

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1741

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to health care benefits for blind vendors.

Brief Description: Providing a plan of health insurance for blind vendors.

Sponsors: Representatives Hunt, Fromhold, Alexander and Armstrong.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care: 2/15/01, 2/22/01 [DPS];
Appropriations: 2/4/02, 2/6/02 [DPS(HC)].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- The Public Employee' Benefits Board will provide health insurance benefits for blind licensees who are actively operating facilities and participating in the business enterprises program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Campbell, Republican Co-Chair; Cody, Democratic Co-Chair; Schual-Berke, Democratic Vice Chair; Skinner, Republican Vice Chair; Ballasiotes, Conway, Darneille, Edmonds, Edwards, Marine, McMorris, Pennington and Ruderman.

Staff: Dave Knutson (786-7146).

Background:

The Public Employees' Benefits Board designs and approves health insurance benefit plans for state employees, school district employees, and retirees.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Blind licensees who operate facilities and participate in the business enterprise program are eligible for health insurance offered by the Public Employees' Benefits Board. The health insurance benefits will be the same or substantially similar to the plan of health insurance offered to state employees. The costs of providing health insurance for blind licensees will be paid from net proceeds from vending machine operations in public buildings.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Enrollment will be at the discretion of the blind licensees under rules adopted by the Public Employees' Benefits Board.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Blind licensees who operate facilities and participate in the Business Enterprise Program have a difficult time finding and paying for health insurance.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Hunt, prime sponsor; Jeanne Gallo, Department of Services for the Blind; Larry Watkinson, Business Enterprise Program; and Jamila Thomas-Roberts, Washington Federation of State Employees.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Health Care be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 24 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Doumit, 1st Vice Chair; Fromhold, 2nd Vice Chair; Sehlin, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Buck, Clements, Cody, Cox, Dunshee, Grant, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, Lisk, Mastin, McIntire, Pearson, Pflug, Ruderman, Schual-Berke, Talcott and Tokuda.

Staff: Andrea Hardy (786-7349).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Health Care:

No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: There are many blind vendors who cannot provide health care for either themselves or their families. It is very difficult and expensive to gain access to reasonably priced health care. There are not enough blind vendors to make a substantial bargaining group to get a less expensive rate for purchasing care from an health care organization. This bill would provide blind vendors the opportunity to purchase health care at the same price that the state purchases it for its employees. Although this bill does not provide care for vendors' families, it provides the opportunity to purchase that care if vendors choose to. This means the difference between being on public assistance through Medicaid and being successfully employed and receiving benefits from that employment. This is a unique opportunity to make vendors whole. We support this bill.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Dennis Martin, Health Care Authority; Kathy Watkinson, Teresa Linsgrath, Larry Watkinson, and Peter Campbell, Blind Vendors Committee.