SENATE MEMORIAL 57

50TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2011

INTRODUCED BY

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A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE INTERIM LEGISLATIVE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
COMMITTEE TO ESTABLISH A SUBCOMMITTEE TO IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES
AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES TO
DEVELOP AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND
SERVICES.

WHEREAS, most people would agree that in order for a
community to do well, its children must do well; and

WHEREAS, although many children in New Mexico are doing
well, many others are struggling, having fallen behind during
their early childhood years; and

WHEREAS, children who live in poverty, or who live in
areas lacking resources and opportunities, often lag behind
other children and have a difficult time catching up; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2010 kids count data book, about
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one-fourth of all New Mexicans live in poverty, and close to
one-half of their children live in extreme poverty; and

WHEREAS, New Mexico is home to twenty-two tribes,
including nineteen pueblos, the Navajo Nation and two Apache
tribes, and to many Native Americans who live off-reservation
throughout the state; and

WHEREAS, twelve percent of all children in New Mexico
between the ages of birth and five years old are Native
American, and many of them live in isolated, rural areas of the
state; and

WHEREAS, these children are among those most in need of
high-quality, comprehensive, early childhood care and education
to ensure their readiness for kindergarten through grade
twelve; and

WHEREAS, according to a December 2009 report of the
children, youth and families department titled "New Mexico's
Early Learning Systems", the sovereign, self-governing pueblos,
tribes and nations of New Mexico vary considerably from one
another in language, government, judicial structure, custom and
traditions; and

WHEREAS, a disproportionate percentage of Native American
children face the challenges of poverty and school failure; and

WHEREAS, according to the Indian education status report
for 2006-2007 prepared by the public education department, only
thirty-eight percent of Indian children are proficient in
reading and only twenty-seven percent are proficient in math in third grade; and

WHEREAS, the status report also reveals that, despite efforts to decrease the number of student dropouts, the Native American drop-out rate increased over a three-year period for grades seven and eight; and

WHEREAS, Native American children who face disadvantages in early childhood and who live in poverty experience a disproportionate level of health problems, including a higher incidence of infant mortality, obesity, substance abuse and suicide and a shorter life span than children in better-supported areas of the state; and

WHEREAS, a widely shared objective is to ensure that every child in New Mexico has an equal opportunity for success in school and has access to an integrated and high-quality system of early learning experiences; and

WHEREAS, New Mexico has a number of early childhood programs and policies to support this objective, including home visiting programs; child care assistance; the teacher education and compensation helps (T.E.A.C.H.) early childhood program; pre-kindergarten, kindergarten plus and K-3 plus programs; the family, infant and toddler program; and generous medicaid and children's health insurance programs known as New MexiKids; and

WHEREAS, despite the existence of these valuable programs, and despite attempts to coordinate efforts through the
establishment of Native American advisory committees, Native
American liaison positions and other approaches, only pockets
of success have been achieved among New Mexico's Native
American populations; and

WHEREAS, although laudable, efforts to extend early
childhood programs and services to the pueblos, tribes and
nations of New Mexico have not resulted in a reliable and
comprehensive system of early programs and services; and

WHEREAS, there has been little attention paid, outside of
the pueblos, tribes and nations themselves, to develop the
necessary infrastructure to support such a comprehensive system
of early childhood programs and services;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE
OF NEW MEXICO that the interim legislative health and human
services committee be requested to establish a subcommittee to
identify opportunities for Native American communities to
develop an infrastructure of early childhood programs and
services; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the subcommittee seek
testimony and recommendations from agencies and other entities
in New Mexico that have been engaged in addressing this
identified need, including the children, youth and families
department, the children's cabinet, the Indian affairs
department, the department of health's office of school and
adolescent health, the public education department, New Mexico
voices for children, the early childhood action network and
others with expertise in early childhood development and
education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the subcommittee request
testimony regarding available federal and grant funding that
could be obtained to develop an infrastructure of early
childhood programs and services for Native Americans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
transmitted to the chair of the interim legislative health and
human services committee.

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