
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5950

State of Washington

56th Legislature

1999 Regular Session

By Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Fairley, Fraser, Thibaudeau, Kohl-Welles and Prentice)

Read first time 03/03/1999.

1 AN ACT Relating to early hearing loss detection, diagnosis, and
2 intervention; adding a new section to chapter 48.43 RCW; creating new
3 sections; and making appropriations.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that the period
6 between birth and two to three years of age is the most valuable time
7 for language development. If hearing impaired children are not
8 identified early, it is difficult, if not impossible, for many of them
9 to acquire the fundamental language, social, and cognitive skills that
10 provide the foundation for later schooling and success in society. The
11 legislature further finds that it has been estimated that over four
12 hundred children will be born in Washington state with significant
13 hearing loss. The average age at which children with hearing loss are
14 first identified and begin intervention in Washington is eighteen
15 months and is higher in rural areas. Only twenty-five percent of
16 children with hearing loss in Washington are identified and are
17 receiving services by three years of age. Unfortunately, this
18 situation is made additionally difficult because we find that only
19 children and families living in metropolitan areas have access to a

1 wide range of services, including a variety of early intervention
2 options. The legislature further finds that local communities want to
3 improve their early detection, diagnosis, and intervention services for
4 children with hearing loss and their families, but need technical
5 assistance and guidance.

6 It is the intent of this act to promote the development of a pilot
7 early hearing loss detection, diagnosis, and intervention system linked
8 to community resources.

9 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The department of health shall establish ten
10 early hearing loss detection, diagnosis, and intervention pilot
11 programs linked to community resources throughout Washington, including
12 metropolitan and rural areas. The department of health early hearing
13 loss detection, diagnosis, and intervention pilot programs shall ensure
14 the following:

15 (1) All newborn infants shall be screened for hearing loss by three
16 months of age in the area identified as the pilot program catchment
17 area by the department of health;

18 (2) Screening should occur prior to hospital discharge at the time
19 of birth, with coordination to screen home births;

20 (3) All infants who fail the screen shall be diagnosed for hearing
21 loss by six months of age; and

22 (4) That appropriate intervention is provided to all infants who
23 are diagnosed with significant hearing loss.

24 The department of health may receive gifts, grants, or endowments
25 from public or private sources that are made from time to time, in
26 trust or otherwise, for the use and benefit of the purposes of the
27 pilot programs created in this section and spend gifts, grants, or
28 endowments or income from the public or private sources according to
29 their terms, unless the receipt of the gifts, grants, or endowments
30 violates RCW 42.17.710.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The department of health shall establish a
32 state-wide advisory committee of consumers, and medical, audiology, and
33 educational professionals to provide guidance and assistance in the
34 design, development, and implementation of the pilot program created in
35 section 2 of this act. The department of health in coordination with
36 the advisory board shall: (1) Develop a strategy to identify best
37 practices standards for the pilot program; (2) develop an educational

1 component to inform the appropriate professional medical communities of
2 the value of the pilot program; and (3) implement a system to evaluate
3 the outcome of the pilot program based on performance standards.

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** The department of health shall report to the
5 appropriate committees of the legislature on the progress of the pilot
6 program created in section 2 of this act by January 1, 2000, and
7 provide a final report by December 12, 2001.

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) The sum of four hundred ninety thousand
9 dollars, or as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for
10 the fiscal year ending June 30, 1999, from the general fund to the
11 department of health for the purposes of this act.

12 (2) The sum of two hundred sixty thousand dollars, or as much
13 thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for the fiscal year ending
14 June 30, 2000, from the general fund to the department of health for
15 the purposes of this act.

16 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** A new section is added to chapter 48.43 RCW
17 to read as follows:

18 (1) For purposes of this section, "health carrier" or "carrier"
19 means disability insurers regulated under chapter 48.20 or 48.21 RCW,
20 health care services contractors regulated under chapter 48.44 RCW,
21 health maintenance organizations regulated under chapter 48.46 RCW,
22 plans operating under the health care authority under chapter 41.05
23 RCW, the state health insurance pool operating under chapter 48.41 RCW,
24 and insuring entities regulated under this chapter.

25 (2) Every health carrier that provides coverage for child birth
26 services shall include as a part of its coverage hearing loss screening
27 for newborns. Hearing loss screening services shall include:

28 (a) Screening for hearing loss for all newborn infants prior to
29 discharge from the hospital, and by three months of age for all infants
30 born at home;

31 (b) Diagnosis for all infants who are determined to have impaired
32 hearing to take place by six months of age; and

33 (c) Appropriate intervention for all infants who are diagnosed with
34 significant hearing loss.

35 (3) Every health carrier must provide notice to policyholders
36 regarding the coverage required under this section. The notice must be

1 in writing and must be transmitted at the earliest of the next mailing
2 to the policyholder, the yearly summary of benefits sent to the
3 policyholder, or January 1st of the next year following the effective
4 date of this section.

5 (4) All health plans issued or renewed after July 1, 1999, are
6 required to be in accordance with this section.

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