

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6129

As Passed Senate, February 8, 1996

Title: An act relating to mental health services.

Brief Description: Allowing a mental health practitioner and an enrollee to contract for services under certain circumstances.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley and Franklin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/26/96, 1/31/96 [DP].
Passed Senate, 2/8/96, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Quigley, Chair; Wojahn, Vice Chair; Deccio, Fairley, Franklin, Moyer, Thibaudeau, Winsley and Wood.

Staff: Rhoda Jones (786-7198)

Background: Currently, under the terms of some health care services contracts, enrollees are prohibited from independently contracting for continued mental health services after the allotted number of visits or other coverage provisions with mental health practitioners have been exhausted. These agreements may be forbidden even if the enrollee will pay for the care in full.

Summary of Bill: Health carriers may not write contracts which deny enrollees and mental health practitioners the option of independently arranging to continue care, at the enrollee's expense, after the benefits of the contract expire. Health carriers include disability insurers, health care service contractors, the Basic Health Plan, the state health insurance pool, and health maintenance organizations.

Mental health practitioners include psychiatrists, psychologists, advanced practice psychiatric nurses, social workers, marriage and family therapists and mental health counselors.

Independent agreements between mental health practitioners and enrollees are permitted when benefits expire, if the enrollees condition is excluded from coverage, or for any clinically appropriate reason at the time.

These independent agreements do not apply to the full time staff of health carriers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: It takes time to develop a trusting relationship with a mental health practitioner. Patients should be allowed to extend their treatment and pay for it themselves if they wish.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Dwight Bushue, WSNA; Mike Gundle, Psychiatric Assn.; Lucy Homans, Psychological Assn.; Kathy Ball, Marriage & Family Counselors; Laura Groshong, Coalition of Mental Health Counselors; Sharon Case; Lonnie Johns-Brown, NASW.

House Amendment(s): Language is added that requires the act comply with federal and state law. Clarification is provided to require that a consumer seeing a mental health provider during an appeal for additional benefits must receive written notice from the provider indicating who would be responsible for payment for services received during the appeal.