

HOUSE BILL NO. 284

INTRODUCED BY C. HINKLE, L. SCHUBERT, K. ZOLNIKOV, B. MITCHELL, K. SEEKINS-CROWE

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT CREATING A MONTANA UNIVERSITY INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE; PROVIDING DUTIES AND MEMBERS; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; PROVIDING FOR CONTINGENT VOIDNESS; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

WHEREAS, President Donald Trump recently issued an executive order directing federal agencies to freeze spending related to certain grants and loans; and

WHEREAS, in response to directions from the White House, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will implement a 15% cap on overhead costs related to grant-funded research, including costs related to equipment, facilities, and support staff; and

WHEREAS, in Montana, the NIH grant funding supports research on opioid addiction, traumatic brain injuries, physical and mental health in indigenous communities, and other important topics to Montanans; and

WHEREAS, the 15% cap could shift approximately \$5 million in research costs to the state; and

WHEREAS, the cap on indirect costs could affect the use of lab space and equipment, graduate students who conduct research as part of their studies, and other staff whose reporting, budgeting, and grant writing work supports research; and

WHEREAS, the biggest driver of enrollment growth at the University of Montana has been in the health department; and

WHEREAS, at Montana State University, undergraduate and graduate students will be affected by the cap as well as the private companies who contract with the university for research; and

WHEREAS, private industries rely on the universities for research that would otherwise be outside the reach of those businesses, including tests in high-end facilities that have been established at the universities.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

NEW SECTION. **Section 1. Montana university system investigation committee -- membership -**

1 - **meetings.** (1) (a) There is a committee to investigate:

2 (i) civil rights violations and acts of censorship committed by the Montana university system. The
3 committee shall gather testimony on the record from Montana students on any civil rights violations or acts of
4 censorship that the students have experienced or witnessed at Montana public universities and colleges and
5 make findings and recommendations for state and federal officials.

6 (ii) the anticipated effects and impacts of recent federal spending freezes on research being
7 conducted on Montana university system campuses, including but not limited to enrollment, budgets, staff and
8 faculty, secondary effects on Montana businesses that rely on the university system, and the resulting impacts
9 on Montana's economy.

10 (b) The committee shall report in physical and electronic copy all findings and recommendations to
11 the president of the United States, the United States department of justice, the United States department of
12 education, the leadership of both houses of the United States congress, all members of the Montana
13 congressional delegation, the governor of Montana, the Montana department of justice, the office of public
14 instruction, the speaker of the Montana house of representatives, and the president of the Montana senate.

15 (2) The committee consists of six legislators appointed as follows:

16 (a) three members of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house. One of
17 the members must be a member of the minority party and be appointed after consultation with the minority
18 leader.

19 (b) three members of the senate appointed by the committee on committees. One of the members
20 must be a member of the minority party.

21 (3) The appointments must be made within 30 days of [the effective date of this act]. A vacancy on
22 the committee must be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

23 (4) The committee shall elect a presiding officer and a vice presiding officer.

24 (5) A committee member is entitled to salary and expenses as provided in 5-2-302.

25 (6) The committee may not meet more than three times and shall complete its work by September
26 15, 2026.

27 (7) The legislative services division shall provide staff assistance to the committee.