

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SB 35

52nd Legislature, 1st Session, 2015

Tracking Number: .197492.1

Short Title: Dental Students in WICHE Program

Sponsor(s): Senator Michael Padilla

Analyst: James Ball

Date: January 27, 2015

Bill Summary:

SB 35 makes an appropriation to increase the number of students who may participate in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) dental school program.

Fiscal Impact:

\$400,000 is appropriated to the Higher Education Department (HED) from the General Fund for expenditure in FY 16. Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund

The fiscal impact report (FIR) by the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) of an identical bill in 2014 states that, for FY 14, the WICHE program received \$2.1 million in General Fund appropriations, including \$1.0 million for 48 dental school scholarships, with six designated for new students and 42 for continuing students.

The 2014 FIR further states that, for FY 15, both the Executive and the LFC recommended increasing funding for the WICHE dental school scholarship program sufficient to increase the student cohort for the academic year 2014-2015 by an estimated six scholarships, for a total of 12 new students.

According to the LFC post-session fiscal review from the 2014 legislative session, the FY 15 operating budget for the WICHE dental program is \$1,149,800.

Substantive Issues:

The Department of Health (DOH) analysis of SB 35 notes that New Mexico is experiencing a dental health care professional shortage. All but one of New Mexico counties are federally designated as Health Professions Shortage Areas or Medically Underserved Areas or Populations. New Mexico ranks 49th of 50 states per capita for dentists. Access to dental health care and preventive services is challenging in many communities throughout the state.

Background:

Since 1952, New Mexico has been a member of WICHE, a 16-member commission working to boost access to higher education for students in the West. In the decades since New Mexico joined the commission, the state has benefitted in a number of ways:

- thousands of students from New Mexico have attended undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in other western states through WICHE's Student Exchange Program;
- New Mexico has received funding to participate in numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas; and
- New Mexico has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

In addition, state participation in this program allows New Mexico students to enroll at out-of-state graduate or professional dental education programs not offered in New Mexico public universities and receive reduced tuition fees.

Committee Referrals:

SEC/SFC

Related Bills:

SB 6, *Dental Therapist Licensure & Regulation*

SB 80, *UNM Dental Science Program*

SB 155, *Medical, Dental & Behavioral Health Recruits*