

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8004

As Passed Senate, February 12, 2025

Brief Description: Concerning Universal Health Care.

Sponsors: Senators Hasegawa, Bateman, Lovelett, Nobles, Stanford, Trudeau, Valdez and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/30/25, 1/31/25 [DP, DNP].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/12/25, 30-19.

Brief Summary of Joint Memorial

- Requests that the federal government create a universal health care program or allow Washington State to implement a universal health system by reducing barriers or granting appropriate waivers.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Cleveland, Chair; Orwall, Vice Chair; Bateman, Chapman, Riccelli, Robinson and Slatter.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Muzzall, Ranking Member; Christian and Holy.

Staff: Julie Tran (786-7283)

Background: Universal Health Care Work Group. In 2019, the Legislature established a Universal Health Care Work Group (Work Group). The Work Group issued its final report on January 15, 2021. It defined universal health care to mean that all Washington residents can access essential, effective, appropriate, and affordable health care services when and where they need it, and developed three coverage models. Models A and B are designed to

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provide coverage for all state residents, including those currently covered by federal programs, and undocumented immigrants. The models would provide coverage for essential health benefits and include no cost sharing. Model A would achieve this through a state-governed and administered program while Model B would be a state-governed, but health plan administered program. Model C would offer coverage to a segment of Washingtonians—those who do not have access to affordable coverage through a public program, an employer, or the individual market. It is primarily designed to increase coverage for uninsured undocumented immigrants.

The State-Based Universal Health Care Act of 2023. In November 2023, during the 118th Congress, Representative Ro Khanna introduced HR 6270, the State-Based Universal Health Care Act of 2023 (federal bill). The federal bill 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, among others.

Summary of Joint Memorial: The Senate and House of Representatives of the state of Washington petition the federal government to create a universal health care program to ensure that every resident in Washington State and the United States has timely access to health care services without incurring familial debt.

Absent federal government action to create a universal health care program, it is requested that either the federal government partner with Washington State to reduce barriers and allow the state to implement a universal health system for the people in Washington State or the federal government grants Washington State the appropriate waivers to remove restrictions on the state's ability to create a universal health care system.

The federal government can allow the state to implement a universal health care system by passing HR 6270.

Copies of this memorial must be immediately transmitted to the President of the United States, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Secretary, the United States Department of Labor Secretary, the President of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, each member of Congress from Washington State, and the federal agencies involved with granting the requested necessary waivers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This is a request for universal health care coverage to improve the health of our whole community. Inadequate coverage and medical costs are the largest contributors to bankruptcies. Washingtonians are struggling to both access and afford health care as premiums rise in the commercial health insurance market. It is time to decide if health care is for everyone. We must bring everybody in and leave nobody out of this basic right to health care. Obtaining universal health care is a long term project but this Joint Memorial is an important and easy step that costs no money and no court will challenge it. We must motivate our federal partners to provide universal coverage or to give our state a waiver.

OTHER: The state is moving in the wrong direction when it comes to health care. There is no hope for cost containment and it is only shifting who pays the ever increasing cost of health care. The universal taxpayer financed care doesn't work as many hope it will and the demand outstrips supply. The state should reduce government intervention and embrace market solutions that enhance quality and reduce costs by eliminating regulations and mandates.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Bob Hasegawa, Prime Sponsor; Ronnie Shure, Health Care for All - Washington; Andre Stackhouse, Whole Washington; Cynthia Stewart, League of Women Voters of WA; Nico Janssen, Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

OTHER: Elizabeth New, Washington Policy Center.

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