

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5398

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, March 3, 1999

Title: An act relating to health insurance benefits for eating disorders.

Brief Description: Requiring health carriers to provide coverage for the treatment of eating disorders.

Sponsors: Senators Brown, Kohl-Welles, Eide, Patterson, Kline, Costa, Gardner and Wojahn.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/8/99, 3/3/99 [DPS-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5398 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Thibaudeau, Chair; Wojahn, Vice Chair; Costa, Franklin and Winsley.

Staff: Christopher Blake (786-7446)

Background: Anorexia nervosa is a condition in which a person maintains a less than normal body weight, fears gaining weight or becoming fat, and has a distorted self perception. Bulimia nervosa is characterized by periods of excessive eating followed by a purging of the food through methods such as vomiting or the use of laxatives. These disorders can lead to depression, reduced bone density, weakened immune system, loss of menstrual cycle, poor dental health, and heart problems. These disorders are often treated with a combination of prescription drugs and psychotherapy.

Summary of Substitute Bill: All health insurance policies issued by carriers after December 31, 1999, are required to provide coverage for treatment of eating disorders. This coverage must be at least as favorable as the coverage made available for other major illnesses.

Carriers are defined to include disability insurers, health care services contractors, health maintenance organizations, the state Health Care Authority, and the state health insurance pool.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Dieticians are added to the list of potential health care professionals whose services may be utilized. Compliance dates are moved back six months. The emergency clause is deleted. Technical changes are made to provide consistency in terminology.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 4, 1999.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Eating disorders are highly preventable and treatable; however, the associated stigma, denial by the individual, and lack of public awareness lead to life-threatening situations. Comprehensive coverage of eating disorders will avoid the more serious and costly health problems that arise from these diseases.

Testimony Against: Mandating coverage for eating disorders will increase the cost of health insurance and add to the instability in the insurance market.

Testified: Senator Brown, prime sponsor (pro); Steve Boruchowitz, Department of Health (informational); Beverly Walker, Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention (pro); Jan (pro); Linda Zobrist, Swedish Medical Center (pro); Mel Sorenson, Washington Physician Services (con).