
Health Care & Wellness Committee

SSB 5966

Brief Description: Establishing the office of the health care authority ombudsman.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Fraser and Swecker).

<p style="text-align: center;">Brief Summary of Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishes the Health Care Authority Ombudsman to assist retired enrollees in the Public Employees Benefits Board program.
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Hearing Date: 2/16/12

Staff: Valerie Rickman (786-7119).

Background:

The Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC) oversees the state's insurance industry. Insurance for public employees is available through the state Health Care Authority and the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB).

The OIC is required to collect certain information from medical insurance providers. Beginning in 2011, each provider of medical insurance under the PEBB program was required to annually submit to the OIC a summary of customer service complaints. The OIC is required to aggregate the information received from each health plan into a report to the legislature. In September 2011, the Washington State Health Care Authority submitted a report to the Legislature of PEBB customer service complaints and appeals.

Another function of the OIC is to provide education and support services about health insurance to the general public. Education and support services are provided free of charge by volunteers through the Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA). Assistance through SHIBA includes, but is not limited to, information about Medicare, Medicaid, Basic Health, Children's Health Insurance program, and the Washington State Health Insurance Pool.

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.

Summary of Bill:

The Health Care Authority Ombudsman (Ombudsman) is created as a volunteer position within the OIC. The Ombudsman is responsible for assisting retired enrollees in the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) program. Assistance may include helping retired enrollees with questions and concerns as well as assisting the PEBB to identify retiree concerns. The Ombudsman must be trained as part of the OIC's volunteer training related to the SHIBA program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 15, 2012.

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