

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5197

As of January 27, 2009

Title: An act relating to permitting electronic signatures on applications for public assistance and for benefits administered by the health care authority.

Brief Description: Permitting electronic signatures on applications for public assistance and for benefits administered by the health care authority.

Sponsors: Senators Marr, Keiser, Franklin, Kohl-Welles and McDermott; by request of Health Care Authority and Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/26/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Mich'l Needham (786-7442)

Background: Legislation passed in 2007 directed the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to develop an online medical benefits application. The initial implementation of the online application is underway. While the initial application for health coverage can be completed electronically, full authentication and verification are completed with a hard copy written signature because the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services requires specific state law to allow an electronic signature on medical assistance applications.

The Health Care Authority (HCA) administers benefits for the Public Employees Benefits Board programs and the Basic Health program. Many forms documenting eligibility can now be submitted via electronic means, but the agency requires written signatures for authentication and verification on many forms.

Summary of Bill: DSHS and HCA health coverage programs may accept electronic applications and electronic signatures for verification. All applications must have either a physical signature or an electronic signature. Electronic signature means a signature in electronic form attached to or logically associated with an electronic record to allow a paperless way of signing a document. This may include a sound, symbol, or process attached to or logically associated with the record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The application process will be simplified with an electronic signature, and may be more secure than hard copy signatures. The encryption methodology provides a high level of security for the authentic signature. Electronic signatures are already used for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and basic food applications, and it would streamline the application for families. There is a desire for an on-line tool that will help families to submit their applications. This will eliminate barriers to enrollment, allow faster processing, and less burden on families trying to get children enrolled. The change for HCA will clear up a lack of clarity for the authority to use electronic signatures and avoid complications with audit questions.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marr, prime sponsor; Manning Pellanda, DSHS; Dennis Martin, HCA; Patty Hayes, Within Reach; Teresa Mosqueda, Children's Alliance.