Capitol News

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Week four saw the first cutoff of the session come and go. Bills had to pass their policy committee by Friday in order to remain alive. Next Tuesday, 2/11, is the fiscal committee cutoff. That’s when bills with an impact to the state budget must be voted out of the fiscal committees (House Appropriations and Senate Ways & Means). The exception to the fiscal committee cutoff is bills that are designated “necessary to implement the budget” or NTIB. These bills are not subject to this cutoff.

On Wednesday, 2/13, the House and Senate begin full-time floor action to meet the “house of origin” cutoff on 2/19. This is when House bills must pass the House and Senate bills must pass the Senate to remain alive.

It’s a good week for two of our legislative priorities. Our health benefit manager bill (SB 5601) is scheduled to be voted out of the Ways & Means Committee on Monday. And our prior authorization bill from last session (SB 5887) will be heard in the House Health Care Committee on Wednesday.

Unfortunately, HB 2012, the national certification bonus bill, was a casualty of the policy committee cutoff. It is unlikely that any further action will be taken on it this session.

Last Thursday, the House passed SB 6492, legislation that changes the B&O overall tax rate for businesses to fund the Workforce Education Investment Account. This account was created last session to fund higher education. In last year’s legislation, a three-tiered B&O surcharge was created on specific businesses who rely on employees with higher education. SLPs and audiologists were included in this law.

However, challenges with implementing this new tax structure led lawmakers to introduce SB 6492. SB 6492 eliminates last year’s tax structure and instead imposes a 1.75% B&O tax on services, except those businesses with less than $1 million in gross receipts. These businesses will pay 1.5%. A portion of the revenue from these new B&O tax receipts will now fund the Workforce Education Investment Account. The Governor is expected to sign this bill into law on Monday.

The two music therapy bills in the House (HB 2706 and HB 2707) died in committee and will not be considered any further this session. However, WSLHA is watching the Senate version from last session, SB 5485, to see if it starts moving. SB 5485 is still in the Senate Rules Committee and could still be considered this session. WSLHA has concerns that these bills would allow a music therapist to treat communication disorders.

SB 6532, the bill eliminating the state regulation of behavior technicians, also died in committee and will not be considered any further this session. WSLHA opposed this bill.