Capitol News
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WSLHA Priorities

WSLHA's priority legislation, SB 6071, is eligible for a vote in the Senate. It prohibits insurers from **requesting refunds from health care providers** on claims payments unless they do so in writing within 12 months of the original payment. **Please answer the call to action from ASHA/WSLHA, asking your senator to vote yes on this bill!**

HB 1589, our legislation regarding **provider contracts with insurers**, is eligible for a vote by the House. The bill requires insurers to publish point of contact information, provide redline versions of updated contracts, provide fee schedules with 60 days' notice, and provide access to contract information in a manner other than a secure website or portal. The bill also requires insurers to provide notice of significant contract changes 90 days before the effective date of the change. **There's a call to action out for this bill, too!**

SB 5845 requires health carriers to **pay clean claims within 30 calendar days**. This bill passed the Senate unanimously with the following amendments:

- Requires that when requesting additional information to process a claim, a carrier may not make any additional requests for information for 30 calendar days after receipt of the claim.
- Provides that if a provider fails to submit requested information within 21 calendar days of the request, the carrier's obligation to pay or deny the claim is extended to 40 calendar days following receipt of the information.
- Allows OIC to subject a carrier to an administrative penalty when a claim is unresolved for more than 90 days. When deciding on the appropriateness of an administrative penalty, OIC shall consider whether a carrier has engaged in a pattern of violations.

It's scheduled for a hearing in the House Health Care Committee on Wednesday.

SB 6226 has passed the Senate unanimously. This is legislation regarding **the use of telehealth in speech and hearing services** and allows SLPs, audiologists, and hearing aid specialists may use their clinical judgment to determine whether telehealth or in-person care is the appropriate treatment modality for a patient. It's been referred to the House Health Care Committee.

SB 5387, is last session's **corporate practice of medicine** bill. The bill is limited to physicians, PAs, osteopaths, APRNs, and naturopaths and requires medical licensees to own all shares and hold all director positions in medical practices. It is still in the Senate Rules Committee.

HB 1155, the **non-compete bill**, passed the House by a vote of 65-29; 10 Republicans joined the Democrats in supporting the bill. It has been referred to Senate Labor and Commerce where there may be an effort to exempt senior executives from the legislation.

Another bill we're watching is HB 1496, legislation that **limits charges for providing patient health care information** that is stored electronically to no more than $50 when provided in an electronic format to the patient or the patient's representative, attorney, or community-based or system-based advocate. This bill is eligible for a House vote.

To address **lengthy credentialling wait times**, SB 5968 requires state agencies with sufficient existing resources to report data on credentials they issue. It also requires state agencies to establish published decision times for all credentials and provide application fee refunds if the agency fails to meet its published decision time. This bill has passed the Senate.

General News

Last Monday's fiscal committee cutoff marked a critical point in session, further narrowing the universe of proposals that will move forward this year. With that milestone now behind them, the House and Senate have pivoted to the next phase: extended caucus meetings, lengthy floor sessions, and strategic negotiations as lawmakers work toward the February 17th deadline for bills to pass out of their house of origin.

Before bills reach the floor, however, they must clear a pivotal and often decisive hurdle, the Rules Committees. Rules serves as a gatekeeper, deciding which proposals are positioned for debate and which may quietly stall without ever receiving a vote. While the fundamental role of the Rules Committees is similar in both chambers, the mechanics differ. In the House, Rules meetings are not publicly announced, and deliberations occur behind closed doors. In contrast, the Senate's Rules process is open to public observation, offering greater transparency into how decisions are made about floor scheduling.

A key factor in whether and when a bill is pulled to the floor is the anticipated level of controversy and the amount of debate time it will require. During the early days of floor action, leadership in both chambers typically prioritize measures that are broadly supported or relatively straightforward, allowing them to move efficiently through the process. More contentious or complex bills, particularly those expected to generate lengthy debate or many amendments, are often held until later in the floor calendar, frequently surfacing during extended evening sessions as deadlines draw near.

Following a record-breaking public hearing, the Senate Ways & Means Committee advanced the Millionaire's Tax, SB 6346, last week. The public hearing drew unprecedented engagement, with nearly 81,000 individuals signing in and more than 200 people testifying. The committee amended the bill in several ways: increased the amount for public defense services; increased the charitable deduction from $50,000 to $100,000; and increased the small business B&O tax credit to exempt the first $300,000 of business income with a complete phaseout at $600,000, among other provisions.

Democrats will likely schedule floor action on the Millionaire's Tax on Monday. It will undoubtedly accrue many floor amendments and debate will be robust as Senate Republicans attempt to kill or slow down the bill.

Also on Monday, the Economic and Revenue Forecast Council will convene to adopt the official revenue forecast. Budget writers in both chambers rely on this forecast as they refine spending plans to account for economic trends and ensure proposed spending aligns with projected revenues.

The Senate is expected to release its operating budget on February 20th, with the House budget release later that weekend. Hearings will likely happen early the week of February 23rd. The transportation and capital budgets typically following shortly thereafter.