



Michigan Roundup

....A bill (SB 64) to increase the certificate of need capital expenditure threshold from \$150,000 to \$1.5 million passed the Senate Wednesday on a vote of 25 to 7. The bill was sent to the House Committee on Public Health, whose chair, Representative Mike Bennane, has expressed doubt about the present certificate of need system. "The law was well intended at the time of passage," said Bennane. "Most of us believe in a mixed system--no one believes in a pure competitive or regulatory model." Representative Bennane plans to establish a special subcommittee on certificate of need within the next few weeks.

....Representative Perry Bullard announced plans to introduce legislation to prohibit nursing homes from turning away Medicaid recipients or discharging patients who, because they have exhausted their personal resources, are unable to pay the difference between the Medicaid reimbursement rate and what the nursing home charges. The bills are intended to improve access for Medicaid recipients by imposing criminal penalties for duration-of-stay contracts and for illegal transfers of Medicaid patients. Nursing homes also would be required to participate in Medicaid as a condition of licensure, to seek intermediate certification for beds, and to accept patients on a first-come, first-serve basis.

....With the Michigan State Medical Society's call for another governor's task force on liability reform Wednesday, physician professional liability laws are likely to be revisited this session. The MSMS announced that a recent 15-percent increase in liability insurance rates underscores the need for further reforms, such as removing some of the exceptions from the cap on noneconomic damages and allowing doctors to countersue in frivolous cases.

....The Senate Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee recommends creating a new state agency to help prevent juvenile delinquency. The new department would seek to centralize authority and eliminate confusion regarding the rights of and services to juveniles in this state. In a report to the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, the citizens' panel also recommends drug testing for employees who work with juveniles, work camps for juvenile offenders, and more money for substance abuse prevention in public schools.

....House Speaker Gary Owen created a special three-member committee, chaired by Representative Richard Young, to develop recommendations on the use of officeholder expense funds. Owen asked for recommendations within thirty days.

....The Peoples' Campaign for Choice, a new coalition of thirty organizations claiming to represent 100,000 voters, announced a campaign to counter the petition drive of Right to Life of Michigan, which seeks to prohibit Medicaid-funded abortions. The new group intends to mail brochures to state residents, asking them not to sign the Right to Life petition. In addition, Right to Life of Michigan president Barbara Listing announced this week that the organization has gathered 211,000 signatures as of March 28; 191,000 valid signatures are needed to force the legislature to act on the issue.

....Thomas Watkins, Jr., has been appointed by Governor Blanchard as the new permanent director of the Michigan Department of Mental Health. Watkins, 33, has been acting director since January 1.