

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6603

As of January 31, 2002

Title: An act relating to hepatitis C.

Brief Description: Establishing a prevention and treatment program for hepatitis C.

Sponsors: Senators Kastama, Kline and Thibaudeau.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/31/02.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Tanya Karwaki (786-7447)

Background: Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. It is a blood borne infection that can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer. While some individuals with hepatitis C are not symptomatic, most infected persons develop a chronic infection. Because there are few initial symptoms, diagnosis often occurs decades after the virus has been contracted.

In Washington, an estimated 100,000 people may be infected with hepatitis C. Of these, approximately 70,000 will develop chronic infection, 15,000 may develop cirrhosis within 20 years, and as many as 1,000 may develop liver cancer within 20 years. Since December 2000, providers have been required to report cases of hepatitis C to the Department of Health.

The hepatitis C virus is spread by direct contact with the blood or sexual fluids of an infected person. The virus is primarily contracted by persons who have shared drug needles, received blood transfusions before 1992, or had work-related contact with infected blood.

Currently, there are only two drugs available for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C. Treatment is effective in only about 10 to 40 percent of persons infected; it is costly and has significant side effects. A vaccine is not available.

There is concern that hepatitis C is an emerging, silent epidemic and that current awareness, prevention, education, and treatment efforts are not sufficient to reduce risk and improve outcomes.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Health must develop a state plan for the prevention and treatment of hepatitis C and develop a program to promote awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the disease. The department must also establish voluntary hepatitis C testing programs and develop and offer a training course for persons providing hepatitis C counseling. Nurses and chemical dependency professionals are required to participate in continuing education relating to hepatitis C.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 29, 2002.

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