

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 507

(Delegate Nathan-Pulliam, *et al.*)

Health and Government Operations

Finance

Inmates - Hepatitis C - Counseling and Referral to Medical Home

This bill requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), to develop a process to refer an inmate who has been diagnosed with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) to DHR or DHMH for enrollment in Medicaid or the Primary Adult Care program upon release. This process must be developed by July 1, 2010. DPSCS must also provide counseling to inmates with HCV on the management of HCV and methods for reducing the transmission of HCV.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill generally codifies existing practice. To the extent that the bill requires DPSCS to provide additional pre-release services to individuals with HCV beyond referral to DHR or DHMH, general fund expenditures for DPSCS may increase.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Chapters 249 and 457 of 2006 require DHMH to take specified actions, as funds are available, to address HCV infection in Maryland. Those required actions include conducting a needs assessment to determine the incidence of HCV infection in the State, coordinating with other units of State government to activate a HCV plan, funding HCV pilot programs, and implementing the 2005 report of the Hepatitis C Advisory Council. Beginning December 1, 2006, and annually thereafter, DHMH must report to the Governor and specified legislative committees on its activities. Chapters 249 and 457 terminate December 31, 2009.

Background: DHMH has been working with DHR and DPSCS to develop a process that would promote continuity of care for all inmates leaving the correctional system. Under this process, inmates scheduled to be released would pre-enroll in Medicaid or the Primary Adult Care program prior to release. In order to fully implement this process, several systems changes that should be fully operational by fiscal 2011 are needed.

DPSCS advises that 1,391 inmates tested positive for HCV and 704 inmates were on HCV therapy in fiscal 2008. HCV testing is part of the department's inmate medical care contract. Counseling on the management of HCV and methods for reducing the transmission of HCV are part of the treatment provided.

In its 2006 HCV virus prevention and control report, DHMH states that all DPSCS inmates are screened for behaviors that can increase their risk of HCV infection. Treatment is offered for those inmates who test positive for HCV and meet DPSCS treatment criteria. Inmates with high-risk behaviors receive HCV prevention education. Inmates are offered Hepatitis A and B vaccines.

Hepatitis C is an inflammation of the liver caused by a virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that an estimated 3.9 million people in the United States are currently infected with HCV. Of those, 2.7 million people are chronically infected. There were approximately 26,000 new HCV infections nationwide in 2004. Of the people infected with HCV, 80% do not show signs or symptoms of the virus. HCV symptoms include jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, and nausea.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 295 of 2008 would have required DPSCS to report annually on the number of individuals under DPSCS' custody who have been tested for HCV and the number of individuals who tested positive and received treatment. The bill was heard by the House Health and Government Operations Committee but was withdrawn.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Human Resources, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 20, 2009
mlm/mwc Revised - House Third Reader - March 25, 2009

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