

the Reporter

Illinois Hospital Association



May 14, 2007

IHA TESTIFIES FOR GRT

Supporters and opponents of using the Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) to fund Illinois Covered and other state programs testified before the entire House during an all-day hearing May 9. After the Governor emphasized that the GRT is the only acceptable option for raising the revenue the state needs, he was followed by representatives of labor, education, business and health care as well as economics and tax experts, speaking on both sides of the issue.

In his testimony, IHA Sr. Vice President Howard Peters emphasized the need for such a mechanism to pay for badly needed health care coverage. "The Gross Receipts Tax represents an historic opportunity to ensure, for the first time in Illinois, that everyone in Illinois has access to affordable, high-quality health care, which will make Illinois a better place to live, a better place to work, indeed, a better place to do business and to raise a family," he said.

Earlier last week, the Senate Public Health Committee voted 7-3 to pass Illinois Covered (SB5) and the Senate Executive Committee voted 7-6 to pass the GRT (SB1). On May 10, the House voted on a nonbinding resolution on the GRT, with 107 voting "No" (against the GRT) and 7 voting "Present."

TURN UP THE HEAT ON DELAYED ASSESSMENT PAYMENTS

Legislators have said they have not heard from hospitals expressing concern about the lack of action on a supplemental appropriation for the Hospital Assessment Program. Unless you tell them, legislators will not be aware of the urgent need for this appropriation. Without the appropriation, the assessment payments due to hospitals cannot resume.

Payments totaling \$900 million were due to hospitals in March and another \$300 million was due last week. As soon as these payments are made to hospitals, another \$600 million in matching federal funds will be generated for the state. Yet the General Assembly has not taken action on the supplemental appropriation. It's crucial that legislators hear directly from their local hospitals how they are negatively affected by the delay in assessment payments. Please contact your legislators now by calling or visiting them or sending a letter or email from IHA's web site ([click here](#)).

BILL THAT WOULD HURT MED MAL REFORMS POISED FOR SENATE VOTE

The Illinois Senate could vote as soon as May 15 on **HB1798**, a hostile bill that would undermine the medical liability reforms achieved in 2005. **HB1798** would allow plaintiffs to obtain higher and excessive awards for new non-economic damages. Plaintiffs would be able to recover for bereavement (grief, sorrow, mental suffering) in addition to loss of society and companionship in wrongful death cases. The bill has already passed the House and cleared a Senate committee.

To stop **HB1798**, it is critical that senators hear from their local hospitals about the negative impact this proposal would have on them from excessive and higher medical liability costs. Members are urged to contact their senators now to oppose **HB1798** and can send an email or letter to their senators from IHA's web site ([click here](#)).

HOSPITAL-BACKED NURSE STAFFING BILL ADVANCES

SB867, the nurse staffing bill supported by IHA, is a step closer to gaining final legislative approval. The House Registration and Regulation

Committee approved the bill last week on a vote of 20-0. The Senate had previously approved the measure on a vote of 55-0.

The bill now moves to the House for a vote as soon as this week. Please contact your representatives now and let them know that **SB867** is the best approach to aligning nurse resources with patient needs. You can send a letter or email to your representatives from our web site ([click here](#)).

MRSA BILL MOVES TOWARD FINAL LEGISLATIVE VOTE

A bill that addresses the MRSA issue is headed for a final legislative vote. The House Human Services Committee last week passed **SB233**, which had been approved by the Senate. The bill would require MRSA screening for all ICU patients and at-risk patients as defined by each hospital; isolation of MRSA-infected patients; adherence to hand hygiene guidelines; and reporting of MRSA infection rates to IDPH.

AHA QUESTIONS STUDY ON CHARGES

Uninsured and self-pay hospital patients were charged an average of 2.5 times more than those with insurance in 2004, according to a study reported in the May-June issue of *Health Affairs*. AHA took issue with the study, saying it was out of date and used a flawed methodology. AHA also noted that the study predates HHS guidance allowing hospitals to eliminate or reduce charges to low-income uninsured patients without violating Medicare regulations. In Illinois, hospitals are meeting or exceeding IHA/MCHC guidelines on charity care to meet the needs of the low-income uninsured, including providing free care to those at or below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL), and discounted care to those between 100% and 200% of FPL.

BRIEFLY NOTED...

✓ At the AHA Annual Meeting last week, IHA President Ken Robbins and Board Chair Gary

Barnett addressed IHA members and congressional aides on issues important to Illinois hospitals. IHA's Federal Advocacy Agenda can be found on the federal advocacy section of our web site. Also, during the meeting, Rob Christie, senior vice president, government relations, **Northwestern Memorial Hospital**, Chicago, received the *Grassroots Champion Award*, conferred by IHA and AHA.

✓ Hospitals have until May 31 to submit data to AHA for the *2006 Annual Survey of Hospitals*. These data are crucial to state and federal advocacy efforts. Contact AHA at 800-530-9092 or surveysupport@healthforum.com for more information.

✓ U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-5) has introduced the Healthy Kids Act, a bipartisan bill that would provide uninsured children with access to health care by streamlining the SCHIP enrollment process and helping states increase enrollment in Medicaid and SCHIP.

✓ Hospital stroke care providers are invited to attend "Improving the Quality of Acute Stroke Care," May 23 at the Thelma Keller Convention Center in Effingham, and May 31 at IHA in Naperville. Registration is required for the free program of the Illinois CAPTURE Stroke Registry. For more information and to register, go to www.ipha.com/strokeregistry.php.

✓ Shaping America's Youth and the Chicago Inter-Departmental Task Force on Childhood Obesity will hold a strategy session on addressing childhood obesity on May 19 at the Chicago Marriott Hotel. For information and to register, go to www.ShapingAmericasYouth.org.

✓ May 21 is the deadline to apply for the 2007 Governor's Pollution Prevention Awards, which recognize pollution prevention efforts by organizations in Illinois, including hospitals. For information, see www.wmrc.uiuc.edu/gp2a.