

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2000 Session

FISCAL NOTE

Senate Bill 15 (Senator Ruben) (Bv Request)
Economic and Environmental Affairs

Long-Term Health Consequences of Nasal Radium Irradiation Medical Procedures

This bill establishes a nine-member task force to study the long-term health consequences of nasal radium irradiation medical procedures on recipients of those procedures. The task force is to determine the current health status of recipients who received nasal radium irradiation medical procedures from 1948 through 1960 and to determine how recipients should be notified of the risk of cancer and other diseases and be administered appropriate medical care. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) will provide staff for the task force. The bill may not be construed to require the task force to notify by mail every surviving recipient of nasal radium irradiation treatment of the risk of cancer and other diseases. The task force must submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and to the General Assembly by December 31, 2001. The bill sunsets December 31, 2001.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures would increase by \$150,000 in FY 2001 and \$12,500 in FY 2002. Revenues would not be affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: There is no provision in current law for this task force.

Background: Nasal radium irradiation treatments were pioneered in the 1940s by doctors at

Johns Hopkins Hospital to treat hearing loss, tonsillitis, and colds. In addition, the federal government used this procedure to treat pilots and submariners during the post-World War II era. Individuals receiving this treatment were not informed of the potential medical risks of this procedure. According to the Radiation Experiment Assessment Project, children treated with nasal radium irradiation are at a ten-times greater mortality risk for cancer than similarly treated veterans during this period.

In 1994, President Clinton ordered (Executive Order 12891) the establishment of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments (ACHRE) to study the procedure and the results of nasal radium irradiation treatments given to U.S. citizens from 1948 through 1960. The federal government has not followed the committee's recommendation that subjects be notified of the increased risk of head and neck cancer and non-cancer illnesses and be given appropriate follow-up treatment. This bill establishes a task force to study the consequences of these treatments administered to military personnel and private citizens in Maryland from 1948 through 1960.

State Expenditures: The task force is required to determine whether surviving recipients of nasal radium irradiation treatment have had prolonged health problems associated with the treatments and to determine the current health status of these individuals. It is estimated that 25,000 individuals residing in Maryland may have been exposed to nasal radium irradiation. Medical records for these individuals have not been maintained; thus the names and addresses of affected individuals are not readily accessible. To conduct a study of the prolonged health problems associated with nasal radium irradiation treatments and the health assessment of affected individuals, the task force would either have to conduct a mass mailing of all households in the State or to initiate a public media awareness campaign. The cost of a mass mailing would total approximately \$450,000, whereas a public media awareness campaign would total approximately \$100,000.

DHMH would have to hire a part-time epidemiologist at a cost of \$25,000 (\$16,000 personnel and \$9,000 office expenses) to staff the task force, monitor the health assessments, and interact with the research institute. In addition, DHMH would have to contract with a research institution in order to conduct the health assessment. Assuming that 500 individuals agree to participate in this study, research costs could total \$25,000, which reflects a \$50 cost per assessment.

This approach will take less time than locating and assessing the current health status of every person who was exposed to nasal radium irradiation treatments, considering the 15-month time period for the task force to present recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. The data produced from the assessments made on the sample population will allow the task force to develop a notification program on the associated health risks and

can be used in the development of a medical care and treatment program for every survivor, as required.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: This bill was introduced in the 1998 session as SB 760 and received an unfavorable report by the Environmental Matters Committee.

Cross File: HB 134 (Delegate Hixson) - Environmental Matters.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Community and Public Health Administration), Department of Legislative Services

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