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HEPATITIS C TESTING

House Bill 5072 (Substitute H-1) First Analysis (5-27-98)

Sponsor: Rep. Judith Scranton
Committee: Health Policy

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Public Health Code imposes a number of medical tests to be done on individuals under certain circumstances. Several recent acts have amended these provisions of the code to add HIV and hepatitis B infection (HBV) to the list of diseases and infections for which testing is required. Public Act 200 of 1994 added HIV and HBV testing for pregnant women and new mothers, Public Act 419 of 1994 added HIV and HBV testing for persons treated by medical first responders, and Public Act 4362 expanded HIV and HBV testing for child molesting offenses. (For more information, see the House Legislative Analysis Section's analyses on House Bill 4558 dated 7-18-94, House Bill 4348 dated 1-9-95, and House Bill 4362 dated 5-18-95, respectively.)

In recent years, hepatitis C infection (HCV) has become a serious health threat, with 28,000 to 180,000 new cases per year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 3.9 million people may be infected with HCV. HCV is spread through contact with an infected person's body fluids. Transmission of the disease is primarily blood borne, and has been known to be spread through such activities as intravenous drug use, sexual contact, dental work, tattooing and body piercing, and even manicures. An incurable disease, Hepatitis C infection is far more serious than hepatitis A and B, causing liver disease and in some cases, premature death. It is the leading indication for liver transplants. Costs due to work loss and medical treatments, not counting transplant operations, exceed \$600 million per year. Unlike hepatitis A and B, no vaccine exists for the prevention of hepatitis C.

Because of the serious health threat posed by HCV infection, and in light of the increasing numbers of people infected with the virus, legislation has been proposed to add HCV infection to the list of infections and diseases for which testing is required under certain provisions of the Public Health Code.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The Public Health Code requires individuals to be tested for HIV and hepatitis B infection under a variety of circumstances, including pregnant women and women who have recently given birth, when an emergency worker becomes exposed to an individual's body fluids, and individuals who have been charged with certain crimes such as prostitution and child molestation. House Bill 5072 would add hepatitis C (HCV) to the list of diseases and infections for which testing was required. In regards to conducting the tests on women who are pregnant or have recently given birth, the bill would specify that the provision would only apply if the testing were determined to be medically necessary or medically advisable by the woman's physician or other individual.

MCL 333.5101 et al.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

Fiscal information was not available.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Under current law, pregnant women and women who have recently given birth, persons convicted of certain sex crimes, and emergency patients who have exposed medical first responders to body fluids must be tested for communicable diseases and infections. The bill would simply require such persons to also be tested for hepatitis C, a serious and potentially fatal disease. Hepatitis C is contracted through contact with an infected person's blood, and cases of new infections have grown rapidly in recent years. Testing for HCV could lead to early treatment for individuals exposed to the blood of infected persons, which could lessen the long-term effects of the disease.

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POSITIONS:

There are no positions on the bill.

Analyst: S. Stutzky

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.