

Minnesota Legislature

April 16, 2011

Volume 25, Issue 15

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Capitol Update

MINNESOTA AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION

Resolving Differences

Much of this past week saw conference committees beginning to negotiate the major appropriations bills. Basically, the House and Senate conferees simply went through what are called the “side-by-sides”. These are massive documents which provide the House and Senate language, by section, comparing identical, similar or one-house-only provisions. There have been no decisions made of the end of business for this week.

Conference committee members also have spread sheets that lay out each house’s language on specific spending areas. They tend to go through these funding provisions in a separate, but parallel, exercise.

In an unusual development, the Health & Human Services Appropriations Conference Committee, watched a House-only amendment added that would restore the MERC funding (medical education). So, that is now part of the House position. The Senate eliminates all MERC funding.

On Monday, the HHS conferees will deliberate for most of the day, then recess for the spring break. Other conference committees may also be meeting, but they have not been scheduled as of yet.

Major Victory No Fault

Six years of hard work finally paid off when legislation was

considered to alter the current No Fault Automobile Insurance Law. The MAA and Minnesota ACEP have been involved from the early days in assuring the EMS would be protected. Efforts to make substantive changes in the No Fault Law which would have had serious implications for ambulance and trauma services have been proposed at the legislature for roughly six years. With every attempt, we have met with countless legislators on both sides of the aisle to explain the negative impact that the loss of the \$20,000 minimum medical benefit would have on emergency medical services. Further, we have continued to meet with the insurance industry which has sought the changes.

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The insurance industry has been seeking means of curtailing what it believes are runaway benefits paid to some health care providers. However, the legislation as introduced harmed all health care providers – not just the targeted groups.

On Tuesday, April 12th, the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee scheduled hearings on all of the No Fault bills. Of the five bills, two are of concern to ambulance and hospital emergency departments (EDs). The first was SF 595 (Michel) which would repeal the entire law. This bill was heard in the morning committee meeting. There were a number of testifiers. For our part, we had HCMC emergency physician and MN ACEP representative, Dr. Bill Heegaard who did a nice job explaining the frailty of the trauma system. Dr. Michael McGonical, Director Trauma Services at Regions Hospital also testified on the serious implications for major trauma patients should the reimbursement stream be eliminated. Last, Aarron Reinert, Director of Lakes Region EMS testified against the bill on behalf of the MAA. Aarron hit all of the key arguments and raised serious concerns among the committee members as to the financial stresses being placed on emergency medical services.

The hearing was split into two parts, the outright repeal bill in the morning; and, Senator Gazelka's reform bill later that evening. During the break, Buck and I continued to meet with Chairman Gerlach and author Gazelka to arrive at some language. The end result was a delete-all amendment that does no harm to EMS providers. We are held harmless. It is unclear as to the strategy for the new language, but this is a huge victory for the MAA and Minnesota ACEP.

We would like to thank the folks who showed up at the hearing to support our position. Dr. Gary Starr, Advocacy Chair for MN ACEP and several other organization members were present. In addition, representatives from the following services also attended. St. Paul Fire/EMS, HCMC, North Memorial Lakes Region EMS, Allina Medical Transportation, Metro Regional EMS System, South Central MN EMS, Gold Cross Ambulance; and, Minneapolis Fire Department. If I neglected to include everyone present, please accept my apologies.

The Week Ahead

This week's report is somewhat anemic, but there simply is not a great deal being resolved at the Capitol. Negotiations behind the scenes are pretty intense, but there have been no

breakthroughs as of yet. There will be **no Capitol UPDATE** next week because the legislature is taking a week-long break. It will resume the following week.