

Multiple bills seek to make access to healthcare easier

By Ann Estvold, NDNA Legislative Intern

Legislative committees are considering several proposals to give North Dakotans easier access to health care. HB1594 would require healthcare facilities to post standard charges for items and services. Prices would have to be listed in a consumer-friendly format. A healthcare facility that did not comply with the measure could be fined. Under an existing federal rule, hospitals are already required to publicly disclose their standard charges. A report last November said only 21 percent of the country's hospitals were complying, said Rep. Jared Hendrix, R-West Fargo. "HB1594 strengthens medical price transparency by codifying compliance into state law, and by giving the North Dakota insurance commissioner tools to enforce," said Hendrix. Jon Arnold, the North Dakota deputy insurance commissioner, said North Dakota law offers more consumer transparency with insurers than it does for health care providers. Opponents of the bill said it was unnecessary and re-

dundant. "We're using taxpayer dollars to police something that is already being policed on the federal side," said Tim Blasl, president of the North Dakota Hospital Association.

Dental care study

Many low-income North Dakotans do not have easy access to dental and oral care. A proposed House bill seeks to change that. HB1567 would study the unmet dental and oral healthcare needs of low-income and Native American children and individuals with disabilities. Information from the Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas showed that nearly one in three North Dakota adults have reported no dental visits in five years or more, while more than half of Indigenous adults report the same lack of care. One in every two kindergarteners has experienced tooth decay, and one in four residents of North Dakota long-term care facilities have untreated tooth decay. Twenty of North Dakota's 53 counties are considered dental care shortage areas, and many people see less access to emergency dental care and surgery centers. The

state Department of Health and Human Services reported that only 44 percent of the need for dental providers across the state is being met. The study would examine the need for programs, the importance of receiving care, and the availability of dental services. It would also review federal and state regulations that affect dental providers and Medicaid payments for their services. It would review existing programs and look into the expansion of programs that offer support and resources, as well as ways to improve accessibility.

Funding for 988

SB2200 would provide \$500,000 to support North Dakota's 988 suicide prevention and mental health crisis help line. North Dakotans may access the helpline by dialing 988. Sponsored by Sen. Kathy Hogan, D-Fargo, the bill would create a "988 crisis stabilization fund" to support the helpline, which would be administered by the state Department of Health and Human Services. The legislation is being considered by the House's Human Services Committee.

Bill would give state funds to regional planning councils

By Ann Estvold | NDNA Legislative Intern

HB1524 would provide \$2.4 million to North Dakota's eight regional planning councils, which encourage community and economic development in small communities across the state. The legislation originally included \$8 million, but the sum was trimmed by House budget writers. Briselda Hernandez Herrera, execu-

tive director of the Souris Basin Planning Council in Minot, said the additional money would help the councils make a greater impact in the regions they serve. "We've reached a point that we no longer can create that greater impact to meet those needs," said Hernandez Herrera. The money in the bill could be used to hire staff or for work plans. North Dakota's eight regional coun-

cils were formed in the 1970s. They help local leaders with grant applications, planning, and other development and management tasks. They assist with solving issues like housing, food deserts, small business financing, child care, and community improvement. The bill did not receive a recommendation in its Senate Industry and Business Committee hearing.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT



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The 69th Legislative Assembly began its session on Jan. 7, 2025, and a much larger number of bills and resolutions were introduced in both the House and the Senate than last session. In the House, 658 bills and resolutions were introduced, compared to 574 in 2023. In the Senate, their increase wasn't as large, with 430 bills and resolutions introduced, compared to 412 in 2023. At crossover, at the end of February, the House had passed 436 bills and resolutions, and the Senate had passed 313 bills and resolutions. As of March 21, the House has 162 bills and resolutions remaining to act on and the Senate has 236 bills and resolutions remaining to act on. The goal of leadership is to complete our work by April 30, which would be Legislative Day 73 of the 80 we are allowed by the state constitution. Your District 29 legislators are in the same roles as last session. I continue to be the Chairman of the House Appropriations Commit-

tee; Rep. Craig Headland is once again the Chairman of the House Finance and Tax Committee and Sen. Terry Wanzek continues as the Chairman of the Government Operations Division of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Due to our conservative revenue forecasting, aided by data from Moody's and S&P Global, the economy in North Dakota once again delivered revenues far above expectations in the current biennium which ends on June 30, 2025. The projected ending general fund balance will be approximately \$1.1 Billion and the projected ending Strategic Investment and Improvement Fund balance, which is derived from oil tax revenues, will be approximately \$1.6 Billion. These excess revenues allow the legislature to address property tax relief and reform, fund investments in our transportation system, including counties and townships, adequately fund our education systems, K-12 and Higher Education, and of course, provide essential services to those citizens that are the most vulnerable through the Human Services budget. The Appropriations Committees recently adopted

the revenue forecast for the 2025-2027 biennium which will begin on July 1, 2025. Looking forward, because the Ag and Energy sectors are not expected to generate the same levels of general tax revenues as they did in the current biennium, the forecast expects about \$75 million less in general fund revenues in the next biennium. The North Dakota economy is still robust and growing but not quite at the same level as it did in the past two years. The forecast for oil tax revenues shows a much larger adjustment from current levels. The forecasted North Dakota oil price is projected to be \$59 per barrel during the first year of the biennium and \$57 per barrel for the second year of the biennium. Production is estimated to remain steady at 1.1 million barrels of oil per day. This will result in approximately \$1.4 Billion less oil tax revenue being deposited in the Strategic Investment and Improvement Fund that can be allocated during the 2027 Legislative Session. The major topic during this session is property tax relief and reform. There are still three bills in discussion in the Senate. The House passed all three before

crossover. HB1176, Governor Armstrong's proposal, would provide a \$1,450 primary residence tax credit using Legacy Fund earnings. It also caps local political subdivisions' levy increases at 3% per year. His plan is to have legacy fund earnings, which continue to grow, provide a larger credit each biennium, eventually paying most of the property tax for primary residence owners. HB1575 also caps political subdivisions' levy increases but simply provides a percentage decrease in property taxes for all types of property including agricultural land. HB1168 lowers the school mills collected from property owners from 60 mills to 50 mills and has a cap on political subdivisions' levy increases. This issue will be decided in the next few weeks and the final legislation may be a combination of proposals on the table. Please contact any of us if you would like more specific information on any of the issues we are discussing in Bismarck. Rep. Don Vigesaa dwvigesaa@ndlegis.gov, Rep. Craig Headland cheadland@ndlegis.gov, Sen. Terry Wanzek tmwanzek@ndlegis.gov.

PICTURES FROM THE PAST

Sales Tax Returns Are Large

Bismarck, N. D., April 13—North Dakota's sales tax law, since it went into effect nearly two years ago, has yielded state coffers \$7,-606,558.00

The state tax department, under supervision of tax commissioner Owen T. Owen, is this month receiving returns from North Dakota retail firms covering tax collections for the first three months of the present year.

All collections for the first quarter must be in the department's hands not later than April 20. A five per cent penalty is provided by law for filing of late returns.

Sales tax collections during 1937 approached \$3,000,000.00 The total for 1937 exceeded that of 1936 due, apparently, to a strict enforcement campaign launched by Owen.

The department has in recent weeks made three arrests of retail firm proprietors who either had evaded the law by not filing full amounts of sales tax due the state or who had ignored the law's provisions entirely by failing to file any report.

It was necessary to sell sufficient properties of one grocery store (in Bismarck) to recover tax due the state on past sales. One sales tax retail permit has been completely revoked, bondsmen were compelled to make good one proprietor's shortage.

(Photo/Steele County Press, April 14, 1938.)