

Capitol News

March 22, 2019

Melissa Johnson, WSLHA Lobbyist

Today, **SB 5887**, our bill clarifying that patients are allowed up to **six visits before a health care benefit manager can impose prior authorization** was heard in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee. WSLHA signed in support of this bill. It has been scheduled for executive session next Wednesday.

The **music therapy bill, SB 5485**, was heard in the House Health Care Committee on Wednesday. WSLHA testified with concerns about how music therapist will coordinate the treatment of clients with communication disorders. WSLHA is working with proponents of the bill on an amendment to address our concerns.

The House Health Care Committee also heard the **Bluetooth and telecoil technology notification bill, SB 5210**, on Wednesday. WSLHA testified with concerns that naming specific technologies in law is not appropriate and that audiologists should be able to decide what is best for their patients.

This week, the anticipated **state revenue forecast** was released, and it showed positive revenue projections. The projections for the current biennium increased by \$307million, and by \$554 million for the 19-21 biennium. Legislators on both sides of the aisle agreed that this was good news. However, they disagreed as to whether new revenue, in addition to these increased projections, is necessary. Democrats argue that the state has commitments beyond current maintenance-level spending that would require new revenue. These commitments include K-12 spending, special education funding, funding the collective bargaining agreements for state employees, and investments in mental health. Republicans feel that additional spending can be achieved within existing resources.

The revenue forecast was the final piece of the puzzle for budget writers to finalize their spending plans. **The House Democrats will release their budget** (and corresponding revenue package) on Monday at noon, with a hearing on the budget at 3:30pm that same day. Of course, that doesn't give much time to do a deep dive into the budget details. The budget is on a fast track, with a vote out of the Appropriations Committee scheduled for Wednesday, and an expected House floor vote on Friday. The Senate Democrats' budget is expected to be released later next week or the following Monday.

Despite the focus on the budget next week, the policy committees will continue to work to hear and vote on bills to meet the fast-approaching **April 3rd opposite house policy committee cutoff deadline**.