

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5448

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Health Care & Wellness

**Title:** An act relating to the treatment of Lyme disease.

**Brief Description:** Requiring a study of the effects long-term antibiotic therapy has on certain Lyme disease patients.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Health Care (originally sponsored by Senator Hatfield).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care & Wellness: 3/18/15, 3/26/15 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Requires the Medical Quality Assurance Commission to study the effects of long-term antibiotic therapy on patients who have been diagnosed with Post-Treatment Lyme Disease Syndrome.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Riccelli, Vice Chair; Clibborn, Jinkins, Moeller, Robinson, Tharinger and Van De Wege.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Harris, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier and Short.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Johnson and Rodne.

**Staff:** Jim Morishima (786-7191).

**Background:**

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection caused by the *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacterium and spread through tick bites. Symptoms of the disease include fever, headache, fatigue, and rash. An

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untreated infection can spread to the joints, heart, and nervous system. Lyme disease is generally treated with antibiotics. The persistence of symptoms after treatment is known as Post-Treatment Lyme Disease Syndrome (PTLDS). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were 11 confirmed cases of Lyme disease in Washington in 2013.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The Medical Quality Assurance Commission (MQAC) must study the effects of long-term antibiotic therapy on patients who have been diagnosed with PTLDS. The study should include a review of:

- the antibiotics that are commonly used, prescribed, and administered for the long-term treatment of Lyme disease;
- the side effects associated with long-term antibiotic therapy;
- long-term antibiotic therapy's effectiveness in controlling the symptoms of patients with PTLDS;
- whether allowing physicians to administer long-term antibiotic therapy for treating Lyme disease would be beneficial to the health and safety of Washington residents; and
- any other aspects of long-term antibiotic therapy that the MQAC deems important to the health and safety of patients who may receive the treatments.

The MQAC must report its findings to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2015.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) This bill requires the MQAC to perform a study that will provide valuable information about the treatment of Lyme disease.

(In support with concerns) Claims that there is no Lyme disease in Washington and that long-term antibiotic treatment has side effects are untrue. Lyme disease can go undiagnosed for many years. Early diagnosis can prevent severe complications. Chronic Lyme disease can have life-threatening consequences. It is a complicated disease that requires complex care. A lot of people need more than the standard course of treatment to be cured. Lyme disease causes people to put their lives on hold. The effectiveness of long-term antibiotic treatment has been proven by international research—the treatment is reliable and safe. Doctors are

afraid to test for Lyme disease for fear of false positives and unnecessary treatments. Doctors are afraid to treat people with chronic Lyme disease for fear of retaliation. Lives have been lost due to complications of this epidemic and suicide. This is a state of emergency. Washington should prevent these atrocities and follow the lead of other states in authorizing long-term antibiotic treatment for Lyme disease. This bill should be expanded to include the use of alternative medicines. The original bill is preferable to the version in front of the committee.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Senator Hatfield, prime sponsor.

(In support with concerns) Dan Boeholt; Bill McClelland; Hannah Miller Kato; Kirsten Pearson; and Faith Ramirez, Lyme Disease Organization of Seattle.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.