

The Public Affairs Pulse

Keeping You on Top of Legislative & Advocacy Issues

VAWA Passes Congress

WASHINGTON, DC — On February 28, in a 286 to 138 vote, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Senate version of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), after rejecting their own, more restrictive version of the bill.

The House version of the bill, highly contested over the last year, does not include protections for the LGBT community, Native American women, or immigrants. The final Senate version contains all three.

The 1994 federal law provides funds to enhance investigation and prosecution of violent crimes such as domestic violence and sexual assault, and it bolsters victim services programs.

According to *The Huffington Post*, The passage of the bills means that VAWA will be reauthorized for another five years, with \$659 million being provided for domestic violence programs. Congress failed to reauthorize VAWA last year when it expired in October 2011, due in large part to House Republican opposition over the new provisions in the Senate bill.

House Passes Insurance Bills without Abortion Ban

LANSING — The House Insurance Committee voted February 21 to advance bills to transform Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) into a non-profit mutual company. They did so without an amendment to restrict insurance coverage for abortions. Planned Parenthood supporters filled the Committee Hearing but the issue was never raised.

The following week the full House passed the bills which now go to the state Senate for final passage.

At the end of 2012, the Michigan Legislature passed a similar bill that contained language that would have banned abortion coverage for women in the upcoming health care exchange without a separate coverage rider. This bill was vetoed by Governor Snyder during the last days of lame duck.

Health Insurance Exchanges for MI – Finally!

LANSING — The House Appropriations Committee voted 24-3 in favor the State Health Care Exchange ([HB 4111](#)) on February 28, giving the state the authority to spend a \$30.6 million federal grant to implement a state-federal partnership health exchange. Later that same day the full House passed the bill, which goes to the Senate for final passage.

Many Republicans, who have resisted the implementation of the Exchange in the past, are now arguing that moving forward with a state-federal partnership would give the state at least some control and that the legislation could save taxpayers money. Without voluntary state participation in the Exchange, it would be established and run by the Federal government.

According to *MIRS*, the House Fiscal Agency, the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) would use the money, in part, to set-up a website that will allow people to buy individual health insurance policies. The money appropriated by the bill would be available until January 17, 2014, and would be used to create an online health care exchange by October 1, when enrollment would begin. The exchanges, which allow residents to compare health insurance providers, become effective January 1, 2014.

HB 4111 requires LARA to utilize Michigan-based resources, like insurance agents, for consumer assistance for the exchange. The bill also says insurers would not be required to offer products exclusively through the health exchange.

If established, Michigan would be one of seven states with a state-federal partnership.

STS and JET Celebrate Condom Month

GRAND RAPIDS — Two advocacy groups at PPWNM celebrated Condom Month by distributing condoms to the Grand Rapids community. The teen group, Something to Say, delivered condom lollipops containing suckers, condoms, and information promoting safe sex and condom use to students at Grand Rapids Community College.

The Justice Engagement Team (JET), a young adult advocacy group did a pub crawl, handing out condom lollipops at Mardi Gras celebrations at local bars. The lollipops also showcased Planned Parenthood's new logo and branding with the slogan "Wear. No Matter What."



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