a condition between an exposed population and a comparable unexposed one — reveals how great an effect radiation had on leukemia incidence.

The Radiation Effects Research Foundation estimates the attributable risk of leukemia to be 46% for bomb victims. For all other cancers, incidence increase did not appear until around ten years after the attacks.

The Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium has published an extensive summary of what is known of the health consequences of exposure to radiation and radioactive fallout, especially regarding those living in the four counties downwind of the Trinity Test: Otero, Lincoln, Sierra and Socorro. According to this report, “In southern New Mexico, four counties have been primarily affected, as evidenced by high rates of cancer, including rare cancers, and other illnesses, such as thyroid disease. Individuals who were at higher risk for developing cancer due to radioactive fallout include, but are not limited to: persons living within 150 miles of the Trinity test site on July 16, 1945; persons who ate game and/or livestock that were exposed to radioactive fallout from the test; persons who drank milk that came from livestock (cows and goats) that were exposed to radioactive fallout; persons who drank water gathered in cisterns that had been poisoned by radioactive fallout; persons who ate food grown in soil that was exposed to radioactive fallout; and descendants of persons from the previous categories whose genetic composition was altered through hereditary DNA changes and/or by consuming or otherwise being exposed to radioactive fallout.”

McKinley County residents living near uranium mines and mills have experienced heavy radiation doses, especially those nearby during a massive spill of mill tailings in 1979. The New Mexico Environment Department estimates that living for one year at one of the mines in McKinley County would result in a radiation dose the equivalent of thirteen years of typical exposure. The result would be increased cancer and other “downwind” results, decreased quality of life and increased medical costs, some of which might be ameliorated by a federal payment through the federal Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 28 Chapter I Part 79, those eligible to claim radiation-exposure related illnesses are those with leukemia, lung cancer or “certain non-malignant respiratory diseases,” renal cancer or chronic kidney disease.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Training on RECA for staff at resource centers throughout the state, but especially in the affected areas (McKinley, Sierra, Otero, Lincoln and Socorro Counties) would be necessary. ALTSD states that “Given ALTSD’s existing relationships with Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), senior centers, and tribal aging programs throughout the state, the department has administrative infrastructure that could be leveraged, but it would require some adaptation.”

VSD states that it will need to research the number of veterans who might qualify for RECA payments.