

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2005 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Revised**

House Bill 233 (Delegates Boutin and Mandel)

Health and Government Operations

Finance

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**Public Health - Legibility of Prescriptions Workgroup - Reports**

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This bill extends the reporting deadline for a Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) workgroup on prescription legibility. The workgroup is charged with recommending statutory or regulatory changes on the topic. An interim report is due by July 1, 2005 and a final report is due by August 15, 2005.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2005.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None. Extending the deadline would not directly affect governmental finances.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** Chapter 503 of 2004 requires written prescriptions by a health care practitioner prescribing a drug to be legible and established a DHMH workgroup to study the issue of prescription legibility and make recommendations for statutory or regulatory changes. A report was due by November 1, 2004 to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

**Background:** Florida and Washington have enacted laws requiring prescriptions to be legible. To reduce medication errors, the American Medical Association encourages physicians with poor handwriting to print or type medication orders if a computerized system is not available.

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices urges physicians to use electronic prescribing systems to prevent medication errors. According to the institute, physicians in this country handwrite nearly every prescription. As a result of poor handwriting, pharmacists make more than 150 million calls to physicians annually to clarify what the doctor prescribed. The institute called for the elimination of handwritten prescriptions by 2003.

A 1999 Institute of Medicine report showed prescription medication errors kill up to 7,000 people in the United States annually. Drug-related morbidity and mortality costs almost \$77 billion each year.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** HB 433 of 2004 was signed by the Governor May 26, 2004 and became Chapter 503.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; *Medication (Drug) Errors in Hospitals*, American Medical Association; *Florida tells doctors: Print clearly or else*, amednews.com; *A Call to Action: Eliminate Handwritten Prescriptions Within 3 Years*, Institute for Safe Medication Practices; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 13, 2005  
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