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Sen. Pat Dougherty's Health Insurance Coverage Expansion Bill Signed Into Law

Measure Expands Types of Covered Clinical Trials for Cancer Treatment

ST. LOUIS – A bill drafted and advanced by Sen. Pat Dougherty, D-St. Louis, expanding healthcare insurance coverage for Missourians was signed into law by the governor today at a ceremony at the Siteman Cancer Center.

Sen. Dougherty's healthcare accessibility initiative makes insurance coverage more available and affordable for patients and employers by requiring health insurance companies to provide coverage for routine patient-care costs incurred as the result of phase II clinical trials undertaken to treat cancer. The law as it stood required coverage for clinical phases III or IV. Clinical trials help identify the best care for cancer patients and often lead to cures.

"We have made major strides in the fight against cancer and other life threatening diseases," Sen. Dougherty said. "The passage of this bill will encourage more patients to enter clinical trials, more research to be done and more cures found for disease. I only wish that my mom, Bunny Dougherty, and my very very good friend, Roy Perkins, who both died of cancer, were here today to witness this major piece of health care legislation."

While Senator Dougherty guided the measure, Senate Bill 567, to final approval during the closing hours of the 2006 legislative session, he noted the help of others was crucial.

"This was a multi-year team effort," said Sen. Dougherty, who wrote the earlier law requiring insurance coverage for clinical phases III and IV. "The American Cancer Society and the Siteman Cancer Center were of great help in furthering this initiative."

“The American Cancer Society considers this legislation an important victory in the fight against cancer,” said Matthew Farlin of the cancer society. “We will miss Sen. Dougherty’s leadership on issues related to cancer and hope his legacy will live on through the countless lives which will be saved in Missouri by this legislation.”

“It was entirely appropriate that Pat passed the clinical trials coverage legislation,” said Maryann Colletti of the Siteman Cancer Center. “He has been a constant battler for better health care coverage for Missourians his entire career.”

Senator Dougherty noted the efforts of Senator Michael Gibbons, Senator Rob Mayer and Representative Robert Schaaf were instrumental in obtaining passage of the bill.

The bill represents the final piece of legislation Sen. Dougherty will handle over his 28-year legislative career due to term limits, which prevent him from serving longer.

“The clinical trials bill is the type of compassionate, progressive legislation I’ve worked to pass and it’s the type of initiative I’ll continue to advocate in my future endeavors,” Sen. Dougherty said. “This legislation may have been the last of my career and the last in the 2006 session, but it is well worth the wait for cancer patients in Missouri. We have expanded access to health care by making insurance coverage more available and affordable for patients and employers.”

The legislation also requires health insurers to charge only one co-payment on a prescription if the required single dosage is not available and a combination of dosage amounts must be dispensed to fill the prescription.

The bill, now set to take effect August 28, also offers more flexibility to employers when it comes to health care insurance coverage. Currently, employers may provide or contract for health insurance at a reduced premium rate for employees who do not smoke or use tobacco products. This act allows employers to provide or contract for health insurance at a reduced deductible level for such employees.

For more information on SB 567, visit www.senate.mo.gov/dougherty

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