
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6368 (as amended by House "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING THE CHOICES HEALTH INSURANCE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

SUMMARY:

This bill makes minor and technical changes to the state's administration of the CHOICES program. The program, which primarily helps seniors with their health care choices, including purchasing Medicare supplements, is authorized by and funded under both federal and state law.

By law, the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioner must, within available appropriations, deliver information to elders and individuals with disabilities concerning any pharmaceutical company's drug program for indigent people through the ConnPACE and CHOICES programs and Infoline of Connecticut. The bill instead (1) provides that the pharmaceutical company drug programs are for Medicare beneficiaries; (2) eliminates a reference to the ConnPACE program, which a different 2013 bill eliminates as of January 1, 2014 (see BACKGROUND); and (3) transfers this function from DSS to the new Department on Aging (which the law established on January 1, 2013). Since Medicare Part D offers drug assistance to Medicare beneficiaries, it is unclear what, if any, programs pharmaceutical companies offer to Medicare beneficiaries.

*House Amendment "A" adds the provision regarding pharmaceutical company programs for Medicare beneficiaries. It also makes several technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

CHOICES PROGRAM

The bill:

1. transfers CHOICES' administration from the DSS to the Aging Department;
2. requires the program to provide consumers access to, instead of maintain, a toll-free telephone number for obtaining advice and information on Medicare benefits;
3. requires the program to provide information through appropriate means and format, instead of only through written material;
4. eliminates the requirement that the program develop and distribute a Medicare consumer's guide and make it available to anyone who requests it (the federal Medicare agency already publishes such a guide that is updated annually);
5. eliminates the requirement that the program provide a worksheet for consumers to use when comparing and evaluating Medicare plan options;
6. eliminates the requirement that the program collaborate with other state agencies and entities to develop consumer-oriented websites that provide information on Medicare plans and long-term care options (the Aging Department has a CHOICES website that appears to do this); and
7. permits the Aging Department, instead of requiring the program, to include any functions the agency deems necessary to conform to federal grant requirements.

The bill permits the aging commissioner to adopt regulations to implement these changes.

BACKGROUND

Related Bills

sSB 837 (File 110, as amended by Senate "A") also transfers administration of the CHOICES program from DSS to the Aging Department.

sHB 6367 (File 779), reported favorably by the Appropriations and Human Services committee, eliminates the ConnPACE program, which currently serves only individuals who are ineligible for Medicare, as of January 1, 2014.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 18 Nay 0 (03/12/2013)