

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 6537

C 116 L 02
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Providing emergency contraception to sexual assault victims.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Costa, Winsley, Kohl-Welles, Thibaudeau, Fairley, Kline, Jacobsen, Prentice, B. Sheldon and Keiser).

Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care
House Committee on Health Care

Background: In 2001 the state convicted 1,280 individuals for committing sex offenses, including 400 rapes involving both children and adults. During the same year, the state's Crime Victims Compensation Program paid for 3,500 medical exams given to individuals who had been sexually assaulted. It is estimated that nationally about one in ten victims report sexual assault to authorities.

According to sexual assault advocates, hospital emergency rooms are most frequently where victims initially seek medical attention. Advocates say that younger victims, especially teenagers, wait as long as a week for medical care, and that the primary concern for all ages seeking care is a fear of pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

There is no statewide protocol for treating sexual assault victims in emergency rooms. Hospital practices vary between institutions, especially with regard to providing information about emergency contraception and access to that treatment.

Emergency contraception is typically administered as high doses of hormones within 72 hours of intercourse. Other procedures, such as the insertion of an intrauterine device, are used if treatment is sought later than 72 hours after sexual contact.

Summary: Every hospital providing emergency care in this state must provide sexual assault victims with accurate and understandable information about emergency contraception. Hospitals are also required to provide emergency contraception to any victim who requests it, unless the procedure is not medically safe for the individual.

Emergency contraception is defined as any health care treatment approved by the Food and Drug Administration that prevents pregnancy, including but not limited to high doses of oral contraceptives taken within 72 hours of intercourse.

The Department of Social and Health Service is directed to develop informational materials relating to emergency contraception for distribution to all of the state's hospital emergency rooms.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate 36 13
House 75 19

Effective: June 13, 2002