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## FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 2/9/18

SPONSOR Stewart LAST UPDATED \_\_\_\_\_ HB \_\_\_\_\_

SHORT TITLE Overweight Backpack Health Risks SM 101

ANALYST Chilton

### ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY18	FY19	FY20	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
<b>Total</b>	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis ( ) Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

**DUPLICATES** Senate Joint Memorial 4

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Regarding identical SJM 4 Received From  
Children Youth and Families Department (CYFD)  
Public Education Department (PED)

No Response Received from  
Department of Health (DOH)

### SUMMARY

#### Synopsis of Memorial

Senate Memorial 101 begins by enumerating the dangers of children, whose muscles and ligaments are not fully developed, carrying heavy backpacks. It proposes that schools be “requested” to address these dangers in the following ways:

- 1) Education of students, parents, teachers, and school administrators on the dangers of overloaded backpacks;
- 2) Working with parent-teacher associations to provide homework solutions that do not require heavy textbooks and materials to be taken home each day;
- 3) Restricting the weight of children’s backpacks to no more than 10 percent of a child’s body weight, and making requirements as to the characteristics of the backpacks that would mitigate the weight placed in them;
- 4) Working to move toward use of e-textbooks, handbooks and workbooks instead of large books;
- 5) Considering weighing students’ backpacks and entering the results into a graph that

would be reviewed by students and by school personnel to allow them to consider the need to adopt further measures to reduce backpack weight.

The Public Education Department accepts responsibility for disseminating the information on the dangers of overweight backpacks to school administrators, teachers, parents and students, and to distributing the information to parent-teacher associations, local superintendents and charter school head administrators.

## **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS**

CYFD indicates no significant impact on that agency; presumably the task of formulating informational material on the dangers of overweight backpacks would fall to either PED or DOH, or both, and there would be a minimal cost to developing that material. As the language in the memorial asks that schools “consider”, “work toward,” and “educate”, it does not appear that enforcement of these considerations is anticipated.

PED indicates that it would not need additional funding to carry out the duties requested of the department through the memorial. It notes that any additional expenses for e-textbooks would be borne by school districts, but that the price for e-textbooks average slightly less than the same textbooks in print form, and that many publishers grant the right to use their e-textbooks if corresponding copies of the print textbooks have already been purchased.

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## **SIGNIFICANT ISSUES**

A search of the medical literature using the search terms “backpack, back pain” in the National Library of Medicine’s Pubmed information site lists 98 medical articles on the subject since 1996. All or almost all appear to indicate that the carrying of a heavy backpack appears to increase the likelihood of back pain, and perhaps more permanent problems, such as scoliosis (spine curvature). For example, in an American Journal of Public Health article entitled “Backpack = back pain”, Guyer states “Some back injuries brought on by school backpacks may linger throughout a person’s life, leaving the individual especially vulnerable to new back problems engendered by other mechanical insults—bad posture, high-heeled shoes, improper lifting—and diseases and accidents.”

Although a majority of children live in households with Internet access, some do not; it is not clear from the memorial how children without Internet access would benefit from the use of e-textbooks. A 2012 study prepared for the New Mexico Department of Information Technology by the University of New Mexico’s Bureau of Business and Economic Research stated that 72 percent of New Mexico families at that time had home internet access, with significant differences among socio-economic and racial groups.

A proposal to limit the weight of backpacks to no more than 10 percent of a child’s body weight would be difficult to implement, given the marked difference in children’s weight even at the same age. For example, 10 percent of 12 year old boys weigh less than 60 pounds, and 10 percent weigh more than 120 pounds.

**WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL**

Education about the dangers of overweight backpacks might not be disseminated to the schools or passed on to their students or the students' parents.

LAC/sb/al/jle