

\$200,000 Appropriation for Interim Study of Mental Health Legislative Council Decision Points

Threshold question

What should be done with the \$200,000 appropriated to the Legislative Services Division for an "interim study of mental health"?

Background

A study resolution initially related to the appropriation, SJR 27 (Weinberg), died in House Appropriations during the regular session. The resolution contained broad conceptual language requesting a study "to evaluate the public mental health services available to Montanans in order to transform those services into a comprehensive, statewide public mental health system...", which would include an "integrated continuum" of services, be focused on "measurable treatment outcomes", and use "evidence-based practices". The resolution's language also suggested the evaluation of all public funding sources to "determine how the state can maximize federal resources and funding opportunities". Further language suggested the money be used in "contracting for research and analysis of federal funding mechanisms and other matters that will provide information necessary for the completion of the study". SJR 27 died in the regular session; however, the \$200,000 was included in HB 2 in the special session as an appropriation item: "interim study of mental health".

Analysis

Much more work needs to be done to refine and focus study objectives. The history of how and why the \$200,000 was appropriated indicates a desire for a statewide strategic plan for publically-funded mental health services in Montana and a plan for state spending that leverages federal funds to the extent possible. This is well beyond the scope of typical interim committee work and could likely involve a second interim. The Legislative Council has authority to assign an issue to an appropriate interim committee or statutorily created committee if a question of statewide importance arises when the legislature is not in session and a legislative interim committee has not been assigned (5-11-105, MCA).

Basic options

- A. Develop an RFP and contract for a full-blown "outside" study*
- B. Allocate the money for more focused "in-house" use (by LJIC, CFHHS, or both) in the context of current studies and assigned interim duties*, i.e. speakers, consultants, technical assistance, etc.
- C. Don't use the money, allow it to revert back to the General Fund

* NOTE: If Option A or Option B is selected, there are second-tier decisions by the Legislative Council to be made regarding oversight (LC, CFHHS, LJIC) to approve a RFP and a timetable, to select and award the contract, to receive progress reports, and to accept the final work product.

Discussion of pros and cons

Option A: Contract for an outside study

Pros: outside consultants/researchers with specific knowledge of public mental health systems could develop information that may be useful in various contexts; outside "objective" recommendations could further the goal of statewide strategic plan

Cons: requires a lot of "in-house" work and collaboration with executive branch before a sufficient RFP could be drafted and issued, proposals evaluated, and a contract awarded; an outside study may not provide results in a timeline that works with the interim schedule; diverts legislative staff from their regular responsibilities

Option B: Allocate for use in the context of an "in-house" studies/duties

Pros: allows the Legislative Council, LJIC, and/or CFHHS to pick and choose how to spend the money within the context of current studies and duties; may provide information that is more immediately usable and specific; CFHHS interim committee already has oversight of DPHHS and the LJIC has been assigned the following studies that relate to mental health:

- SJR 24 - Alternative sentencing/treatment courts
- HJR 26 - Mental health in adult and juvenile corrections
- HJR 50 - Court-ordered psychiatric exams and costs

Cons: would divert legislative staff and committee resources from other interim studies and responsibilities; narrows focus from a "big picture" study to work with more narrow focus; would not be likely to make use of the full \$200,000

Option C: Don't conduct the study, allow the appropriation to revert back to the GF

Pros: does not add to current workload of legislative staff; avoids possibility of diverting attention from other study issues; avoids risk of "just another study gathering dust on the shelf";

Cons: ignores Legislative intent of funding a mental health study; potential opportunities missed