

HALL RENDER'S THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON - MAY 25, 2018

SENATE, HOUSE HEALTH COMMITTEES EXAMINE GME PROGRAM

On May 22, the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions ("HELP") Committee held a **hearing** on the graduate medical education ("GME") program. Republican members raised concerns over the current GME program, alleging there are inequities in the distribution of residency slots and asking whether training should be based out of clinics rather than hospitals.

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) raised the issue of "geographic maldistribution" of residency slots, particularly in New York and Boston, which have a high concentration of the slots. Witnesses called for changes to the Medicare statute to better promote growth in rural physician training.

On May 23, the House Energy and Commerce Committee **examined** the Children's Health GME program. Funding for the program expires on September 30, 2018. The House is looking to renew funding through a five-year reauthorization bill, H.R. 5385, which would spend \$330 million annually on freestanding children's hospitals that train pediatric resident physicians and dentists. The legislation is expected to pass.

SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE ADVANCES PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

On May 23, the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee voted to **advance** legislation reauthorizing the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act ("PAHPA"), **S. 2852**. The Senate hopes to reauthorize the bill before programs expire at the end of September. PAHPA seeks to provide the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority additional flexibility to prepare for pandemic influenza, antimicrobial resistance and other significant threats. BARDA would also reauthorize the Hospital Preparedness Program, increasing annual funding by 2.7 percent to \$385 million between 2019 and 2023. Hospital groups had urged the committee to increase funding to \$515 million annually.

SERIES OF TELEHEALTH BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE SENATE

A series of bills were introduced this week aimed at increasing access to telemedicine-based treatment for substance abuse disorders. One bill (**S. 2901**), introduced by Sen. John Thune (R-SD), would ease the originating site restrictions on Medicare reimbursement for telehealth treatment. Another measure (**S. 2910**), introduced by Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS), is intended to evaluate access to services and treatment for substance use disorders and to telehealth services and remote patient monitoring for pediatric populations under Medicaid.

Another measure directs the HHS secretary to clarify how Medicaid funds can be used for virtual substance abuse treatment. A fourth bill (**S. 2912**), introduced by Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), directs the HHS Secretary to publish data about the population of Medicaid patients with substance abuse disorders and on the availability of treatment under Medicaid.

HEALTH-RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK

The Senate Finance Committee **introduced 22 opioid-related bills** this week. Similar to the House Energy and Commerce Committee last week, Senate leaders hope to mark up the comprehensive opioid reform package in early June.

Sen. Roberts introduced a bill, **S. 2908**, to amend Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for electronic prior authorization under Medicare part D for covered part D drugs.

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) introduced a bill, **S. 2904**, to require the HHS Secretary to provide guidance to States regarding federal reimbursement for furnishing services and treatment for substance use disorders under Medicaid using telehealth.

Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA) introduced a bill, **S.2891**, to amend Title XI of the Social Security Act to require applicable manufacturers to include information regarding payments made to physician assistants, nurse practitioners and other advance practice nurses in transparency reports submitted under section 1128G of such Act.

Rep. James Langevin (D-RI) introduced **H.R.5912** that would amend Title XIX of the Social Security Act to delay the reduction in federal medical assistance percentage for Medicaid personal care services and home health services furnished without an electronic visit verification system.

NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON

The House and Senate are out of session next week and return the week of June 4. Upon returning, the House will aim to pass its comprehensive opioid reform package, and they should have the votes. The Senate will address opioid reform at the committee level. With Congress out next week, the next edition of *This Week in Washington* will be published on June 8.

THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON IN HISTORY

1856 - 162 years ago this week, a cane fight breaks out on the Senate floor as Rep. Preston Brooks from South Carolina attacks Sen. Charlie Sumner from Massachusetts with his cane. The attack was allegedly provoked by Sumner's earlier condemnation of slavery, which included an insult to Brooks' cousin, Sen. Andrew Butler. Injuries from the fight would keep Sumner out of office for over a year. The House voted to expel Brooks but fell short on votes.

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