Public Health Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 24, 2019

11:00 AM in Room 1C of the LOB

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 AM by Chairman, Rep. Steinberg J. 136.

The following committee members were present:

Senators: Anwar S. S03; Daugherty Abrams M. S13; Lesser M. S09; Somers H. S18

Representatives: Arnone T. 058; Betts W. 078; Borer D. 115; Candelora V. 086; Carpino C. 032; Comey R. 102; Cook M. 065; Demicco M. 021; Genga H. 010; Hennessy J. 127; Kennedy K. 119; Klarides-Ditria N. 105; McCarty K. 038; Michel D. 146; Petit W. 022; Ryan K. 139; Steinberg J. 136; Tercyak P. 026; Young P. 120; Zupkus L. 089

Absent were:

Senators: Scanlon S. 098

Rep. Steinberg convened the meeting at 11:00 AM and asked if there were any remarks from committee leadership, to which there were none.

Rep. Steinberg proceeded to Section III of the agenda: Bill Referred from the House for Review.

1. Substitute For H.B. No. 7159 (File No. 481) An Act Addressing Opioid Use. (GL,PH) (Referred On 4/17/19)
Rep. Steinberg noted that this bill has been referred to the Public Health Committee from the General Law Committee. The bill reflects the input of the Lamont Administration on the ongoing attempts to address the opioid epidemic. Although this committee has its own opioid bill, it is viewed as a work in progress. The intent is to convene experts to discuss other potential opioid innovations and solutions. Their information and suggestions will inform whichever bill ends up reaching the Floor, but the elements described in this bill form the basis for excellent opioid legislation.

Rep. Steinberg elaborated on each Section of the bill, 1 through 7. He noted that the bill proposes to make changes to decrease the likelihood of opioid misuse by strengthening prescription oversight and facilitating the use of various tools to investigate problems. It also prohibits discrimination against individuals who use lifesaving opioid antagonists. Additionally, the bill enhances communication between healthcare practitioners and patients regarding opioid use.

Rep. Steinberg elaborated further explaining that Sections 1 and 2 of the bill require pharmacists to not only dispense the opioid medication, but also counsel patients regarding their prescriptions and provide them with quality information. Under current statute, pharmacists are required to offer counseling only to Medicaid patients. This bill will enhance communication between pharmacists and non-Medicaid patients. Section 3 facilitates the use of Connecticut’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program by allowing pharmacists to designate and authorize a pharmacy technician. Additionally, prescribers can disclose prescribing information to the Department of Social Services (DSS) for the purpose of administering the Medicaid program. Section 4 requires manufacturers and wholesalers to report to the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) when they terminate or decline distribution of controlled substances. In 2018, the legislature only required them to report suspicious orders. This new provision will allow DCP to more rapidly identify potential problems and strengthen investigatory tools. Section 5 prohibits discrimination against substance users and their families. Section 6 requires prescribers to specify the diagnoses that elicit opioid prescriptions. Section 7 of the bill requires a pain contract between prescribers and patients. Rep. Steinberg remarked that this proposed bill by the Administration is comprehensive.

Sen. Somers asked if the bill would have to pass today, or if it can be held and combined with the Committee’s opiate bill. She further questioned which bill number would be used as the opioid bill since it would be easier to pass a comprehensive bill rather than have two similar bills on the Floor.

Rep. Steinberg responded that while recognizing both bills are a work in progress, it is in the interest of the Committee to pass Substitute For H.B. No. 7159 so it can be available for future references and could serve as a foundation vehicle. After the opioid working group discussions, the leadership of the Committee will be in a better position to determine which of these bills is more appropriate going forward.

Rep. Petit asked for clarification on prescribers disclosing prescribing information to DSS. When the Department receives an opioid prescription invoice, it also serves as a notification that such medication was given to an individual. Rep. Petit asked whether the bill allows prescribers to send a separate notification.

Rep. Steinberg said his understanding is that the disclosing of prescription information would clarify the information DSS needs to receive, and ensure that they receive it in a
timely basis. Additionally, the bill expands the information that can be shared with the Department beyond Medicaid, which is the current law.

Rep. Petit asked whether the bill will increase the sharing of information to such an extent that people will have privacy concerns over others having their prescription information.

Rep. Steinberg noted the validity of the question. He said that it would be good if the Committee sought feedback for ramifications for sharing more information than is currently shared. He noted that other states have successfully passed similar laws without HIPPA or privacy complains. This issue can be discussed further.

Rep. Arnone stated that he is speaking on behalf of the people who are in chronic pain. Those who suffer horribly every day with chronic pain, such as quadriplegics, are worried that they will lose their right to use opiates. He asked that as the bill moves forward, to ensure that those in pain can receive pain management medication.

Rep. Steinberg said that this issue was the subject of many conversations a few years ago when the legislature passed a limit on the number of opiates that can be prescribed. He noted that there is a process of obtaining waivers for those in pain. Rep. Steinberg asked for feedback on the current waiver system. He asked that if it is not working for some people, then perhaps access can be expedited for extreme circumstances.

Rep. Arnone noted that this bill is moving in the right direction and contains some safeguards for longer chronicity. He said that he would touch base with Rep. Steinberg as the bill moves forward.

Sen. Somers followed up on Rep. Arnone’s pain management concerns, noting that the Committee leadership is working hard to make sure there is a pain management expert on the working group so that such issues can be addressed.

Rep. Steinberg asked if there were any additional comments or questions, to which there were none.

Rep. Steinberg asked for a motion to JF to the Floor Substitute For H.B. No. 7159.

Sen. Somers offered the motion and it was seconded by Sen. Anwar.

Rep. Steinberg asked for a roll call vote.

Total voting = 24, Yea =23, Nay = 1, Abstain = 0, Absent and Not Voting = 1.

A motion was duly made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at the start of the House Session.

Bev Henry
Administrator

Valentina Mehmeti
Committee Clerk