

Don't Waiver on Health Care Coalition

UPDATE: After being unanimously approved and improved in the House Health Committee, Rep. Shay Schual-Berke's Sunshine Legislation (HB 2461) will be heard in Appropriations.

Washington's Medicaid program is one of the best: Washington's Medicaid program is one of the strongest public health insurance programs in the country, providing medically necessary health benefits to over 900,000 elderly, disabled, and low-income families in Washington State. It is a program that Washington can be proud of.

Medicaid is more important than ever: As more workers are laid off and the unemployment rate in Washington increases due to the recession, Medicaid will become even more critical for the newly unemployed and their families who have lost their employer-based health insurance.

DSHS' waiver effectively block grants Medicaid: The Department of Social and Health Services requested new power to cap enrollment in Washington's Medicaid program, eliminate benefits, and institute new cost-sharing requirements when it submitted a first of its kind waiver to the federal government on November 5, 2001.

DSHS' waiver was developed in secret: The legislature and the public did not have a full opportunity to review this far-reaching, blank check waiver before it was submitted.

DSHS has not revealed its specific intentions for Medicaid: The waiver DSHS submitted to the federal government provides no specifics on what it plans to do with the Medicaid program. Instead it asks for the federal government to pre-approve a waiver of important consumer protections and federal requirements.

Rep. Shay Schual-Berke's Sunshine Legislation (HB 2461) holds DSHS accountable by letting the sun shine in when DSHS seeks or implements waivers that diminish the state's Medicaid program.

SHB 2461 provides us with the following protections:

- Requires that DSHS obtain legislative approval – through a statutory enactment – prior to implementing any federal waivers that reduce eligibility, enrollment or benefits coverage, or increase costs to recipients in the Medicaid program.
- Requires DSHS to provide all necessary information to the legislature “to ensure a full public discussion” regarding the potential impacts of the waiver, including full details about which Medicaid consumers would be impacted by the propose changes in the waiver.

The Don't Waiver on Health Care Coalition includes the following member organizations and others:

Washington Citizen Action • Northwest Health Law Advocates
Northwest Federation of Community Organizations • Service Employees International Union
Washington Protection and Advocacy System • National Organization for Women

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