

SB 5140 - DIGEST

Finds that: (1) Hundreds of thousands of patients in Washington need interpretation and translation services to understand medical instructions and diagnoses and to communicate clearly with their health care providers;

(2) The health care system in the state is not currently meeting the needs of these patients, largely because of unanswered questions about how to fund needed language services;

(3) Studies document that limited English speakers are less likely to have a regular primary care provider or receive preventative care, and are more likely to experience medical errors, all of which lead to negative health outcomes and higher long-term costs to the health care system;

(4) Language barriers impede informed consent for treatment and surgical procedures, leaving health care organizations and providers vulnerable to potentially costly lawsuits;

(5) According to the 2005 American community survey, four hundred fifty-four thousand Washington residents speak English less than very well;

(6) Medicaid and the state children's health insurance program provide interpretation and translation services. Many private insurers and the Washington basic health plan do not; and

(7) Quality language services lead to better health outcomes and long-term cost savings to the health care system, and the private and public sectors should share the responsibility of covering the cost of these vital services.

Requires the Washington basic health plan to provide interpretation services to limited English proficient enrollees.

Directs all health care service contractors that provide coverage for health care services to provide interpretation services or reimburse clinical health care providers, contract representatives, or administrators that are responsible for billing and claims services for providing interpretation services to limited English proficient enrolled participants.

Directs all health maintenance organizations that provide coverage for health care services to provide interpretation services or reimburse clinical health care providers, contract representatives, or administrators that are responsible for billing and claims services for providing interpretation services to limited English proficient enrolled participants.

Directs, for all disability insurance contracts that provide hospital and medical expenses and health care services, insurers to provide interpretation services or reimburse clinical health care providers, contract representatives, or administrators that are responsible for

billing and claims services for providing interpretation services to limited English proficient insured individuals.

Establishes a working group on language access in health care in the department of health.

Requires the insurance commissioner to conduct a study of language issues that affect consumers who purchase health insurance contracts in the state of Washington.

Provides an effective date of January 1, 2011, for sections 4, 5, and 6 of the act.

Provides that section 3 of the act takes effect when funds are appropriated for its implementation.