



UNDER THE WEATHER

We are truly a representative republic. Like much of the general population, much of the general assembly is down and out with some sort of illness. Many representatives and senators missed a day or two of work this week due to influenza, COVID, or pneumonia. We increased the frequency and ferocity of our hand-washing in hopes of being spared from the crud. Between the coughing and sneezing fits, legislators managed to pull off another fully loaded week. The House even had a few committee hearings that went into the late-night hours and the Senate took to the floor to debate and give first round approval to a couple of bills.

PRIOR AUTH GETS HEARD

Monday afternoon, the House Insurance Committee heard public testimony on [HB 618](#), sponsored by Rep. Melanie Stinnett, to rein in the egregious overreach of insurance companies' use of prior authorization (PA). You know all too well from uncountable firsthand experiences that prior authorization's only real purpose these days has morphed from rational cost containment to the denial and delaying of necessary care.

We had a team of physicians in town to testify in support of the bill, sharing their experiences, as well as patient stories, to help legislators understand how onerous the PA process has become. A few patients also shared their devastating experience with PA with the committee members.

The hearing for HB 618 lasted nearly three hours. Insurance companies tout this utilization control measure as a cost saving tool for plan participants. However, we know it is far more than that. Prior authorization is overused to the point of abuse. They are practicing medicine at the expense of the health outcomes of patients.

Unfortunately, it sounds like we are not expecting a committee vote just yet. We were hoping for a vote on Monday, but the insurance lobbyists are pulling out all their tricks to delay progress of this bill. After all, they're experts in delaying things. They know our witnesses' testimony was so compelling we have the support of enough committee members to move the bill out of committee and to the House floor. Legislators have stories of their own about how PA has delayed their care. We are continuing the conversation with stakeholders and pushing hard to see this bill move forward. We will not abandon our prescribed course of action on this bill!

TELEHEALTH BILLS HEARD

This week, the House and Senate heard bills related to audio-only telehealth updates. Tuesday, the House Health and Mental Health Committee heard HB [825](#) and HB [822](#) related to telehealth services. These identical bills add audiovisual and audio-only encounters to the definition of

telehealth services. On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Families, Seniors and Health heard [SB 94](#), the companion bill on the Senate side. We support physician payment for telehealth visits and will continue to monitor these bills as they advance.

LATE NIGHT HEARINGS

The House tackled some big issues this week, holding hearings on gender transition and abortion bills in back-to-back late night committee hearings. On Monday evening, the House Emerging Issues Committee heard HBs [35](#), [1016](#), [1038](#), and [1081](#) relating to gender transition procedures. These bills would remove the sunset on the current prohibition on gender transition procedures. Later in the week, this same language was the subject of the Senate's first filibuster of the year. On Tuesday evening, the House Children & Families Committee heard [HJR 54](#) relating to reproductive healthcare. This resolution would propose a constitutional amendment to modify portions of the newly-adopted Constitutional Amendment 3 from the 2024 November election.

COMMUNITY PARAMEDICS BILL AMENDED

House Bill [943](#), the healthcare omnibus bill we wrote about last week, is headed to the floor for debate. It was unanimously voted out of the House Health & Mental Health Committee. We asked for – and received – a small change in the bill to keep community paramedics from going door-to-door looking for patients to treat. Such activity could potentially interfere with doctors' orders or could keep patients from seeking care from their physicians altogether.

INTOXICATING CANNABINOIDS

Another bill we wrote about a few weeks ago, [SB 54](#) regulating cannabinoids, was voted out of the Senate Families, Seniors & Health Committee this morning. This bill seeks to classify intoxicating cannabinoids derived from hemp and regulate them similarly to how marijuana is regulated by the Department of Health and Senior Services. MAOPS supports further regulation of cannabinoids, including the unregulated THC.

MEET AND GREETINGS

In addition to keeping tabs on hearings, we had a few high-priority meetings this week. On Monday afternoon, we had the opportunity to sit down with key members of the Governor's staff and discuss our legislative priorities such as prior authorization, title protection, tort reform, and protecting against scope-of-practice expansions. We also encouraged the Governor to continue increased funding for GME and residency slots and physician reimbursement in MO HealthNet. Speaking of GME funding, we met with budget leaders for both chambers this week. We thanked them for their past support and commitment to GME funding and new residency programs. We expressed our hopes for their continued assistance in keeping and training more physicians to care for patients in our state.

As a side note, MAOPS has representation on the state's GME Advisory Panel. President-elect Katie Davenport-Kabonic and Executive Director Brian Bowles both serve on the panel which meets at least monthly to discuss issues related to GME in the state.

PHYSICIAN OF THE DAY

While many of our members participate in Physician Advocacy Day (on March 4 this year!), we need more volunteers for the Physician of the Day Program done collaboratively with the Missouri State Medical Association. This program's goal is to have a physician in the Capitol each Tuesday and Wednesday during the session. Participants are briefed on the issues of the day, and if possible, testify in front of House and Senate committees during relevant hearings. This program replaces our D.O.c-A-Day program that was highly successful prior to the pandemic. Following the pandemic and our institution of Physician Advocacy Day we saw a significant drop in volunteers for this program. It's time to step it back up and get more individual docs in the building! If interested, contact Executive Director Brian Bowles at brianb@maops.org.

SHOW A SHOW OF FORCE!

We need to continue to make a BIG impression on the legislature, and that takes as many members of the profession as possible in Jefferson for Missouri Physician Advocacy Day which is just over one month away!

Please make plans to join us for this collaborative event with the Missouri State Medical Association on Tuesday, March 4, 2025. Senate President Pro Tem Cindy O'Laughlin and House Speaker Jon Patterson, MD, are scheduled to be there to share their thoughts and send us off for the day. Thank you to the Jefferson City Medical Group (JCMG) for sponsoring a nice breakfast for everyone this year. Physician Advocacy Day has a long and healthy history with the legislature. This big advocacy effort is so popular it even has a nickname, White Coat Day! Wear your white coat and join us in being a part of the physician takeover of the Capitol this year! If you have not already done so, please register [HERE](#) to join in the fun. We need your voice to make this work.

A virtual issue briefing will be held on Sunday, March 2 at 7 PM. Registrants will receive meeting information the week before the event.