

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SJM 8006

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care & Wellness

Brief Description: Requesting that the federal government create a universal health care program.

Sponsors: Senators Hasegawa, Cleveland, Billig, Kuderer, Lovelett, Nguyen, Shewmake, Stanford, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care & Wellness: 3/24/23, 3/28/23 [DP].

Brief Summary of Joint Memorial

- Requests the federal government to either create a universal health care program or, absent federal action, partner with the state to implement a single-payer health system.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Riccelli, Chair; Bateman, Vice Chair; Bronoske, Davis, Macri, Orwall, Simmons, Stonier, Thai and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Barnard, Graham, Harris, Maycumber and Mosbrucker.

Staff: Ingrid Lewis (786-7293).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Universal Health Care.

In 2019 the Legislature directed the Health Care Authority (HCA) to convene a Universal Health Care Work Group (Work Group) to make recommendations to the Legislature related to the creation, implementation, maintenance, and funding of a universal health care system that is sustainable and affordable to all Washington residents. The Work Group considered three models for realizing universal health care and provided analysis of each with respect to expected costs, access, equity, governance, quality, administration, affordability, and feasibility.

In 2021 the Legislature further directed the HCA to convene a Universal Health Care Commission (Commission) to make the health care system more accessible by increasing access to quality, affordable health care. The role of the Commission is to prepare the state for the creation of a health care system that provides coverage and access for all Washington residents through a unified financing system, once the federal government approves the new health care system.

The State-Based Universal Health Care Act of 2021.

House Resolution 3775, introduced in the 117th Congress, establishes the option for states, or groups of states, to apply to waive certain federal health insurance requirements and provide residents with health insurance benefits plans through a state-administered program. Such programs must cover 95 percent of the residents in the state within five years and plan benefits must be at least as comprehensive and affordable as the coverage under the equivalent federal program.

State programs are supported with funds from the federal programs the state programs replace, which may include Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Federal Employee Health Benefits program, certain federal tax credits, and premium-assistance funds.

Summary of Bill:

Several findings are made in this memorial related to the health care system and universal health care:

- that costs in the current health care system continue to rise along with certain negative health outcomes;
- that the current system of fragmented private health insurance is the main obstacle to expanding access to health care because it promotes waste and inefficiency;
- that the current system most harms marginalized communities, and creating a system of universal access, free point-of-service care and standardized reimbursement would make the health care system more equitable and less expensive;
- that replacing the current system with a fair system will promote efficiency, better

- health, and good public policy;
- that a national universal health care program is the most efficient and cost-effective means of providing access to health care and would eliminate hardships experienced by many Americans due to either lack of timely access to health care or debt incurred, or both;
 - that a single-payer health plan in the state would replace the current multi-payer system;
 - that a single-payer health plan would establish a state agency to finance all medically necessary health care with substantial savings;
 - that a single-payer health plan would reduce financial barriers to access care and inadequate coverage; and
 - that workers and businesses would benefit from a single-payer health plan by lowering the cost of health care, removing the burden of unfunded and inadequate coverage, and allowing businesses to be more competitive in the markets.

The Legislature requests the federal government to either create a universal health care program or, absent federal action, partner with the state to implement a single-payer health system. To allow the state to implement a single-payer health system, Congress could pass House Resolution 3775 or grant the state the appropriate waivers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Providing health care coverage for Washington residents has been a priority for decades. Many Washingtonians have trouble paying for health care and even more worry about paying for care in the future. Task forces and commissions have made recommendations that would position the state for successful implementation of a universal health care program. Currently, the main obstacle is the federal government. The state cannot succeed without additional support from the federal government. This bill is a compromise that gives Congress three options: (1) create a universal program; (2) pass House Resolution 3775, which would allow states to create their own universal health care programs; or (3) grant Washington the appropriate waivers.

Fundamental changes need to be made to the current health care system. Patients are afraid of surprise medical bills and denials of health care requests. Insurance companies make mistakes with their rules and procedures. There is a lack of infrastructure and an insufficient number of providers. There is not enough staff or hospital space to care for residents. Predatory health insurance companies are no longer needed. Their administrators keep getting richer while health outcomes get worse. It is time to stop capitalizing on people's suffering. It is imperative to give people access to health care in order to prevent

health issues from getting worse.

(Opposed) Washingtonians already have access to quality health care and skilled doctors. Universal health care is expensive, and taxes would have to be raised on low-income populations to fund it. In addition, specialty care would be compromised. In countries that have a universal health care system, wait times for services are lengthy. Their universal health care systems have failed.

The bill has good intentions, but the wrong message is being sent. Access and affordability do not always go together. Citizens, not the government, are the best advocates for their care.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Bob Hasegawa, prime sponsor; David Loud, Health Care Is a Human Right Washington; Jody Disney, League of Women Voters of Washington; Marcia Stedman, Health Care for All Washington; Kathryn Lewandowsky, Whole Washington; Maysoon Park-Huatuco; and Blanca Zuniga.

(Opposed) Eric Pratt; Anthony Mixer; and Elizabeth Hovde, Washington Policy Center.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.