

WSLHA Legislative Report

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SB 5887, our bill clarifying that patients are allowed up to **six visits before a health care benefit manager can impose prior authorization, is scheduled for a vote** out of the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on Tuesday. WSLHA is working with Sen. Short and Rep. Cody on an amendment to clarify the medical necessity language in the bill.

The **music therapy bill, SB 5485**, is scheduled for a vote out of the House Health Care Committee on Tuesday. WSLHA has proposed an amendment that would require a music therapist to collaborate and review the music therapist's treatment plan with an SLP or audiologist, for clients diagnosed with a communication disorder.

SB 5210, the **Bluetooth and telecoil technology notification bill**, passed the House Health Care Committee last Wednesday. It was amended to remove the specific references to Bluetooth and telecoil technology. Instead, the Department of Health is required to define in rule the hearing assistive technologies about which a person purchasing a hearing instrument must be notified.

This week was all about **the budget**. The House released their budget on Monday, heard it in committee that same day, voted it out of committee on Wednesday, and passed it out of the House Friday evening on a straight partisan vote. The Senate released their budget yesterday, giving an unprecedented two days to review it before the hearing this Monday. They plan to vote the budget out of committee on Tuesday, with a Senate floor vote later in the week. Once that is complete, budget negotiations between the two chambers will begin in earnest.

The House budget funds over \$300 million in behavioral health investments, including \$91 million to expand bed capacity and services in the community; \$34 million in housing; \$70 million for special education; and \$453 million for the School Employees Benefit Board.

The House budget relies on several revenue packages, totaling about \$1.4 billion. The revenue package includes three bills:

- HB 2156, which establishes a capital gains tax (\$780 million) and adjusts the Real Estate Excise Tax (\$130.3 million)
- HB 2157, which closes certain tax preferences (\$68.4)
- HB 2158, which increases the B&O tax on certain services from 1.5% to 1.8% (\$427.4 million). This revenue is dedicated to higher education investments.

A further note on HB 2158...health care services are targeted for the B&O increase from 1.5% to 1.8%, including health care services delivered by health care providers including speech-language pathologists and audiologists. The revenue generated by the increase is dedicated to higher education investments. This bill was heard yesterday and is scheduled for a vote out of committee next week.

The Senate budget funds almost \$200 million in behavioral health investments; \$24 million in housing; \$156 million for special education; and \$507 million for the School Employees Benefit Board.

The Senate Democrats released a smaller revenue package, totaling about \$524 million. This revenue package includes four bills:

- SB 5986, which establishes a tax on vapor and heated tobacco products (\$900,000). This revenue is dedicated to public health and cancer research.
- SB 5988, which eliminates the preferential B&O tax rate for prescription drug resellers and dedicates this revenue to opioid abuse treatment services in rural and high need areas (\$38.5 million)
- SB 5991, which adjusts the Real Estate Excise Tax (\$421 million)
- SB 5997, which closes certain tax preferences (\$63.6 million)

The Senate Democrats also introduced SB 5961, which establishes a capital gains tax (\$780 million starting in 2021).

Policy committees are finishing up their business to meet the April 3rd opposite house policy committee cutoff deadline. The fiscal committee cutoff deadline, for policy bills with a fiscal impact is on April 9th. And the opposite house cutoff deadline is April 17th, when House bills must be out of the Senate and Senate bills out of the House. Bills that pass both chambers, but in different forms, must be reconciled such that each chamber passes the same version. This is done between April 17th and the last day of the session, April 28th. Of course, bills that are necessary to implement the budget (NTIB) are not subject to cutoff deadlines.