

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6494

As of February 3, 2016

Title: An act relating to increasing access to adequate and appropriate mental health services for children and youth.

Brief Description: Increasing access to adequate and appropriate mental health services for children and youth.

Sponsors: Senators Darneille, Frockt, Rivers, O'Ban, Conway, Carlyle, Rolfes, Keiser, McAuliffe and Hasegawa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services, Mental Health & Housing: 2/01/16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, MENTAL HEALTH & HOUSING

Staff: Kevin Black (786-7747)

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) contracts with regional support networks (RSN) to provide mental health services for adults and children who suffer from serious mental illness or severe emotional disturbance and meet access-to-care standards. An RSN may be a county, group of counties, or a nonprofit or for-profit entity. RSNs are required to provide:

- crisis and involuntary treatment services for all residents in the region;
- medically necessary community based mental health treatment services covered under the state Medicaid plan; and
- limited other services for individuals not covered under the Medicaid program.

During the 2015 fiscal year, the Department provided mental health services to approximately 48,000 children through contracts with 11 RSNs.

The Health Care Authority (HCA) administers the Medicaid program, which is a state-federal program that provides health care for low-income state residents who meet certain eligibility criteria. In Washington state, Medicaid is called Apple Health. Apple Health for Kids is free for all children in families below 210 percent of the federal poverty level. Families above that level may be eligible for the same coverage at a low cost. HCA is responsible for providing medically necessary community-based mental health treatment services covered under the state Medicaid plan for Medicaid clients who do not meet access-to-care standards.

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

Federal law requires group and individual health plans to provide coverage for several types of preventive health services. For infants, children, and adolescents, these services include evidence-informed preventive care and screenings provided for in the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) comprehensive guidelines. The HRSA's comprehensive guidelines have adopted the American Academy of Pediatric's "Periodicity Schedule of the Bright Futures Recommendations for Preventive Health Care" (Periodicity Schedule). The Periodicity Schedule establishes a recommended timetable for patients to receive preventive services from birth through 21 years of age. In 2015, the American Academy of Pediatrics updated the Periodicity Schedule, recommending annual depression screenings for children ages 11 through 21 years of age.

Medicaid programs are not required to follow the Bright Futures guidelines. However, Medicaid includes benefits under the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment Program (EPSDT) for enrollees under 21 years of age. EPSDT covers health screening visits, which are regularly scheduled examinations and evaluations of the general physical and mental health, growth, development, and nutritional status of infants, children, and youth.

Summary of Bill: The Children's Mental Health Work Group (Work Group) is established, consisting of four legislators, one from each caucus of the Senate and House of Representatives; four alternate legislators; four executive members; a representative of tribal governments; and a representative of each of the following: behavioral health organizations, community mental health agencies, Medicaid managed care organizations, commercial insurance providers, child health advocacy groups, child care providers, and the managed health care plan serving foster children. The Work Group must review barriers that exist to identifying and treating mental health issues in children with a particular focus on birth to five, and with an emphasis on:

- appropriate assessment tools to establish eligibility for services;
- billing issues related to serving the parent or caregiver;
- workforce issues;
- the adoption of standards for training and endorsement of professionals; and
- supports for child care providers to reduce expulsions of children from child care and preschool.

The Work Group must report its findings by December 1, 2016.

HCA and DSHS must report annually to the Legislature, starting December 1, 2017, on the status of access to behavioral health services for children from birth through age 17. The reports must include measures including the rate of access of mental health or substance use treatment by children aged 6-17 within 30 days of an emergency room visit related to mental health or substance use, and the percentage of health plan members with an identified mental health need who received mental health services during the reporting period.

Effective January 1, 2017, subject to the availability of funding, HCA must require universal screening and provider payment for depression for children aged 11-21, as recommended by the Bright Futures Guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The bill is subject to a null and void clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: It is hard for legislators to learn about something as devastating as the circumstances of mental illness among children if we can't do something about it. One in seven children has a diagnosable mental health problem. We continue to look in the deep end of the system and overlook children's issues. This bill will provide information to legislators and embrace the idea of doing early intervention. Please consider changes made to this bill in the House. It's been a while since serious children's mental health legislation was passed. The work group created in this bill is an important step towards identifying what most needs to be done to ensure that children and youth can receive the services they need. There is little awareness of what good things are happening. We appreciate the intent to identify how to strengthen network adequacy requirements. We need to collect data to understand the flaws in the system. Please amend the bill to increase the amount of data which is collected. Half of mental illness starts by 14 years of age, but only one out of five children receive treatment. One in five kids seen by health providers are there for a behavioral health problem, and they often do not receive care. Integration of behavioral health is essential. Implementation of depression screenings would be a positive step. Stigma and inconvenience are barriers to treatment. There is only one child psychiatrist in this state for every 1,100 kids with serious emotional disturbance. Our group looked into the services being delivered by the health plans to the children in this state. Only 2 percent of children received mental health services from the health plans. This is not mental health parity. Some providers under the health plans aren't taking more Medicaid, or they have a month-long delay. RSNs and health plans should cover the same providers and share information. Please add a member of the Superior Court Judges Association to the Work Group; we can help stop sending troubled kids to JRA. The current mental health system is crisis driven. Children are most amenable to treatment, so it's disappointing they don't receive it.

CON: The state has the obligation to ensure that all prescriptions are necessary and appropriate. Kids need love not drugs. Please adopt the House amendment discouraging psychotropic medication for children. Let's focus on health outcomes, not system outcomes. Adolescents are anxious--that's normal, not a sign of disease.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Darneille, prime sponsor; Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children; Joan Miller, Washington Council for Behavioral Health; Robert Hilt, Seattle Children's Hospital; Tom Parker, Superior Court Judges; Kristin Houser, King County Mental Health Advisory Board; Seth Dawson, National Alliance on Mental Illness, NAMI Washington.

CON: Steven Pearce, Citizens Commission on Human Rights.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.