



For the Week Ending February 20, 2009

A joint session of the Vermont legislature to hear a report from the chief justice of the state supreme court and to elect a sergeant-at-arms, adjutant general, and legislative representatives to the University of Vermont consumed a full day of legislative time last week. The House also devoted significant floor time last week to debate an annual bill to adjust the state's budget at mid fiscal year and a bill to address sex crimes.

Also last week, the House Health Care Committee heard additional testimony over a controversial provision contained in a workers compensation bill (H.162) that would prevent health insurers from recouping payments made to health care providers for claims that turn out to be workers compensation claims. The proposal would require the health insurers to recover the money from workers comp carriers instead.

After hearing a long list of reasons why this provision would add costs to health care from opponents of the provision, representatives of the task force that proposed the bill told the committee that they would agree to remove the provision from the bill. The committee took no immediate action on the provision or the bill and will return to the topic after Town Meeting break. The committee will spend this week considering proposed cuts to the FY2010 budget recommendations for health care and report its findings to the Appropriations Committee.

Upon its return from a scheduled two-week break beginning the week of Town Meeting Day, the Health Care Committee will turn its attention toward developing a committee bill that is likely to contain a variety of recommendations. Among the initiatives that may be included are changes to Catamount Health to make it more sustainable, a recommendation that health insurance contracts be for multiple years in order to provide incentives to employers and health plans to endorse preventive care benefits and engage in wellness efforts, and a series of Vermont Medical Society proposals included in H.220 to standardize and regulate contracts with insurers.

The Senate Finance Committee last week completed work on a bill (S.48) to regulate pharmaceutical manufacturer marketing interactions with prescribers. The bill would make it unlawful for pharmaceutical manufacturers to offer or give any gift to a health care professional except for a limited list of circumstances, including samples for distribution to patients, peer-reviewed academic or scientific articles or journals, and rebates and discounts as a part of normal business. The full Senate will consider the bill this week.

The Senate Health and Welfare Committee spent most of last week gathering information on the Medicaid budget and financial position. This week, the committee will meet jointly with House Health Care on Tuesday to hear from legislative consultant Ken Thorpe about federal health reform initiatives. The committee will also continue its ongoing examination of solutions to resolve cost issues in health care. Committee sessions this week will cover shared decision-making in health care, regional variations in utilization, and Vermont program for Quality in Health Care's (VPQHC) role working with BISHCA.

New Bill of Interest:

H.233 Introduced by Representatives Hube of Londonderry and Poirier of Barre City
This bill proposes to split Catamount Health into two separate plans. One plan would implement sliding-scale deductibles based on income. The second plan would utilize health savings accounts and would offer a choice of two different deductibles for individuals and families, regardless of income. The health savings accounts would not include premium assistance.

H.242 Introduced by Representative Martin of Springfield and others
This bill proposes to require dental insurers to reimburse dentists the same proportional amount for a composite filling as for a mercury amalgam filling.

H.267 Introduced by Representative Rodgers of Glover
This bill proposes to merge the individual and small group health insurance markets into a single risk pool.

H.270 Introduced by Representatives Copeland-Hanzas of Bradford and Wheeler of Derby
This bill proposes to minimize the costs of marketing prescription drugs by eliminating most gifts, increasing the substitution of generic drugs for brand-name drugs, and study the feasibility of reducing health care costs in corrections by utilizing federally qualified health care centers.

H.272 Introduced by Representative Wizowaty of Burlington and others
This bill proposes to establish a no-fault compensation system for medical injury claims.

If you are interested in this week's Legislative Committee Meeting schedules, agendas, and a listing of other meetings and activities, please visit the Vermont Legislature's website at <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/schedule/schedule2.cfm> Committee meetings are normally updated daily, and are subject to change without notice. If you plan on attending, you may want to call ahead to verify the agenda.

For more information on legislative proposals, visit the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont website at www.bcbsvt.com or call Leigh Tofferi at (802) 223-6131 or Kathy Parry at (802) 371-3205. If you wish to discontinue receiving these updates or know of anyone else who would like to receive it, please call Kathy Parry or send an e-mail to parryk@bcbsvt.com