Capitol News
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WSLHA Priorities

The House of Origin cutoff was not kind to many health care bills, including our two legislative priorities. Here's a rundown of bills that died last week:

- HB 1589, our legislation regarding **provider contracts with insurers**, died on the House floor calendar. However, the House budget **contains our budget proviso to fund a contract with the William D. Ruckelshaus Center** to design, convene, and facilitate a collaborative forum with respect to contracting practices between health carriers and health care providers.

- SB 6071, prohibiting carriers from **requesting refunds from health care providers** on claims payments within one year of the payment. However, there is a chance that this bill could be amended onto SB 5845 (see below).

- 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.

- 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.

So what's still alive?

- SB 6226 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 scheduled for a hearing in the House Health Care Committee on Tuesday. WSLHA and ASHA are pro on the bill.

- HB 1155, the **non-compete bill**, is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Labor and Commerce on Monday and executive session on Tuesday.

- 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 was heard last Friday and is scheduled for a committee vote this week.

- SB 5845 requires health carriers to **pay clean claims within 30 calendar days**. It is scheduled for executive session on Tuesday. There is a good chance that SB 6071's language on overpayment recovery will be amended onto SB 5845.

APTA Washington just learned of a devastating proposal in the House budget to **eliminate the adult PT/OT/Speech Medicaid benefit**. We are working with our OT and PT colleagues to remove this cut from the House budget.

General News

The Legislature wrapped up house of origin floor action last week, sending a wave of bills to the opposite chamber's committees. Lawmakers now face a fast-moving timeline to meet the February 25th policy committee deadline.

On Monday, the state's revenue forecast was released and showed Washington's economy and state finances performing modestly better than expected, with projected revenue for the current 2025-27 biennium now about $827 million higher than the November forecast and revenue for 2027–29 also up by over $1 billion compared to previous projections. This is largely due to stronger personal income, employment, and tax receipts. This improved outlook has given state budget writers good news as they prepare supplemental budget proposals, easing some pressure on negotiations even as lawmakers work through a complex process of reconciling competing priorities before the March 12th adjournment. Democratic budget leaders have noted the forecast provides needed "breathing room," but challenges remain.

Also on Monday, Senate Democrats approved SB 6346 (Pedersen, D-43), widely known as the "Millionaire's Tax," following a lengthy and often contentious floor debate. Minority Republicans introduced multiple amendments aimed at modifying the scope and structure of the proposal. However, none of those amendments were adopted. When the final 27-22 vote was taken, Democratic Senators Cortes (D-18), Hansen (D-23), and Krishnadasan (D-26) broke with their caucus and joined all Republicans in opposing the bill. The measure now advances to the House for further consideration. SB 6346 is scheduled for a hearing in the House Finance Committee on February 24th and executive session on February 27th.

Tension over the bill didn't end on the Senate floor, however. On Tuesday, Governor Ferguson (D) held a media availability where he addressed the passage of the bill by the Senate. Ferguson proposed directing more than half of the projected revenue from the millionaire's tax, about $1.9 billion annually, back to Washingtonians through affordability measures. His plan includes roughly $1 billion to dramatically expand the small business B&O tax credit. He also proposed about $380 million per year to significantly expand the Working Families Tax Credit. Finally, he called for targeted sales tax relief, including a sales tax holiday for purchases under $1,000 and exemptions for diapers, baby products, and hygiene items.

In response, legislative Democrats voiced clear frustration not only with the substance of the governor's proposed spending plan, but also with the way it was rolled out. Rather than sparring through press conferences, they urged the governor to pick up the phone and work collaboratively with legislative leaders to reconcile differences.

On Sunday, the House and Senate released their supplemental operating budgets. Hearings are scheduled for both budgets in their respective fiscal committees on Monday afternoon, giving the public about 24 hours to review these important bills before testifying. Committee votes are scheduled for Wednesday.