
Health Care Committee

SSB 5558

Brief Description: Establishing a prescription drug assistance foundation.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Brown, Swecker, Fraser, Keiser, Benson, Brandland, Weinstein, Roach, Rasmussen, McAuliffe, Pridemore, Shin, Rockefeller and Kohl-Welles).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a nonprofit organization to assist low income citizens to access free or low-cost prescription drugs.

Hearing Date: 3/18/05

Staff: Dave Knutson (786-7146).

Background:

In recent years, individuals have become much more reliant on prescription drugs to improve and maintain their health. At the same time, retail drug prices have increased substantially, leaving many unable to afford their prescribed medications.

In an effort to address this, pharmaceutical manufacturers have developed prescription drug assistance programs that provide free or low cost drugs to those otherwise unable to afford them. Many companies have prescription drug assistance programs with various application processes and eligibility criteria. A person is often required to apply multiple times over the course of a year, and must wait while his or her application is processed before returning to his or her physician to get the drugs. There is concern that these factors present significant barriers to the use of these programs by those who need them.

In some states, non-profit organizations have been created to streamline and reduce variations in the application and distribution process of these assistance programs, giving those in need easier access to the free drugs supplied by manufacturers.

Summary of Bill:

The Health Care Authority must establish a nonprofit foundation to assist uninsured individuals with an income below 300 percent of the federal poverty level in obtaining free or low cost prescription drugs. The foundation's five-member board of directors will be appointed by the Governor.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.