

'IT'S HARD TO BE OPTIMISTIC'

Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce disappointed with special session results

BY MEGAN GLEASON
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Like Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce had hoped for substantial debate on public safety legislation in last week's special session.

It quickly became apparent Thursday that wouldn't happen, the Chamber said after the Legislature adjourned the same day after only passing one bill.

Lawmakers in five hours passed a \$103 million appropriations bill, with \$100 million for disaster relief efforts and \$3 million for judiciary pilot programs focused on assisted outpatient treatment and competency diversion.

The Chamber went into the special session unanimously endorsing all of the governor's public safety proposals, including definitions impacting civil commitment, additional criminal competency considerations in court and criminalizing occupancy on most

medians.

Republicans introduced a slew of bills in the Senate, including the governor's priorities.

None of those measures passed. None even made it to committee.

In a statement after the Legislature adjourned, Lujan Grisham expressed her disappointment in policymakers' inability "to adopt common-sense legislation to make New Mexicans safer." The governor said she walked through a neighborhood earlier that day "ravaged by dangerous activity and everyday petty crime."

"Families can't walk in the park, employees are scared to go to work, and businesses are shuttering," she said. "For the Legislature to ignore these stark realities is nothing less than a dereliction of duty."

The governor on Friday hadn't ruled out calling another special session.

Chamber Board Chairman Del Esparza and President and CEO Terri Cole in a joint statement thanked Lujan Grisham for her work toward "making our state safer for our businesses and families."

"We appreciate your recognition of the crisis and your pledge to do something



EDDIE MOORE / JOURNAL

Terri Cole, left, president of the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, talks with New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham during a Feb. 27 lunch in Albuquerque. She is disappointed along with the governor on the results of the special session.

about it," they said. "We look forward to your next effort, because we know you won't quit."

The Chamber in its email wrap-up said "it's hard to be optimistic about positive legislative action to fight crime" but it's committed to continue advocating for a safer New Mexico.

"And, as we've said many times before,

anything can happen," the email stated.

As the 60-day session set for 2025 looms, Democratic lawmakers have said they'll continue focusing on complex crime issues in the interim so they can address the matters in January. The next interim Courts, Corrections and Justice Committee meeting is Aug. 12-14 in Albuquerque.

SMALL PRINT

State launches nontraditional communication registry for vehicles

Law enforcement has to check registry when pulling people over

BY MEGAN GLEASON
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Liz Thomson's adult son has autism, is half African American and is 6'7". His safety if pulled over at a traffic stop is always on her mind.

Being part of the autism community, Thomson said, she's heard many stories about situations that escalate to physical violence because officers are unaware that a driver or passenger doesn't communicate in a traditional manner.

That's why the Albuquerque representative sponsored a bill last year to create a registry for people who communicate untraditionally. Law enforcement has to check the registry

before they talk to someone they've pulled over.

The legislation went into effect this month.

"I wanted to protect the folks like my son, people who are deaf, people who may have brain injury, the whole gamut of things," Thomson said.

Anyone with autism spectrum disorder, deafness, brain injury, intellectual disability, behavioral health disorder, dementia or seizure disorder can now request the New Mexico Motor Vehicle Division add their vehicle to the nontraditional communication registry.

A licensed health practitioner must



Elizabeth
"Liz"
Thomson

also sign the form.

House Bill 40 from the 2023 legislative session requires law enforcement check the registry before approaching the driver of a vehicle.

Thomson said protecting law enforcement in addition to the people who communicate non-traditionally is part of the goal.

"I can't imagine what it would feel like to know that you pulled your weapon and killed someone that didn't understand what you were saying," she said. "They weren't defying you; they just didn't understand, didn't hear."

Thomson said she's been working to pass the bill for around a decade. It was originally set to go into effect in January 2024, but lawmakers pushed the date back so the Taxation and Revenue Department would have more time to set up the

database.

"I'm hoping to make things better for both the disability community and the law enforcement community," Thomson said.

The paperwork to sign up to be part of the registry can be found online at www.mvd.newmexico.gov/forms/ under the vehicle forms tab. The title of the file is Nontraditional Communication Registry Enrollment, also known as MVD form 10126.

Forms should be returned in person at an MVD field office.

What policies or laws do you want to see written about in Business Outlook? Send an email to mgleason@abqjournal.com.

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