

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5383

As of February 10, 2003

Title: An act relating to the establishment of a pharmacy connection program.

Brief Description: Establishing a manufacturer-sponsored prescription drug assistance program.

Sponsors: Senators Winsley, Thibaudeau, Deccio, Franklin, Keiser, Kline, Eide and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/12/03.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Jonathan Seib (786-7427)

Background: Influenced by price increases, greater utilization, and changes in the types of prescriptions used, national expenditures for prescription drugs have been one of the fastest growing components of health care spending in recent years, increasing around 18 percent a year for each of the last several years. This trend is expected to continue.

The burden of increased prescription drug expenditures may be particularly difficult for older persons and others on fixed incomes who are more reliant on medications to stay healthy. According to one report, while seniors make up only 12 percent of the U.S. population, they consume almost 35 percent of all prescription drugs, with the average senior filling 18 prescriptions per year. Those over 65 spend over twice the national average on prescription drugs each year.

Some who have trouble affording needed prescriptions may turn to the assistance programs sponsored by pharmaceutical manufacturers that offer drugs on a reduced or no-cost basis. There is concern, however, that these programs are inconsistent and not easy to use. To address this concern, a number of states have developed programs to help people access these programs.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Social and Health Services must establish a Pharmacy Connection program through which health care providers and members of the public can obtain information about and help in accessing manufacturer-sponsored prescription drug assistance programs. The program is to initially target seniors, and includes a toll-free number that may be used to obtain information.

The program is to work with participating manufacturers to simplify application forms and the enrollment process.

The department may apply for and accept grants to assist with the program, and contract with other state agencies or private organizations for its implementation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 6, 2003.

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