

Legislative Update May 15th

Start the Countdown?

Well, perhaps not quite yet, but with three weeks to go, time becomes an increasingly important factor, which begs the question: what are the priorities, for the Governor and for the Democrat-controlled Legislature?

Try as we may – and must – to rise above the political partisanship to advance policy that benefits not just the NVPCA but also the Nevadans we serve, “the end game” always raises the stakes in every aspect, for better or worse.

With Friday’s upcoming deadline for non-exempt and non-waiver bills to pass out of committee in the second house, expect lengthy committee hearings this week. The May 26th deadline that’s soon to follow for second house passage shifts the focus from committees to floor sessions in each house.

The Week That Was

This past week was productive and positive for NVPCA priority bills.

Family Planning and Women’s Healthcare: The biggest news was the passage of Senate Bill 122 by the Assembly Health and Human Services committee by a unanimous vote. SB122 would establish a state-funded program for family planning services. The NVPCA testified in support. There was never a doubt the bill would pass the Legislature, the real question was whether Republicans would support it and thereby prevent a veto by the Governor. The next step is a vote by the Assembly. Because the bill was amended in committee in the Assembly, once voted out of that house, it will go back to the Senate for a vote to accept or reject the bill as amended. Hopefully, some Senate Republicans will get on board.

Senate Bill 233, which would put into state law women’s health care provisions from the Affordable Care Act plus provide for the 12-month prescribing and dispensing of birth control, passed a key hurdle when it was voted out of the Senate Finance committee with an amendment that was agreed to by key stakeholders. The NVPCA testified in support. Next step: to the Senate floor for a vote by that body, then on to the Assembly.

Meanwhile, Assembly Bill 249, which proposes to allow for 12-month prescribing and dispensing of birth control, was heard in the Senate Health and Human Services committee, but no action was taken. The NVPCA testified in support. How this bill and the similar provision in SB233 are reconciled remains to be seen.

Also, Assembly Bill 348, which would establish sex education curriculum in public schools through the state’s Council on Academics Standards, endured a lengthy hearing – over an hour – in Assembly Ways and Means, despite the fiscal focus of that committee, as opponents couldn’t help themselves and continued to debate the policy.

Patient Centered Medical Homes: Because of the fiscal notes attached to Senate Bill 139 as introduced, this issue found its way to the Senate Finance committee after its unanimous passage by the Senate Health and Human Services committee. SB139 was heard in Finance and the fiscal notes from Medicaid and the Division of Public and Behavioral Health were officially removed. The NVPCA presented this bill in the absence of the bill's sponsor, Sen. Hardy. Next step is for Finance to vote the bill out of committee and get it back to the Senate floor for a vote by that house.

Medicaid as a Public Option: Assembly Bill 374, gutted prior to its first hearing last Friday, would allow for Medicaid health insurance coverage to be offered to Nevadans who aren't eligible for Medicaid, just as any other commercial insurance plan is. This coverage would be called the Nevada Care Act and would not be part of Medicaid. The bill's other objective, which is the key consideration for the NVPCA, is to use revenue generated by the Nevada Care Act to further sustain Medicaid by increasing provider reimbursement rates, after costs are accounted for, and hopefully encourage more health care providers to accept Medicaid patients. Revenue derived from Medicaid is very significant for FQHCs, particularly since Medicaid was expanded, thereby increasing the percentage of Medicaid patients served by FQHCs.

The NVPCA and the Community Health Alliance were the only organizations to testify in support of AB374. The Nevada Hospital Association and Sunrise Hospital testified in opposition. The insurance industry did not take a position. State agencies – Medicaid, the Division of Insurance, and the Silver State Health Insurance Exchange – were neutral on the bill. AB374 is still very much a work in progress, the details of which would be worked out through regulations, and time should allow for that, as its effective date is January 1, 2019.

Other Issues: The NVPCA testified in support of Senate Bill 165, which would reinstitute BMI in school districts for certain grades, when it was heard in the Assembly Health and Human Services Committee. It's up for a vote Monday.

Senate Bill 162, which would allow for more efficient use of psychology assistants, interns and trainees, passed out of the Assembly Commerce and Labor committee with an amendment proposed by the bill's sponsor. The NVPCA testified in support of SB162.

A bill to tax recreational marijuana and that would streamline tax rates for both medicinal and recreational marijuana passed out of the Senate Revenue and Economic Development Committee on a party line 4-3 vote. Senate Bill 487 is the only marijuana tax bill that would appropriate any revenue to public health concerns – substance abuse and mental health – but faces competition in the form of legislation from the Governor's office and an Assembly bill. Ownership of this issue is as important as the issue itself, meaning there's still a long way to go.

Again, at this stage of the session with time getting shorter with each passing day, things change very quickly, so there will be more on our agenda this week than is known now.